

A SCIENCE OF SOCIETY:  
THE RISE OF URDU ECONOMIC THOUGHT IN COLONIAL INDIA

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This dissertation examines the translation and reception of classical political economy in colonial India in the nineteenth century. Drawing on a largely unexplored archive of Urdu-language translations of political economists such as James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Alfred Marshall, and others, the dissertation traces how the works of these thinkers circulated in India in a vernacular idiom. While classical political economy has frequently been seen as inextricably entangled with imperial ideology or as an instrument of colonial governmentality, this dissertation argues instead that it was actively claimed and refashioned by Indians to develop a language of social science and ethical critique. In doing so, the dissertation offers a new case study of how British economic ideas circulated globally in the nineteenth century and how they were transformed in different contexts.

The dissertation shows that, far from treating political economy as a hegemonic colonial discourse, Indian intellectuals engaged critically with it and re-made it in their own terms. One of the key ways in which they did so was by interpreting it through existing Indian ideas about wealth and society. In particular, to make sense of one of the central claims of political economy – namely the notion that society was a network of abstract interdependence mediated by relations of production – Indian translators turned to earlier theoretical models of social and civic interdependence. These included early modern Indo-Persian concepts of the household as a sphere of production; the city as a space of civic cooperation and ethical obligation; and alchemy

as a science of wealth and improvement. By recasting these early modern concepts and mapping them on to classical political economy, Indian translators sought to inject a language of ethics and enchantment into modern economic thought. In this way, a modern language of economics in India came to be suffused with early modern idioms, which ultimately enabled the development of a robust critique of modern commercial society.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Osama Rehan Siddiqui studied history at the University of Western Ontario and at Cambridge University before coming to Cornell to study the history of modern South Asia and the British Empire. He defended his doctoral dissertation at Cornell in 2019.

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The novelist Charles Cumming once wrote that “if a young person is lucky enough to read the right books at the right time in the company of the right teacher, it will change their life forever.”<sup>1</sup> For me, this teacher was Eli Nathans who gave me a copy of Rousseau’s *Second Discourse*, a book which sparked a life-long interest in the history of ideas. Over the years, Eli Nathans has been a kind and generous mentor and a source of great support. As an undergraduate at the University of Western Ontario, I benefitted enormously from taking classes with him, as well as with Anne Skoczylas, Allyson May, and Francine McKenzie. At Cambridge, Shruti Kapila gave me my first introduction to some of the exciting new debates in Indian intellectual history; Clare Jackson and Sylvana Tomaselli taught me a great deal about how to make



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<sup>1</sup> Charles Cumming, *The Trinity Six* (London: HarperCollins, 2011).

Hospital, Cayuga Medical Center, and Cornell Health looked after me with a great deal of care and consideration. John Skrovan has been a guiding light in so many ways. And, I surely would not have managed without the labor of countless workers at cafes, libraries, diners, bus and train stations, and many more, all of whom made it possible for me to live a life conducive to research and writing.

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## A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

As the people I study in this dissertation show, any act of translation and transliteration is merely an attempt to create commensurability. In my own practices of attempting to make commensurability, I have tried to use a simplified and minimalist transliteration scheme to render Persian and Urdu words into English. I generally avoid the use of diacritical marks, except in the case of the ain and the hamza. For most proper nouns, I have used the conventional anglicized spelling.

## Introduction

In his 1903 book *Ilm ul-Iqtisad* (The Science of Economy), the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) began by reflecting on the question of whether poverty (*aflas*) was a necessary part of the world order (*nazm-e-alam*), or if it could ever be eliminated completely. Writing in the sentimental style that would later characterize his poetry, and which was itself a challenge to the formal and generic conventions of political economic writing, Iqbal asked if it were not possible that every person could be liberated (*azad*) from the sorrow (*dukh*) of poverty, and if the heart-rending wails of the poor in all the corners and back alleys (*gali kuche*) of the world could ever be soothed.<sup>2</sup> Responding to his own question, he wrote that a comprehensive answer to such a question was not the proper work of political economy since the answer lay more in the realm of the ethical faculty (*akhlaqi qabliat*) of human nature (*insani fitrat*). Iqbal argued that the sphere of political economy, instead, was limited to the ordinary business (*ma'muli karaobar*) of life. As such, political economists were not well-situated to address ethical and existential matters.<sup>3</sup> Despite these limits, however, he argued that political economy still had some bearing on this subject, as it could show how societies acquired and used wealth. This, he suggested, was especially important in India, where knowledge of political economy was virtually non-existent and the problem of poverty very grave. Thus, by writing an Urdu treatise on political economy, Iqbal hoped to offer an intellectual resource for Indians with which to understand wealth and poverty in modern societies.

In pointing to the inability of political economy to address certain ethical questions, Iqbal was articulating a critique that gradually became prevalent in India in the late-nineteenth and

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<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Ilm-ul-Iqtisad* (Karachi: Iqbal Academy, 1961), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Iqbal, 23-4.

early-twentieth centuries. At its core, this critique highlighted a moral and ethical deficit in political economic thinking, even as it accepted the legitimacy and usefulness of political economy in explaining modern society. In this way, this critique was not a rejection of political economy, but rather a refashioning and reworking of political economic concepts in ethical terms. In particular, Indian translators and intellectuals, like Iqbal, sought to introduce a language of ethics and enchantment to political economy, which they saw as a cold, impersonal, and overly-rationalistic science. Drawing on their own intellectual resources, such as the early modern Indo-Persian ethical (*akhlaqi*) tradition in which they had been trained, they aimed to reinterpret political economy for an Indian audience. This dissertation describes the foundations and development of that intellectual project. It examines how a discourse of political economy first arrived in India, how it became vernacularized, and ultimately, how it was reworked and critiqued by Indian intellectuals.

Contrary to Iqbal's assertion that Indians were unfamiliar with political economy, books on the subject were, in fact, first translated more than half a century before Iqbal wrote. These early translations were done in the 1830s and 1840s, which was a formative period for the dissemination of British ideas in India. By the 1820s, the East India Company state had expanded its conquests across North India and had defeated most of its major political rivals on the subcontinent. As a result of its new-found imperial confidence and authority, and guided by an agenda of reformist liberalism, the colonial state began to extend its reach deeper into Indian society to reshape Indian customs and populations.<sup>4</sup> In the 1830s, the central locus of this reform was Indian education. Colonial administrators like T.B. Macaulay and Charles Trevelyan, working with Indian scribal elites, restructured Indian education along 'Anglicist' lines, an

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the consolidation of British power in North India, see C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1988.

approach which emphasized English-language education, dissemination of Western texts and knowledge, and modes of learning that privileged individual reading as opposed to tutelage and training under an established *ustad* (teacher).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, this period was shaped by the colonial government's turn away from classical languages like Persian and Sanskrit towards vernacular languages like Urdu.<sup>6</sup> Together, these changes spurred the demand for a wide range of English texts to be translated into Urdu and other languages, including works belonging to history, geography, moral philosophy, and political economy. Scholars at Delhi College translated James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* (1821) into Urdu in 1844, which was quickly followed by translations of the political economic writings of Francis Wayland, Richard Whately, William Nassau Senior, and others. By the 1860s, as new Indian universities and colleges were established, political economy gradually began to be taught as a subject of academic study. Thus, in 1869, the educationist and reformer Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) and his Aligarh Scientific Society commissioned Delhi College alumnus Dharam Narayan to translate John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) with the hope that it would be "useful in connection with the standard of an university training."<sup>7</sup> In the next three decades, many more translations appeared, including the works of William Stanley Jevons, the Mills, Henry Fawcett, and Alfred Marshall. By the end of the nineteenth century, there was a

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<sup>5</sup> For a concise summary of the Indian education debate in the 1830s, see Catherine Hall, *Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 225-31. For a longer history of colonial interventions in Indian education see Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir eds., *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781-1843* (London: Curzon Press, 1999), 1-72; Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Bruce McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (Gloucester, Mass: P. Smith, 1966). For earlier modes of learning which emphasized teacher-student relationships over individual reading, see Nile Green, "The Uses of Books in a Late-Mughal Takiyya: Persianate Knowledge between Person and Paper," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, 2 (2010): 241-65.

<sup>6</sup> On the formation of colonial language policy, see Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 27-61.

<sup>7</sup> Pundit Dhurm Narayan, preface, *Rudiments of Political Economy, compiled from the well-known work of John Stuart Mill* (Aligarh, 1869), 2. On the Aligarh Scientific Society, and the Aligarh movement generally, see David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

significant corpus of Urdu political economy texts, many of which were among the earliest non-European translations of classical political economy anywhere in the world.

Although political economy had initially arrived in India as an import of the colonial education system, it was quickly taken up by Indians for their own intellectual agendas. What made political economy particularly appealing to Indian scholars and translators was its perceived ability to conceptualize modern society. They saw it as a discipline that explained how society functioned as a distinct entity and as an independent unit of human organization. As John Stuart Mill had explained in his *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* (1844), “this science stands in the same relation to the social, as anatomy and physiology to the physical body.”<sup>8</sup> Just as those sciences explained the workings of the *physical* body, so too did political economy explain the workings of the *social* body, or society. In particular, the central claim of political economy was the notion that society was a network of mutual interdependence between people mediated by relations of production. As Mill described it, each person in society depended on the labor of another: for instance, the baker depended on the ploughman; the ploughman depended on the farrier; the farrier depended on the miner; and so on, in a continuous chain of interdependence. This chain of mutual interdependence constituted society.<sup>9</sup> Indian thinkers accepted, and more importantly, recognized this conception of society in their own socio-historical circumstances, but their writings suggest that they were interested in exploring their own indigenous models of conceptualizing society as well. By drawing on these indigenous models and using them to interpret political economy, they hoped to create an Indian science of the social, one which was capable of describing modern society but was rooted in Indian intellectual and discursive traditions. By far the most important of these indigenous models

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<sup>8</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Essay on some unsettled questions of Political Economy* (London: John W. Parker, 1844), 135.

<sup>9</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy, with some of their applications to social philosophy*, edited by W.J. Ashley (London: Longman Greens and Co, 1923), Book I, Chapter II.



belonged to the Indo-Persian *akhlaq* (ethics) tradition, which became one of the key interpretive frameworks through which political economy was received and translated.

### ***Akhlaq* and Society in the Age of Liberalism**

In his study of nineteenth century Indian liberal thought, C.A. Bayly suggested that the *akhlaqi* tradition represented a “hidden Indian Enlightenment,” a kind of early modern “Indo-Islamic civic republicanism” which provided a fertile ground on which liberalism could grow.<sup>10</sup> Bayly argued that Indian liberals drew upon several normative themes of *akhlaqi* thought, including the notion of the moral autonomy of the householder, the obligation towards civic duty in a virtuous polity, such as by bringing instances of mis-governance or moral failing to the ruler’s attention, and the ruler’s obligation to dispense justice and exercise wise judgment. Together these themes formed an early modern Indo-Persian political sensibility centered around the ideal of an engaged and virtuous body of subjects ruled by a just and pious prince. This sensibility, Bayly showed, was frequently invoked by nineteenth century Indian liberals both in “sentiment and allusion” in debates over issues such as toleration, press freedom, and social reform.<sup>11</sup>

For the purposes of political economy, however, the *akhlaq* literature offered not so much a political sensibility, but rather a social sensibility and an awareness of society as a conceptual category of analysis. In fact, *akhlaq* texts were replete with models of social organization and mutual interdependence. These models included the concept of the household (*manzil*) as a bounded and self-sufficient space of material and social reproduction, which consisted of an assembly (*jama ‘at*) of people, each with distinct and mutually-dependent roles who together formed a society (*mua ‘sharat*). Another *akhlaqi* model of social relations was that of the city

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<sup>10</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 35-7.

<sup>11</sup> Bayly, 36.

(*madan*), a political space outside the household, in which people were linked to each other through an ideal of civic cooperation (*mua 'vanat*) and to the prince through his ethical obligation to dispense justice (*'adl*) and treat his subjects with love (*mahabat*). These models became crucial explanatory aids with which Indian scholars translated and explained political economy as a science of society. To be sure, these models were not the conceptual or historical equivalents of the political economic model of society, but they performed the crucial task of supplying the lexical resources to describe mutual interdependence. Moreover, these models suggested that social interdependence need not be premised solely on relations of production, as political economy insisted, but also on ideals of civic cooperation and ethical obligation. In doing so, they opened up a space to critique political economy's lack of any ethical considerations or any vision of a social or civic collective beyond relations of production.

This 'ethical' turn of political economy was not particular to India. As Boyd Hilton has shown, mid-nineteenth century liberals in Britain were similarly interested in recasting economic arguments in ethico-religious terms.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, thinkers like John Stuart Mill believed that nineteenth century political economy had become much too "hard-hearted," almost a doctrine of "cold calculation," and it needed to be wrested away from its impersonal rationalism and grounded instead in social philosophy, such that it could properly be a social science.<sup>13</sup> In both Britain and India, the impetus towards this move to invest political economy with social and ethical significance was the growing awareness of the 'social' as a category of analysis as well as the identification of custom as a determining feature of human society. In India, the growing awareness of the 'social' was registered primarily in terms of a concern for *social conditions* such as poverty, illiteracy, and 'backwardness,' and manifested itself increasingly in politics and

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<sup>12</sup> Boyd Hilton, *Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68.

popular movements in the form of reformist projects. The Indian case speaks to a larger global history of the “social question” in the nineteenth century, which in Britain and France too subsumed concerns about pauperism, crime, welfare, and population growth, among many other issues. In fact, so wide was the scope of the “social question,” and so pervasive its expression, that it has recently been described by one historian as possessing a “structuring tendency” that “lent shape and stature to thought” in the entire period between 1820 and 1920.<sup>14</sup> Indian and British liberals alike responded to these intellectual developments by incorporating social scientific analysis in their works. For Mill, this meant drawing upon the methods of the emerging field of sociology and social theory, such as empirical observation, historical analysis, and comparisons between different societies. Likewise, Indian liberals like Syed Ahmed Khan embarked on projects to trace the historical development of Indian society, and its unique customs and ethics, which they compared with that of other societies. It was in this intellectual context that they drew upon *akhlaqi* models of social organization to read political economy as an Indian social science. In this way, the translation and transformation of political economy in India was part of a broader story of the transformations of global liberal thought in the nineteenth century.

### **Political Economy and the British Empire**

Historians of political economy and the British Empire in India have tended to explain the relationship between political economy and empire as a mutually constitutive one. They have argued that political economy frequently provided ideological purpose and coherence to imperial

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<sup>14</sup> Holly Case, “The ‘Social Question,’ 1820-1920,” in *Modern Intellectual History* 13, 3 (2016): 747-775. On the social question in France, see Cheryl Welch, “Tocqueville’s resistance to the social,” in *History of European ideas* 30 (2004): 83-107. For a longer intellectual history of French social theory, see Johan Heilbron, *The Rise of Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

projects, while conversely, imperial policies offered a testing ground for political economic theories. This scholarship has been located primarily in two disciplinary approaches. On the one hand, political theorists and intellectual historians have studied the works of individual thinkers to explore what role empire played in their respective theories.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, historians of the British Empire have explored how political economic ideas influenced colonial policies.<sup>16</sup> As a result of these two approaches, histories of economic thought and empire have largely viewed political economy as either inextricably entangled with imperial ideologies or as an instrument of colonial governance.

This focus on the instrumentality of political economy is valuable and compelling because, as this scholarship has shown, political economy as a discipline had a close institutional relationship with the British empire in India in the nineteenth century. From the beginning of East India Company rule in India, political economy was called upon to address a range of governance questions and concerns, a link which grew deeper in the nineteenth century. By 1805, when the East India College was established at Haileybury to train Company officers, political economy was deemed sufficiently important so as to be a compulsory subject of study.<sup>17</sup> Prominent nineteenth century political economists were also closely allied with the Company in various roles. Thomas Malthus was appointed professor of political economy at the East India College, the first such professorship in Britain; James and John Stuart Mill were both employed in the Company's service; and, David Ricardo was a Company shareholder, who often advised

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<sup>15</sup> Donald Winch, *Classical Political Economy and Colonies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: the rise of liberal imperialism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jennifer Pitts, "Legislator of the World? A Rereading of Bentham on Colonies," in *Political Theory* 31, 2: 200-234; Duncan Bell, "John Stuart Mill on Colonies," in *Political Theory* 38, 1: 34-64, among a number of others.

<sup>16</sup> Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959); Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal* (Paris: Mouton, 1963); S. Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy and the British Policy in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> S. Ambirajan, 12. Although the East India College was abolished in 1858, political economy continued to remain a compulsory subject for officers in the Indian Civil Service until 1892, after which it became an optional subject.

on economic matters.<sup>18</sup> In fact, so well-trained in political economy were Company officers that, as Eric Stokes put it, colonial dispatches to London were “filled increasingly with short disquisitions on the principles of political economy.”<sup>19</sup> Given the importance accorded to political economy, there was scarcely any aspect of colonial governance in the nineteenth century on which the influence of the subject could not be detected. From trade and taxation to revenue, famine policy, emigration, judicial administration, and credit regulation, virtually all areas of imperial policymaking were influenced by and tested for their adherence to political economic principles. To govern the empire, in other words, meant inevitably to practice political economy.

Yet, as valuable as it has been, this emphasis on how political economy was instrumentalized by the colonial state has also overlooked the ways in which political economy had a remarkable vernacular life in Indian society. Translations of political economic texts in Indian languages such as Urdu circulated widely, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century with the expansion of print and vernacular presses. Prominent Indian intellectuals such as Syed Ahmed Khan, Mohammad Iqbal, and Munshi Zaka-ullah engaged closely with political economic ideas, offering critiques of these ideas and incorporating them into their own intellectual projects and concerns. For these thinkers, political economy was not just an instrument of colonial state power but also a generative and productive resource for making sense of modern society. By translating political economy, they hoped to create an indigenous social science that could conceptualize modern commercial society in all its complexity using Indian languages and traditions. In tracing this intellectual project, my dissertation builds on the rich scholarship on political economy and empire by arguing that colonial societies were not only

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<sup>18</sup> Ambirajan, 2-4.

<sup>19</sup> Stokes, 99.

objects of analysis for political economic thought (which they undoubtedly were), but were also sites where political economic ideas were generated, translated, and critiqued. The dissertation, thus, hopes to offer a new angle on the intellectual history of political economy in India.

### **Global Intellectual History and the History of Political Economy**

In recent years, conversations around the history of economic thought in India have increasingly been gathered around the rubric of ‘global intellectual history’ a relatively new sub-field of intellectual history that seeks to explore ideas beyond conventional national or regional frames.<sup>20</sup> It is worth reflecting on how this approach differs from other kinds of intellectual history. For, to a great extent, intellectual history in general has always had a global imagination. The two classic works of intellectual history in South Asian and British imperial studies – Eric Stokes’s *English Utilitarians in India* (1959) and Ranajit Guha’s *A Rule of Property for Bengal* (1963) – were undoubtedly global in scope, even if they did not announce themselves as ‘global’ intellectual history. Both Stokes and Guha were interested in how ideas circulated globally. Stokes showed how English utilitarianism influenced the development of land revenue policies, judicial and administrative organization, and the codification of law in colonial India in the early nineteenth century. Guha, meanwhile, traced how European physiocratic ideas shaped the East India Company’s permanent settlement with Bengali landlords in the late-eighteenth century. Both works showed how a set of political and economic ideas were appropriated in a context other than the one in which they were written. If the circulation and transformation of ideas across the globe has always been on the agenda of intellectual history, what distinguishes ‘global intellectual history’ from these earlier works? Or, to put the question another way, what is

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<sup>20</sup> For a programmatic statement of this approach, see Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

‘global’ about the new global intellectual history?

One of the most important differences is that ‘global intellectual history’ is more concerned with *concept formation* than it is with the *circulation of ideas*. Rather than thinking about how ideas circulated, global intellectual history is interested in exploring how certain global concepts emerged socio-historically in different places. This approach is premised on the idea that certain concepts are globally available, but emerge in different places at different times depending on the particular historical circumstances of that place. In this sense, global intellectual history is a history that looks for sameness, rather than difference. In part a reaction to the Subaltern Studies school’s emphasis on alterity and difference, or on the ‘derivativeness’ of Indian ideological formations, global intellectual history has challenged the notion of India as always being a particular variation of a universal European story. Instead, global intellectual historians have sought to show how India fit into the dominant narratives of European history and not as autonomous from them.

An influential example of this approach is Andrew Sartori’s *Bengal in Global Concept History* (2008). Sartori argued that the concept of culture emerged in Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century as a reaction to the crisis of liberal political economy in the Bengali countryside. He showed that the liberal ideal of free and independent exchange in civil society, which was the dominant ideological paradigm in the early nineteenth century, gradually became untenable as commercialization increasingly locked Bengal into a subservient position in a Britain-centered global economy.<sup>21</sup> The turn to an indigenous Hindu culture was, therefore, an attempt to rebuild a philosophical foundation on which to ground freedom and self-realization. The culture concept, in other words, emerged not through the global circulation of texts, or out of

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 95-8.

colonial pedagogical and translational projects, but rather as a result of the socio-historical transformations within Indian society. As Sartori explained, echoing Manu Goswami's elaboration of the socio-historical approach to the study of colonial nationalist discourse, a history of ideas should be driven "not by the logic of any particular discourse formation, but rather by the transformations in the socio-historical context within which these discourse formations [are] located."<sup>22</sup> In recent works, Sartori has extended these insights to the history of political economy and the history of liberalism.<sup>23</sup> He has argued that intellectual histories of political economy and liberalism must be rooted in the social and structural transformations that those discourses actually describe, rather than in the transnational circulation or 'diffusion' of ideas.<sup>24</sup> As he put it, political economic discourse must be explained with reference to the "thick relational network it takes as its object," rather than from some space outside of it.<sup>25</sup> For Sartori, then, it is only possible for abstract political economic concepts – such as, say, labor – to emerge in a society where those abstractions are actually present (that is, where capitalist social transformation has restructured relations of production).

There is a great deal to admire and learn from in this rich and theoretically rigorous account, not the least of which is the call to treat Indian ideological forms in similar ways, and with the same degree of seriousness, as one would treat European ones. Indeed, as Sartori writes, "the history of a European concept's appropriation in Bengal should be analyzed in the same

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<sup>22</sup> Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*), 74. For more on the 'socio-historical' perspective, see Manu Goswami, *Producing India: from Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 152-53.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> For an approach which prioritizes the diffusion and circulation of ideas in the history of liberalism, see C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Sartori, "Global Intellectual History and the History of Political Economy," in Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).



manner as the history of the generation of that concept in Europe in the first place.”<sup>26</sup> I think it is a valuable and necessary intervention to say that South Asia (and the non-West more broadly) does not always have to be the supplier of difference in our narratives of global historical change, and my own work is motivated by this impulse as well. As I discussed above, in my reading of Urdu political economy, I emphasize the ways in which the intellectual project of Indian translators – namely, the development of a science of the social – was similar to that of European political economists. Syed Ahmed Khan and John Stuart Mill, I submit, were engaged in strikingly similar projects. However, where I depart from Sartori’s approach is to argue that the particular speech-act in which a concept is articulated is just as important as the socio-historical process through which that concept emerged. For example, even if one accepts Sartori’s argument, as I do, that capitalist social transformation produced the culture concept in Bengal, it does not explain how that concept was expressed in Bengali in the particular ways that it was. Why, in nineteenth century Bengal, was ‘culture’ articulated as *sanskriti* or *anushilan* (or *tammadun* in Urdu) and not as something else? How did Bengali thinkers make a discursive connection between ‘culture’ and ‘*sanskriti*’? Through what mechanisms were these terms posited as equivalent and commensurable signs? And, how did the popular discursive and affective understandings of ‘*sanskriti*’ – what C.A. Bayly called “styles of thinking active in everyday life”<sup>27</sup> – inflect how people understood the culture concept? To ask these questions is not to quibble over lexical minutiae, but rather to approach intellectual history at the level of articulation and circulation of ideas instead of at the level of concept formation. Whereas the latter approach might have asked how political economic concepts emerged in India, my inquiry is related more to how, and to what effect, political economic concepts were expressed in

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<sup>26</sup> Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 36.

vernacular Indian languages like Urdu. This emphasis on how concepts were articulated requires close attention to the dynamics of translation, which plays a central role in my dissertation. By drawing on translation theory, I seek to understand how, precisely, Urdu vernacular traditions interfaced with English political economy, and to what effects.

### **Urdu and its Regimes of Translation**

Histories of translation in South Asia have often treated translation as an act of cross-cultural mediation and as a process that seamlessly transfers meaning from one discrete, unified linguistic entity to another in a moment of ‘cultural encounter’. Translation theorists, however, have sought to complicate our understanding of translation as not just an singular and seamless act of mediation, but a complex and often fraught process of negotiating meaning that is shaped both by the specific social context in which it occurs and the subjectivity of the translator. In thinking about this process, this dissertation draws considerably on the work of the translation theorist Naoki Sakai. There are two concepts in particular that I borrow from Sakai’s work on translation. First, one of Sakai’s main interventions has been to embed the practice of translation in social relations through his concept of *regimes of translation*. He argues that a regime of translation consists of a network of social relationships that have been produced through acts of translation. In other words, for Sakai, translation is not simply a textual activity of transferring meaning from one language to another, but is instead a social process. As he puts it, translation is a “practice always in some way carried out in the company of others and structuring the situation in which it is performed.”<sup>28</sup> Following this insight, this dissertation attends closely to the social-institutional contexts in which political economy was translated in colonial India. I trace the growth of

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<sup>28</sup> Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On ‘Japan’ and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xiv.

institutions such as Delhi College, the Delhi Vernacular Translation Society, and the Aligarh Scientific Society, all of which became important centers for the translation of political economy. I examine the role of the various *munshis* and translators at these institutions to think about how these practices of translation re-structured their positions in relation to each other within the colonial educational system.

A second argument I draw from Sakai's work relates to the question of commensurability and incommensurability when writing histories of translation. As historians, when we encounter a translated text in the archive – say, an Urdu copy of John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* – how should we approach it? Should we treat it as completely commensurate to the original text (that is, we assume total translatability), or as completely incommensurate (that is, we assume zero translatability), or as partially commensurate (that is, we assume some translatability)? For Sakai, to some extent, this is the wrong question to ask.<sup>29</sup> Instead of trying to determine the degree of 'success' of any given translation, or to evaluate its 'correctness,' Sakai is interested in thinking in a more practical sense about "what actually happens in an effort of translation."<sup>30</sup> In other words, what are the ways in which the translator negotiated meaning? Through what conceptual and discursive moves did the translator attempt to create commensurability? To answer such questions, I attempt to re-construct the mental universe of Indian translators. Tracing their educational training and careers, I inquire into what they read,

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<sup>29</sup> Sakai makes a distinction in his work between *heterolingual translation* and *homolingual translation*. He explains the difference between *heterolingual* and *homolingual* translation as the difference between "address" and "communication" (in the sense that addressing someone is prior to communicating with them). According to Sakai, under a homolingual model, which assumes that translation is equivalent to communication, translation is understood as "a transfer of message from one clearly circumscribed language community into another." In contrast, a heterolingual model does not assume that translation is communication between two distinct linguistic entities. Under a heterolingual approach, "translation occurs at every listening or reading... because heterogeneity is inherent in every medium." Thus, to inquire into the 'success' of any given translation would be, for Sakai, a homolingual approach. See Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 3-10. On the question of (in)commensurability, see also Lydia Liu, *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, xiii.

what kinds of epistemological assumptions they held, and which intellectual frameworks they might have had in their conceptual arsenals. Ultimately, I argue that Urdu translators related political economy to older Indo-Persian genres of knowledge, which were a central part of their educational training.

### **Plan of the Dissertation**

The dissertation begins in the first chapter by examining early modern discourses of *akhlaq*, wealth, and accounting to think about Indian social and economic ideas before political economy. I focus specifically on *siyaq* (accounting), an early modern genre in which, I argue, it is possible to read the antecedents of Urdu political economy. The second chapter then turns to the rise of political economy in the early-nineteenth century, focusing in particular on the institutional space of Delhi College and its adjoining Vernacular Translation Society to narrate the social and intellectual context of the early translations. The chapter focuses, in particular, on the translation of James Mill's political economy, and explores how the translator Wazeer Ali's training shaped his translational choices. The third chapter takes the narrative to nearby Aligarh and the Aligarh Scientific Society. This chapter examines the thought and networks of the Society's founder, Syed Ahmed Khan, and delves into his project of using early modern concepts of the household and the city to translate John Stuart Mill's political economy as an Urdu social science. Moving away from these intellectual and educational circles, the fourth chapter considers the popular circulation of political economy. The chapter looks, in particular, at how Indian translators used popular genres like alchemy and magic to explain political economy as a science of improvement. Finally, the last chapter examines the work of the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal in the early-twentieth century, and explores how Iqbal drew on the economic

theory of Alfred Marshall. Although Iqbal has primarily been seen as the ideological founder of Muslim nationalism in South Asia, this chapter turns to his little-known prose and poetic work on economics and considers how he formulated an aesthetic and ethical critique of liberal economic thought and of modern society.

## Chapter 1

### Accounting for Households:

#### Indo-Persian Languages of Economic Thought Before Urdu Political Economy

The technique of regulating a household (which is called Domestic Philosophy) consists in supervising the state of this community in such a way as necessarily produces general best interest, by facilitating the means of livelihood and of attainment of perfection which is sought in accordance with association.

--- Nasir al-din Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens (1964)<sup>31</sup>

### Introduction

To search for the early modern Persianate roots of Urdu political economy, I begin with a short illustration of the Mughal emperor's household and the language that was used to describe its management. According to the 1703 text *Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq* (The Essence of Accounting), the emperor's household was managed by the office of *khan-i saman*, a high-ranking Mughal title that has variously been described as Chief Steward, High Steward, or even Lord Chamberlain.<sup>32</sup>

The text explained that the role of the *khan-i saman* was to arrange and make available (*muhaiya' va maujud mikonad*) the resources or items that were needed for sustaining life (*asbab-i-ma'ishat-i-hayat*).<sup>33</sup> The use of the term *ma'ishat* here points to a possible genealogy of the economic in Indo-Persian intellectual history. It suggests that the term *ma'ishat*, which came

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<sup>31</sup> Nasir al-Din Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd), 1964), 154-55.

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurungzib*, Vol. II, *Northern India, 1688-1681* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), 79; S.A.I. Tirmizi, *Mughal Documents*, vol. II, *1628-1659* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 251. According to Satish Chandra, the title of "khan-i-saman" was not in use during Akbar's time, but only came into use under Jahangir or Shah Jehan. See Satish Chandra, *Medieval India, from the Sultanat to the Mughals*, Part II, *Mughal Empire, 1526-1748* (New Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 1997), 140.

<sup>33</sup> Indar Sen, "Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq," 1703, Punjab University Library, Shirani Collection, Ms. 5741/2422, ff. 2a. Other copies of this manuscript include Add. Ms. 6588 at the British Library and Ms. 410/143 in the Suleiman Collection at the Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University. For this chapter, I have relied mainly on the Punjab University Library copy since it seems to be the most complete. For more information on this work, see N.M. Siddiqi, "Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq," in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 22<sup>nd</sup> session, edited by George Moraes, V.G. Hatakhar, and V.D. Rao (Bombay: Bombay University Press, 1960), 282-87.

to mean ‘the economy’ in twentieth century Persian and Urdu, was used in early modern India in the context of livelihood and housekeeping.<sup>34</sup> In this case, specifically, the term described the supplies and expenditures surrounding the emperor’s household. The text explained that the *khan-i saman* was responsible for managing the various departments (*karkhanas*) of the royal household, which included the department of jewels (*jawahar khana*), the department of weapons or the armoury (*qur-khana*), and the kitchen (*bawarchi khana*).<sup>35</sup> These descriptions indicate that there is an Indo-Persian discursive tradition which links early modern ideas of the household with later conceptions of the economy as a bounded space of production. In this chapter, I am interested in studying this tradition primarily by looking at *siyaq-namas* (accounting manuals), such as the *Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq*, which I argue allow us to situate Indo-Persian administrative and accounting language within the long history of economic thought in India. My aim in this chapter is, therefore, to explore the intellectual antecedents of Urdu political economy.

*Siyaq-namas* represent a genre of administrative literature that was prevalent in India from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, across the Mughal and British Empires. The first part of the term *siyaq-nama* refers to “*Siyaq*”, an Arabic-derived notational system for writing numbers, which was in wide usage throughout the medieval Arabic-speaking world, from where it gradually spread to the Persianate regions of the Near East and Central Asia.<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> An early-nineteenth century Persian-English dictionary defined “*ma’ishat*” as “living or leading a life.” See Ramdhun Sen, *A Dictionary in Persian and English* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1829), 162. Meanwhile, a Hindustani-English dictionary from the same period defined “*ma’ishat*” as “subsistence, livelihood, living, way of life.” See John Shakespear, *A Dictionary, Hindustani and English*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: J.L. Cox, and Son, 1834), 1648. In her study of Indo-Persian texts in the eighteenth century, Gulfishan Khan translated “*ma’ishat*” as meaning “social living” or “socio-economic life”. See Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim Perceptions of the West during the Eighteenth Century* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 125.

<sup>35</sup> Sen, “*Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq*,” *Shirani Collection*, Punjab University Library, ff. 26.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the history of *Siyaq*, see Brain Spooner and William L Hanaway, “*Siyaq*: numeral notation and numeracy in the Persianate world,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Mathematics*, ed. Eleanor Robson and Jacqueline Stedall (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 429-47.

system consisted of shorthand symbols representing the Arabic word for each number, and was used for recording agricultural revenues, tax receipts, and merchant accounts. It is not known exactly when *Siyāq*-based accounting arrived in India, but it likely may have been at some point in the late-sixteenth or early-seventeenth century as part of the Persianization of the Mughal bureaucracy that began under Akbar (r. 1556-1605) and continued throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>37</sup> The second part of the term *siyaq-nama* is the Persian suffix “*nama*” which is added to words to indicate something which has been written down or documented. Thus, “*siyaq-nama*” literally means a manual or a written description of *Siyāq* accounting. In practice, however, *siyaq-namas* consisted of much more than simply describing the system of notation and accounting; some of them also contained commentaries on historical, political, and agricultural topics. They described, for instance, how the Mughal revenue and accounting system had evolved, and what historical and political factors lay behind its development. *Siyāq-namas* are, therefore, important sources for studying the political and economic thought of early modern India.

Despite their importance, however, *siyaq-namas* have received relatively little attention in the historiography of Mughal India. The few historians who have studied them have tended to do so indirectly in two ways. First, since many *siyaq-namas* apparently included real agricultural and revenue statistics as examples of how to record revenue (as the *Khulasa-t-ul-Siyāq* also did), some historians have used *siyaq-namas* as quantitative data sources. Thus, for instance, in his monumental work *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (1963), Irfan Habib drew on a 1694 accounting manual, titled *Siyāq-nama*, to locate statistics on total assessed revenue (*jama* ‘) for

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<sup>37</sup> On the Persianization of the Mughal state, see Muzaffar Alam, “The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics,” in *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1998): 317-349.



the years 1638-56.<sup>38</sup> These statistics have been corroborated from other sources, which confirms that *siyaq-namas* tended to contain actual revenue statistics. Second, and more recently, a vibrant and important new body of scholarship has developed around the social and cultural history of Mughal intermediary and administrative figures, particularly the *munshi* (clerk or secretary).<sup>39</sup> Since *munshis* were ostensibly among the intended audiences for *siyaq-namas*, historians have turned to these manuals, as well as to other administrative genres of writing, to understand what Najaf Haider has called “norms of good behaviour” and “professional ethics” of the Mughal secretarial class.<sup>40</sup> This scholarship has added immensely to our understanding of Mughal India, yet there remains a need to study *siyaq-namas* in their own right, and to understand the ideas that underpinned Mughal accounting itself and how those ideas contributed to an early modern economic language.

In writing a history of economic thought based on accounting documents, I am interested in thinking of accounting not just as a bureaucratic practice, but also as a discourse that reflected larger ethical, political, and economic ideologies. I have in mind here Jacob Soll’s argument about “cultures of accountability” – the notion that accounting practices and numerical conventions arise from “moral or cultural frameworks” which dictate who is accountable, for what, and to whom.<sup>41</sup> To this, we can add that accounting practices also reflect prevailing economic ideologies. Indeed, accounting has been described as the “first-order naming discipline

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<sup>38</sup> Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 397.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), particularly the essay titled “The Making of a Munshi”; Najaf Haider, “Norms of Professional Excellence and Good Conduct in Accountancy Manuals of the Mughal Empire,” *International Review of Social History* 56 (2011): 263-74. For a recent in-depth study of *munshis* and their training, see Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), particularly chapter 2.

<sup>40</sup> Haider, 270.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob Soll, *The Reckoning: Financial Accountability and the Rise and Fall of Nations* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xvi. Even within the field of professional accounting itself, scholars have been willing to investigate the historical and social contexts that give rise to particular accounting practices. For a seminal article on this subject, see Anthony Hopwood, “On trying to study accounting in the contexts in which it operates,” *Accounting, Organizations, and Society* 8, 2-3 (1983): 287-305.

that underlies economics”.<sup>42</sup> Such a description comes from the compelling assumption that accounting is logically prior to, and constitutive of, economic thought – in the sense that the things that accountants name and count form the basis of thinking about wealth and economic activity. We might apply this same assumption to the history of accounting in India to think about how it fits in a longer history of Indian economic thought. To put this in the context of a global early modernity, just as William Petty’s seventeenth century idea of ‘national accounting’ preceded classical political economy in English economic thought,<sup>43</sup> or Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s seventeenth century innovations in *tenir les livres* (book-keeping) were episodes in the development of French economic thought,<sup>44</sup> so too perhaps is Mughal accounting a precursor to later Indian economic ideas.

One of the main reasons why Indo-Persian accounting manuals can help us to understand the roots of Urdu political economy is because they have many discursive connections with those later works. The Persian accounting texts I will study in this chapter, and the works of Urdu political economy I will study in later chapters, clearly have shared vocabularies. But, the question remains as to whether they share any conceptual links. To ask this bluntly: was there a Mughal political economy? *Siyaq-namas* offer us one possible way to answer this question. As evident from the description at the beginning of this chapter, *siyaq-namas* reveal a system of accounting and administration in which the conception of ‘economics’ was confined to the royal household. This is markedly dissimilar to political economy which locates the economic outside the household and in society. To put it another way, there is no ‘Mughal political economy’ if

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<sup>42</sup> David Chioni Moore, “Feminist accounting theory as a critique of what’s ‘natural’ in economics,” in Philip Mirowski, ed. *Natural Images in Economic Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 583-610.

<sup>43</sup> Ted McCormick, *William Petty and the Ambitions of Political Arithmetic* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> On Colbert and development of state accounting, see Soll, *The Reckoning*, chapter 6, “The Accountant and the Sun King.” For more on the connection between accounting and political economy in other early modern European contexts, see Soll, “Accounting for Government: Holland and the Rise of Political Economy in Seventeenth-Century Europe,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 2 (2009): 215-238.

one understands political economy to be a reflection on social relations of production (as opposed to household relations of production). Hannah Arendt's account of the rise of political economy is useful in understanding this distinction. In the Arendtian account, political economy arose when questions of "housekeeping" left the "shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere."<sup>45</sup> Arendt referred to this historical development as "the rise of the social," which she argued also marked the conceptual shift from ancient *oikonomieia* to modern political economy. My inclination from reading *siyaq-namas* is to argue that, if we speak of a 'Mughal political economy', it is closer to this earlier meaning of economics as *oikonomieia* (from Greek *oikos*, or household, and *nomos*, or law or administration) than it is to Urdu political economy.

Finally, I am also interested in studying *siyaq-namas* to think about the connection between translation and economic thought. *Siyaq-namas* are ideal documents to study this connection because translation was central to the Mughal accounting system. Mughal accounting from the seventeenth century onwards required that revenue documents be translated from local languages (often *Hindavi*) to the imperial language (Persian) to create chains of accountability and verifiability. *Siyaq-namas* discussed these requirements at length and included clearly-defined rules about who should translate which documents and when. In studying these discussions, I draw on Naoki Sakai's concept of *regimes of translation*. According to Sakai, a regime of translation produces a network of relationships premised on particular acts of translation. For Sakai, translation is "a practice always in some way carried out in the company of others and structuring the situation in which it is performed."<sup>46</sup> Following this insight, I argue that *siyaq-namas* were products of a seventeenth century *Persian regime of translation*, which

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<sup>45</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 38.

<sup>46</sup> Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On 'Japan' and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xiv.

structured the relationship between different administrative ranks and classes of revenue officers, and in so doing, produced particular forms of accountability. In many ways, this regime of translation persisted until the early-nineteenth century when the East India Company successor state replaced Persian with Hindustani (Urdu) as the official language of administration. This change not only produced new accounting practices and new forms of accountability, as nineteenth century *siyaq-namas* show, but also established new types of translational relationships. Thus, this chapter is partly also concerned with exploring how the genre of the *siyaq-nama* changed as it moved in time across different translational regimes.

In what follows, I explore these arguments across four sections. In the first section, I examine the concept of the household as a unit of economic activity in Mughal thought to understand the intellectual context in which *siyaq-namas* were written. The second section then moves to the formation of a Persian regime of translation, showing how *siyaq-namas* were both products of this regime and also narrated its historical development. In the third section, I turn to *siyaq* numerals themselves to explore how they reflected and reinforced ideas of accountability. Finally, in the fourth section, I trace how *siyaq-namas* gradually changed under the new accounting and translational regime of Hindustani (Urdu) when it replaced Persian in the early-nineteenth century as the language of administration. The conclusion reflects briefly on *siyaq-namas* and Mughal economic thought as precursors to Urdu political economy.

### **The Household in Mughal Economic Thought**

A person aspiring to be an accountant (*mutasaddi*) or a clerk (*munshi*) in the Mughal Empire required, in addition to technical knowledge of accountancy and the scribal arts, an extensive

scholarly education in the great works of Persian literature and philosophy.<sup>47</sup> Foremost among these works was Nasir al-din Tusi's *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* (The Nasirean Ethics), a thirteenth-century work of ethical philosophy that cast a significant influence on Mughal thought. It has been described as being "among the five most important books" of Akbar's court which were read aloud to the emperor regularly, and manuscripts of it from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries in archives across South Asia attest to its wide circulation.<sup>48</sup> In recent years, historians of Mughal India have studied Tusi's *Akhlaq* as a foundational work in relation to Mughal political thought and norms of statecraft, the formation of imperial identity, and ideas of gender, imperial masculinity, and bodily comportment.<sup>49</sup> My focus, instead, will be on the discussion of wealth and accounting, which remains almost entirely overlooked in analyses of this work. In particular, I explore the Nasirean conception of the household as a unit of wealth production, and I argue that it held accounting as a key function which regulated wealth and produced order, stability, and prosperity for the household.

The *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* purported to be a complete system of ethics, consisting of three domains of knowledge, each of which established guidelines for ethical conduct relating to a particular aspect of kingship. The three domains were: the refinement of manners (*tahzib-i-akhlaq*); the management of households (*tadabir-i-manazil*); and, the administration of cities

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<sup>47</sup> Alam and Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," in *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 316.

<sup>48</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 61.

<sup>49</sup> For an overview of Tusi's importance to Mughal thought, see S.A.A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign, with special reference to Abu'l Fazl, 1556-1605* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers 1975), Chapter 9. For the importance of *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* to Mughal political thought and norms of governance, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 50-121, as well as his article "Akhlaqi Norms and Mughal Governance" in Francoise Delvoye Nalini and Marc Gaborieau, eds., *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 73-78. On the *Akhlaq* and imperial identity, see Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chapter 3. the *Akhlaq* and imperial masculinity see Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Kingdom, Household, and Body History: Gender and Imperial Service under Akbar," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2007): 889-923.

(*siyasat-i-madan*).<sup>50</sup> In English translations of the work, these three domains have often been taken as being analogous to the modern disciplinary trifecta of ethics–economics–politics, a translational move which implied that the three domains were distinct, but co-equal branches of knowledge. On the contrary, in my reading of this ethical system, I see the three domains as being hierarchically ordered, moving from smaller to larger fields of ethical action. In fact, we might think of them as a set of three concentric circles: the smallest circle related to ethical conduct at the personal level, then at the household level, and finally at the community level. Within this ordering, the discussion of wealth and property was located almost entirely at the household level, which marked the household as the primary unit of the production and regulation of wealth.

The section on household management (*tadabir-i-manazil*) began with an explanation for establishing households in the first place. Tusi argued that households arose out of the twin imperatives of the preservation of the individual (*tabqiyat-i-shaks*) and the preservation of the human species (*tabqiyat-i-nau'*). In the first instance, the preservation of the individual depended upon food (*ghaza*) and other necessities of life (*asbab-i-ma'ishat*), which could only be produced through mutual collaboration (*be-mu'awanat-i-mu'awanan*). The production of these necessities also required various tools (*a'laat*) and a settled place (*makan*) where one would be safe from the tyrants and oppressors (*zaliman va ghasiban*) of the outside world.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the preservation of the human species required that men choose partners (*jufti girad*), who were assigned two important offices simultaneously (*yak shaks do muhimm ra*): the work of

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<sup>50</sup> For references to the *Akhlaq*, I have drawn on the published Persian text and the well-known G.M. Wickens English translation. See Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* (Tehran: Intisharat Ilmiyah Islamiyah, [1993] 1413 hijri), 14, 165, 205 and Nasir al-Din Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd), 1964), 262 n. 39.

<sup>51</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 165-66; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 153.

procreation (*tanasul*) and the work of sustenance (*maunat*).<sup>52</sup> The work of sustenance, in particular, required the organization of various techniques of housekeeping (*tadbir-i-sinai*), such as sowing (*kash-tan*), harvesting (*dirav-dan*), cleaning (*pak kardan*), cooking (*pukhtan*) and others. These tasks required the help of attendants and servants (*khadam*), who along with parents and children, were part of the assembly (*jama 'at*) of the household.<sup>53</sup> Tusi, therefore, envisioned the household as the fundamental unit of production and reproduction, a space for organizing the different tasks required for living, with different components (*arkan*) each of whom had defined duties and functions. The household was, in other words, a comprehensive system for the administration of life and livelihood (*nizam hal-i-ma 'ash*).<sup>54</sup> There is much to be said here about the configuration of the household, and its attendant notions of gender, family, and service, as the scholars cited above have discussed, but the language is worth noting as well. Most relevant for our purposes is the repeated invocation of “*ma 'ash*” and “*ma 'ishat*” to describe the purpose and organization of the household. Tusi described the household both as the space for producing the necessities of life (*asbab-i-ma 'ishat*), as well as the domain encompassing the set of relationships that administered those necessities (*nizam hal-i-ma 'ash*). In these ways, the household was imagined as a bounded, self-sustaining community.

Indeed, the Nasirean conception of the household could be likened to a political community in miniature. Tusi argued that what was meant by ‘household’ (*manzil*) was not a physical house made of brick or stone, but rather a particular combination (*talif-i-makhsus*) of familial and patronage bonds, such as that between husband and wife, parent and child, and master and servant. The head of the household (*mudabir-i-manzil*) was the ruler of this community, and accordingly, all matters pertaining to the government of the community (*riyasat-*

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<sup>52</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 166; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 154-5.

<sup>53</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 166; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 155.

<sup>54</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 166; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 154.

*i-quom*) were entrusted to him. In this, the ruler was comparable to a shepherd (*shaban*) who looked after the well-being of his flock of sheep (*rama-i-gosfand*) and they in turn provided the means of his livelihood (*amoor-i-ma'ishat*).<sup>55</sup> Moreover, as the governor of the community, he ensured that all members (*arkan*) were able to develop and attain perfection in their individual roles (*har yek be-kamali ke be-hisb shaks bidan*). This way of governing, of ensuring that everyone's material needs were fulfilled and the community's best interests (*maslahat-i-'umum*) were secured, required a science of its own called domestic philosophy (*hikmat-i-manzali*), and it was incumbent on all household heads to be proficient in it.<sup>56</sup>

The key values underpinning domestic philosophy were balance and equilibrium (*i'tidal*).<sup>57</sup> All members of the household working together in specific roles created an equilibrium, much in the same way that different parts of the body worked together to produce healthfulness (*sehat-i-badan*). Here, instead of a shepherd, the head of the household was likened to a physician (*tabib*) who looked after the overall health of the body by ensuring that the different parts were in equilibrium with each other. And, if a disorder (*khalal*) were to arise in the household, it was incumbent on this physician-ruler to provide treatment and remedy (*'ilaj*) so as to protect the welfare of all other members, and further to ensure that corruption (*fisad*) did not spread to the rest of the household.<sup>58</sup> Preserving the equilibrium was deemed the primary objective (*maqsad-i-avval*) of the head of the household.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 166-7; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 154.

<sup>56</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 167; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 154-5.

<sup>57</sup> G.M. Wickens translated "*i'tidal*" as equilibrium, but its various shades of meanings also include balance, symmetry, and moderation. In his discussion of the *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, Muzaffar Alam translated it as "equipoise" and, again, as "equity". See Alam, "Shari'a and Governance in the Indo-Islamic Context," in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds., *beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 228, 236.

<sup>58</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 168; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 155-56.

<sup>59</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 168; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 156.



These values of balance and equilibrium were reflected in the discussion of wealth. Tusi expressed a persistent concern with the correct accounting of wealth (*hal-i-mal*), in order to avoid disorder and corruption. The discussion of wealth and accounting consisted of three main topics, which corresponded to the flow of money into and out of the household. These three topics were: income, or money coming into the household (*dakhal*); custody, or care of money in the household (*hifz*); and, expenditure, or money leaving the household (*kharj*).<sup>60</sup> As we will see later, these categories reflected the ethos of *siyaq* and other accounting systems, which separated wealth into different streams of money that could be documented and accounted.

Income was derived either from crafts/professions (*San'aat*) and commerce (*tijarat*), or from inheritance and gifts (*'itaya*). With regard to crafts and professions, Tusi's advice was to avoid those that were base (*khasis*), such as those that were harmful to the rest of the community. Examples of these harmful professions included maintaining a monopoly (*ihhtikar*), conducting sorcery (*sehar*), and gambling (*muqamiri*).<sup>61</sup> Instead, he encouraged readers to aspire to noble (*sharif*) professions such as those that required the use of intelligence (*'aql*), learning (*kitabab*), or chivalry (*shaja'at*). These included professions such as ministerial work (*vazir*), medicine (*tibb*), or military command (*sipah-giri*). Finally, there were a number of professions that were neither noble nor base, but were necessary (*zaruri*) to the community. These intermediate (*mutawassit*) professions, located between the noble and the base, included such crafts and occupations as agriculture work (*zira'at*) or carpentry (*durodgari*). Whatever their professions, readers were exhorted not to engage in any business that sullied their reputations (*tadnis arz gardanid*).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 171; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 157.

<sup>61</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 172; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 158.

<sup>62</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 171-2; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 158.

The custody and expenditure of wealth also demanded specific guidelines. The most important of these was holding wealth in such a way that there was no disorder in the administration of the household and in the lives of its inhabitants (*ikhhtilali be-ma 'ishat ahl-e-manzil ra ne-ayad*). Tusi argued that disorder came not only from greed (*hiras*) and stinginess (*bukhl*), but also from ignoring a number of principles of managing money wisely.<sup>63</sup> The first principle was that household expenditures should not match household income, but be less (*kharj ba dakhil muqabil na-bud balke kamtar bud*). Next, he suggested, one should only make expenditures on things that themselves could generate additional wealth, such as agricultural land (*milki*). Tusi also advised that heads of household ought to seek consistency and steadiness in profits: a small, but uninterrupted (*mutawatir*) stream of money was better than large profits (*munafeh bisyar*) arriving at unexpected times (*bar wajh ittefaq*).<sup>64</sup> Finally, Tusi suggested that wealth holdings ought to be diversified. Rather than holding wealth in only one kind of property, he recommended holding one portion in cash (*naqd*), another portion in commodities (*ajnas*) and provisions (*aqwat*), and a third portion in landed property (*amlak*) and livestock (*mawashi*). This diversification would ensure that if there were disorder in any one portion (*khalali be-tarfi ra bayad*), one could repair it from the other two portions (*do tarf deegar jabran mayasar shavad*).<sup>65</sup> Taken together, these principles suggested that the order and prosperity of the household depended on the correct ordering and accounting of wealth: disorder was prevented when expenses were less than income, money was invested productively, cash flows were reliable, and assets were sufficiently diversified.

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<sup>63</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 173; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 159.

<sup>64</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 173; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 159.

<sup>65</sup> As an aside, it is worth noting that the verb used here is “*jabr*”, which has various connotations of repairing, compelling, or forcing. Among these different meanings is repairing or “setting a broken bone” which recalls the physician metaphor raised earlier. See Steingass, *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, 355.

These guidelines also pointed to the intertwining of ethical and economic principles. Greed was as disruptive to the household order as inconsistent flow of money; parsimony was as liable to produce disorder as undiversified wealth holdings. Indeed, in the list of vices that Tusi warned readers to guard against, moral and ethical failings sat alongside poor management. The four main vices, in relation to money and expenditures, were: miserliness (*taqtir*), especially in giving allowances to domestic servants; excess and extravagance (*israf*); pride and boastfulness (*mubahat*); and, poor management (*su 'i-i-tadbir*). Tusi defined poor management as being too frugal in some places (*dar ba 'az mawazi ' ziyadeh az iqtisad bikar bard*) and not sufficiently frugal in others (*dar barkhi kamtar az an*).<sup>66</sup> Good household management, in other words, demanded the cultivation of an ethical disposition, particularly around the values of frugality and thrift.

A final observation about Tusi's language in this passage: the use of *iqtisad* (frugality) is particularly notable here. For Tusi, *iqtisad* referred to a certain ideal of balance. It implied a careful management of household finances, such that one was not too extravagant or too stingy. In the late-nineteenth century, the term *iqtisad* was recast as 'economics.' The most well-known example of this was the poet-philosopher Mohammad Iqbal's 1903 textbook *Ilm-ul-Iqtisad* (The Science of Economics), which drew upon the political economy of Alfred Marshall, Henry Fawcett, and John Stuart Mill.<sup>67</sup> Iqbal's translational move of rendering "economics" as "*iqtisad*," which I will explore in greater detail in the fifth chapter, is another example of how early modern ethical conceptions of household management were recast into Urdu political economy in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>66</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaqi-i-Nasiri*, 174; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 160.

<sup>67</sup> Mohammad Iqbal, *Ilm-ul-Iqtisad* (Karachi: Iqbal Academy [1903] 1962).

In the discussion above, I have focused solely on the *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, but these notions of household management were not limited to this one text. While the *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* remains the most complete example of early modern Persianate domestic philosophy (*hikmat-i-manzali*), these ideas can also be found in a number of other early modern *akhlaq* (ethics) texts as well, many of which were modeled on the Nasirean system and which also circulated in Mughal India.<sup>68</sup> This view of domestic philosophy was, therefore, widely available to Mughal scribes and accountants who also studied it as part of their training. As we have seen, these texts positioned the household as the primary unit for the production of wealth and property, and laid out broad principles for ordering, managing, and counting wealth. But, how did these principles influence the development of accounting practices and systems of accountability? How did early modern accounting texts draw upon these ideas and express the values of balance and equilibrium? The next two sections take up these questions in turn.

### **Accountability and the Formation of a Persian Regime of Translation**

The *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* helps us to understand, in broad terms, conceptions of wealth and accounting in early modern Indo-Persian traditions. But, the development and adoption of *siyaq* accounting by the Mughal state in the seventeenth century was contingent on factors and conditions particular to that period. C.A Bayly has argued that *siyaq* accounting was a new branch of “syncretic” knowledge, which brought together “Hindu commercial culture” and “systems of accountability of Mughal political culture” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>69</sup> Bayly argued that the mathematical, accounting, and documentary practices of Hindu merchants and scribes merged with Iranian and Persianate norms of governance and ethics to

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<sup>68</sup> For more on the *Akhlaq* tradition, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 50-121.

<sup>69</sup> C.A. Bayly, “Pre-Colonial Indian Merchants and Rationality,” in Mushirul Hasan and Narayani Gupta, eds., *India’s Colonial Encounter: Essays in Memory of Eric Stokes* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993), 3-24.

create a dynamic “Mughal synthesis.”<sup>70</sup> For Bayly, this synthesis represented an example of the linkages between state authority and commercial power that grew deeper in the eighteenth century. In fact, he argued these linkages between state and society produced a “public commercial culture” which he saw as “an alternative culture of modernity alongside the amalgam achieved by capitalism and the modern state in contemporary Europe.”<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, however, he argued, this synthesis was not durable as it was subject both to internal strains, such as political instability and the perpetual conflict between revenue farming and military campaigns, as well as external pressures, such as European expansion in South Asia. According to this narrative, then, the rise and fall of Mughal accounting culture was closely linked to the political economy of South Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

There are two elements of this narrative that I want to question, which will frame the discussion of *siyaq-namas* in this section: first, I am interested in thinking in more detail about how, and through what means, this ‘synthesis’ occurred; and second, I want to question the distinction between state and society that is implicit in this argument. But, before delving into these points, it is worth noting that Bayly’s account of the formation of a cultural synthesis is broadly consistent with what *siyaq-namas* tell us. Indeed, *siyaq-namas* themselves embody this synthesis: many were written by Hindu scribes in service of the Mughal state. The most complete and well-known *siyaq-nama*, the *Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq* (1703), was written by Indar Sen, a Hindu scribe most likely of the Kayastha caste.<sup>72</sup> Another text, the *Siyaq-Nama* (1694) was composed

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<sup>70</sup> C.A. Bayly, “Pre-Colonial Indian Merchants and Rationality,” 21.

<sup>71</sup> Bayly, “Pre-Colonial Indian Merchants and Rationality,” 21.

<sup>72</sup> Indar Sen’s likely Kayastha background is suggested by a number of scholars, including Alam and Subrahmanyam, “Making of a Munshi,” 319. Alam and Subrahmanyam also suggest in the same piece that a large number of *munshi* positions generally in the seventeenth and eighteenth century were filled by Kayastha and Khattri scribes.

by Ananda Ram, a Khattri scribe from Allahabad.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the *siyaq-namas* also described how these different documentary cultures came together. In the *Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq*, for instance, Indar Sen began by narrating the arrival of Mughal rule in India, and the subsequent changes in administration and accounting which resulted from it. According to Sen, in ancient India, scribes and those of the pen (*ahl-i-qalam*) had traditionally been Hindu, and they had developed the art of mathematics (*fun-i-hisab*). When Muslim rulers (*salatin-i-Muslimin az vilyat-i-Islam*) arrived in India, they were unfamiliar with the language and writing of Hindi (*zaban va khatt-i-Hindi*). Consequently, according to the ancient custom (*be-dastur-i-qadim*), these Hindi writers became office holders (*ahl-i-dafatir*) for the new Muslim rulers, particularly in the matters of administration (*muamlat-i-sultani*) and the adjustment of revenue accounts (*muhasabat-i-diwani*).<sup>74</sup> In this way, Hindu scribal communities and traditions were absorbed into the new Mughal regime.

However, what Bayly's account of the 'Mughal synthesis' does not address is the question of how this synthesis actually happened. What were the mechanisms that helped to produce a syncretic cultural formation? Here, it is important to think about the question of translation, not least because writers of *siyaq-namas* themselves were attentive to it and specifically referred to the role of translation in the creation of new systems of accounting and accountability. Indar Sen explained in the *Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq* that, soon after the new Muslim rulers had established their reign in India, Persian writers from Iran and Turan (*farsi-navis az vilayat-i-Iran va Turan*) arrived and were employed in the service of the new rulers (*naukar mi-shudand*). Until this time, according to Sen, all revenue and administrative papers had been kept

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<sup>73</sup> On Ananda Ram, C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, vol. II, part 3 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 371.

<sup>74</sup> Sen, "Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq," Ms. 5741, ff. 4a. The same passage appears in the British Library manuscript of the work at Sen, "Khulasa-t-il-Siyaq," BL. Add. Ms. 6588, ff. 64-64b.

in Hindi (*dar Hindustan daftar-i-hindi bud*), as they had been for the past four hundred years, going back to the rule of Prithviraj Chauhan in A.H. 583 (C.E. 1187).<sup>75</sup> However, beginning in the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605), and the arrival of Persian writers, matters of revenue (*hisab-dani*) and the particulars of accounting (*daqqa 'iq-i-siyāq*) were *translated* from Hindi to Persian (*az hindi be farsi tarjum namudeh*).<sup>76</sup> The key figure in this shift, Sen pointed out, was Akbar's minister Abu al-Fazl, known by the pen-name Faizi (*faizi takhulus dasht*), who was also deeply familiar with the intricacies of mathematics (*mushkilat-i-hisab*) and had consulted the *Lilavati*, the renowned text of Hindi numbers.<sup>77</sup> Following from this, a number of Persian scholars, including Khawaja Shah Manzur Shirazi, Khawaja Ata Beg Mashadi, and others, developed the rules and regulations of writing accounts in *siyaq* (*qawaid-va-qawanin navisandagi zawabit siyaq*). Eventually, in the twenty-seventh year of Akbar's reign, Raja Todar Mal, the chief minister for revenues (*vizier-azam dastur-i-hisab dani*), established Persian revenue papers (*daftar-i-Farsi muqarar kard*). And, gradually, in the company of Persian writers (*dar suhbat-i-navisandigan-i-farsi*), the rules of *siyaq* accounting became known (*daqqa 'iq-i-siyaq waqif shudeh*).<sup>78</sup> This narrative shows that scribes like Sen viewed *siyaq* as a kind of 'syncretic' knowledge, one which relied both on the influence of Persian scholars and writers, as well as on Hindi textual traditions (such as the *Lilavati*) and Hindu administrative officers (such as Raja Todar Mal). More importantly, the formation of this syncretism was closely linked to translational practices: the arrival of *siyaq* was not only accompanied by, but in fact depended on, a shift from Hindi to Persian as the language of revenue accounting.

<sup>75</sup> Sen, "Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq," Ms. 5741, ff. 4b; Sen, "Khulasa-t-il-Siyaq," Add. Ms. 6588, ff. 64b.

<sup>76</sup> Sen, "Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq," Ms. 5741, ff. 5a; Sen, "Khulasa-t-il-Siyaq," Add. Ms. 6588, ff. 64b. I have taken the word "*tarjum*" to mean "translation," but it is worth noting that "*tarjum*" could also mean "interpretation". See Steingass, *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, 293.

<sup>77</sup> Sen, "Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq," Ms. 5741, ff. 4b-5a; Sen, "Khulasa-t-il-Siyaq," Add. Ms. 6588, ff. 64b.

<sup>78</sup> Sen, "Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq," Ms. 5741, ff. 5b; Sen, "Khulasa-t-il-Siyaq," Add. Ms. 6588, ff. 65.

Sen's mention of the changes made by Todar Mal in the twenty-seventh year of Akbar's reign is most likely a reference to Todar Mal's well-known memorandum on revenue, which he wrote in 1582-3 and which was later appended to the *Akbarnama* (Chronicle of Akbar) by Abu'l Fazl.<sup>79</sup> In the decade prior to this memorandum, Akbar had implemented the *zabt* system, a new policy of revenue assessment that introduced standardized cash rates based on regular measurement of cultivated land in certain provinces.<sup>80</sup> Todar Mal's memorandum was a set of twelve recommendations that aimed to clarify various features of this system of revenue assessment and introduce new accountability measures. These measures were designed to explain the roles of different ranks of revenue officers, as well as to establish a more reliable paper trail of accountability between local officials and the imperial government. Among the policies Todar Mal proposed was that *karoris* and *amils* (types of local revenue officers) and *jagirdars* (holders of assigned land) be authorized to collect revenue only according to the standardized rates prescribed in the manual of rates and regulations (*dastur-ul-amal*), and not demand more.<sup>81</sup> The concern that officials would make excessive revenue demands on the peasantry led Todar Mal to propose a chain of accountability. Records of land measurement (*siyaha*), along with accounts of actual revenue collected, were to be sent to the imperial treasury at regular intervals, and the village clerk (*patwari*) would keep a record of these in his papers (*kaghaz-i-kham*) as well. If there were any disputes or disagreements about measurements, an arbitrator (*amin*) would be appointed to adjudicate. Further, whenever an amount was collected from peasants, they were to be given receipts by the treasurer (*fotadar*) or the collector (*tehsildar*). Overseeing this system at the village level were higher-ranked, often inherited

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<sup>79</sup> For more on the memorandum, see Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 159 and Shireen Moosvi's translation, "Todar Mal's Original Memorandum on Revenue Administration, March 1582," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 49 (1988): 237-248.

<sup>80</sup> For more on the *zabt* system of assessment, see Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 240.

<sup>81</sup> Moosvi, "Todar Mal's Original Memorandum," 241.



positions, the *chaudhuri*, the *qanungo*, and the *muqaddam*, who were also tasked with sending regular reports to the provincial *diwan* (revenue minister), who in turn reported to the *diwan-i-'ala* (chief revenue minister) in the central government. These reports were intended to act as checks on local revenue officials by relating the names of those who were looking after the welfare of peasants and increasing prosperity, as well as those who were causing disturbances.<sup>82</sup> These revenue policies, therefore, depended upon prescribed roles tied to a system of documentary accountability; the roles were defined, to a large extent, by the type of accounting document for which they were responsible.

Todar Mal's revenue recommendations were part of a broader set of administrative reforms, which as our *siyaq* writer mentioned, also included the Persianization of the imperial administration. Persian was designated the official language of the court in 1582, a move that created a large and on-going need to translate Hindavi revenue papers into Persian.<sup>83</sup> But, the role of translation went deeper than simply rendering documents from one language to another; translation was, in fact, a central feature of the system of accounting and accountability that developed over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In recent years, historians have begun to pay greater attention to practices of translation at the Mughal court, but translation is often studied as a literary exercise that interfaced between separate and distinct cultural traditions.<sup>84</sup> I want to suggest, instead, that we see translation not only as an act of cultural mediation, but also as a key structuring principle of Mughal revenue relations. The adoption of Persian by the Mughal administration, and the subsequent practices of translation this change required, helped

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<sup>82</sup> Moosvi, "Todar Mal's Original Memorandum," 241-7. For more on each of these officials, see Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 331-40.

<sup>83</sup> Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," 325. The shift to Persian language governance is described in the *Ain-i-Akbari* as well. See Abu'l Fazil, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: G.H Rouse, 1873), 352.

<sup>84</sup> See, for instance, the recent important intervention by Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

to produce a Persian *regime of translation*, by which I mean a social order in which acts of translation structure relationships between people, in this case the relationships between different ranks and positions of revenue officers.<sup>85</sup> In essence, translation became one of the ways through which revenue officers were held accountable for their roles in revenue collection.

*Siyaq-namas* and other accounting and administrative texts help us to understand more precisely how this regime of translation operated. The *Nigar-nama-i-Munshi*, a seventeenth-century collection of administrative documents, accounting regulations, and sample correspondence, outlined the translational rules that supported Mughal revenue accounting. According to this text, new rules set out by the Emperor Aurangzeb in his famous *farman* (royal order) of 1665 required that for purposes of reporting (*bar-amad*),<sup>86</sup> the *Diwan* should arrange to have the *patwari*'s papers (*kaghaz-i-kham*) from each village translated into Persian (*tarjum namudeh*).<sup>87</sup> In these translated documents, the *Diwan* was to ensure that the amounts deposited by each peasant household were clearly listed, along with the amounts that were taken by *amils*, *karoris*, and *zamindars*. The translated documents were also to list the amounts set aside for village expenses (*ikhrajat*), from which the *patwari*'s salary and other fees and levies were paid. The *Diwan* was then instructed to compare these amounts to those provided in the manual of rates and regulations (*dastur-ul-amal*) to ensure that local officials were not taking more than their prescribed share. If any were found to have been taking more, the *Diwan* was to send their

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<sup>85</sup> On the concept of a 'regime of translation', see Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On 'Japan' and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) as well as Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon, "Introduction: Addressing the Multitude of Foreigners, Echoing Foucault," in Sakai and Solomon, eds., *Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 1-35.

<sup>86</sup> The term "baramad" is defined by Steingass as expenditures or outgoings, as well as informing (more particularly of bribery). See Steingass, 168. In her translation of Aurangzeb's *farman*, Shireen Moosvi translated the term "baramad" as "auditing". See Shireen Moosvi, *People, Taxation, and Trade in Mughal India* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 183.

<sup>87</sup> There are various copies of this *farman*. I have used the one in Munshi Malikzadah, "Nigarnama-i-Munshi," 1850, British Library, Or. 1735, ff. 162-4. Shireen Moosvi's translation, taken from various copies, is in Moosvi, *People, Taxation, and Trade in Mughal India*, 177-184. This process is also described in the *Khulasa-t-ul Siyaq*, Add. Ms. 6588, "Khulasa-t-il-Siyaq."

names to the imperial court, and if necessary, dismiss them from service. There was further accounting to be done for dismissed officials: the *Diwan* was instructed to recover any misappropriated funds (*abwab-i-bazyafiti*) from those officials, so that they could obtain a certificate of ‘accounts cleared’ (*az muhasiba faragh*) from the imperial office (*kachery*).<sup>88</sup> These instructions show that a system of Hindavi-to-Persian translation stitched together petty village officials (*patwari*), higher-ranked local officials (*amils* and *karoris*), and provincial and imperial government revenue ministers (*diwans*) into a network of accountability. Through these acts of translation, the Mughal revenue system created a relationship of accountability between the locality and the center.

In addition to these bureaucratic innovations, did *siyaq* accounting also represent a “public commercial culture” as Bayly argued? *Siyaq* accounting was certainly used in early modern markets and commerce, and there are many examples of merchant accounts and transactions being recorded in *siyaq* notation.<sup>89</sup> But, the idea of a public culture implies, to some extent, a conceptual distinction between state and society, which does not come through in these texts in any significant way. In *siyaq-namas*, descriptions of social structure were restricted largely to agrarian relations which arose fundamentally from the emperor’s personal imperative to collect land revenue. It has sometimes been an ambiguous point in Mughal texts whether the emperor was theoretically the owner of all land, or merely entitled to its revenue.<sup>90</sup> The *Khulasa-t-ul Siyaq*, for instance, described the emperor as the “*nazim*” (governor or chief) of “*mulk-o-*

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<sup>88</sup> Malikzadah, “Nigarnama-i-Munshi,” 1850, BL, Or. 1735, ff. 162 and Moosvi, *People, Taxation, and Trade in Mughal India*, 183-4.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, the reference to the account books of a sea-faring merchant family in Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C.A. Bayly, “Portfolio capitalists and the political economy of early modern India,” in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 25, no. 4 (1988), 410. There are also various early modern manuscripts which show transactions or costs of the manuscript itself in *siyaq*. See, for instance, Anonymous, “Kitab-i-Haqiqat-i Chihrah-i Raudah-i Muqaddasah-Mutahharah,” n.d, Royal Asiatic Society, Codrington/Reade No. 175 and various other similar manuscripts in that series.

<sup>90</sup> For more on this debate, see Irfan Habib, “Forms of Class Struggle in Mughal India,” in *Essays in India History: Towards a Marxist Perspective* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 237-8.

*mal*” (land and wealth/revenue), a term that does not necessarily imply ownership, but does suggest the emperor’s dominion over the wealth of the land.<sup>91</sup> It was this dominion that formed the basis of agrarian relations. As such, there was a very limited conception of ‘society’ beyond the emperor’s personal domain. This becomes more evident when we look for instances in the text where the writer invoked any conception of the social. The term “*mu‘asharat*” is a useful example in this respect. The term, which as I will discuss in later chapters, came to mean ‘society’ in nineteenth century Indo-Persian texts, appeared once in the *Khulasa-t-ul Siyaq* in the context of the duties of the provincial *amin* (judge or arbitrator). Specifically, the text mentioned that the *amin*, appointed by the emperor, should carry out his duties of auditing revenue accounts with such skill and integrity that peasants (*ra‘aya*) are a happy and agreeable society (*mu‘asharat khush-o-rizamand*).<sup>92</sup> In other words, this conception of the social is within the ambit of agrarian relations stemming from the person of the emperor.

In *siyaq-namas*, then, it seems that the abstract household of the Nasirean system is reflected in the particular household of the emperor. All discussions of wealth and the production of wealth are linked to the emperor’s household. In the *Khulasa-t-ul Siyaq*, for instance, following the description of revenue collection, the next section was devoted to the responsibilities of the *khan-i-saman*, or the chief officer in charge of the emperor’s household. One gets the sense from this section that the emperor’s household was conceived as a bounded economic space with specialized departments (*karkhanas*), each responsible for maintaining different kinds of wealth and provisions. The section described how to account for royal possessions such as jewellery and weapons, and explained how different types of commodities

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<sup>91</sup> “*mal*” means wealth, but was also the official term for land revenue. Sen, “Khulasa-t-il-Siyaq,” Add. Ms. 6588, ff. 64.

<sup>92</sup> Sen, “Khulasa-t-il-Siyaq,” Add. Ms. 6588, ff. 73b. Though “*mu‘asharat*” came to mean ‘society’ in the modern sense in the nineteenth century, its early modern connotations are of ‘society’ as being in the company of others.

and money (*naqd-o-jins*) were to be recorded. In other *siyaq-namas*, too, considerable portions are devoted to cataloguing the wealth of the emperor's household. The *Siyaq-nama* (1694), for instance, explained how to record transactions for the purchase of items for courtly consumption, including tents, jewels, scents and perfumes, gold and silver, and fine cloth.<sup>93</sup> In essence, just as the household was the primary unit of analysis in Nasirean economic thought, so was the emperor's household the primary unit of analysis in *siyaq-namas*. Thus, rather than exemplifying a 'public' culture, *siyaq* accounting advanced an understanding of society in which the 'economic' was located entirely within the household.

### **Finding Balance and Order in *Siyaq* Accounting**

The previous section discussed how, and in what context, *siyaq* accounting came to be adopted by the Mughal state, but it did not explain *why* it was adopted. What was it about *siyaq* notation specifically that was appealing to Mughal rulers? To some extent, the answer lies in the history of Mughal engagements with Persian as well as in the Nasirean concept of balance and its importance in maintaining accountability in the household. Muzaffar Alam has argued that the Mughals adopted Persian due to a number of factors, including Akbar's desire to compete with and emulate the Iranian Shah, as well as to counter the influence of Turkic-Chaghtai nobles in his own administration. More importantly, he argued, Persian was particularly well-suited to meeting the political and ideological needs of Akbar's regime. According to Alam, the "non-sectarian and liberal" quality of Persian made it ideal for governing a large and diverse empire. As he put it, the "culture and ethos of the language" matched the Mughal vision of empire.<sup>94</sup> Somewhat along these lines, I want to suggest that the formal features of *siyaq* notation were

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<sup>93</sup> Ananda Ram, *Siyaq-nama* (Lucknow: Navak Kishor Press, 1879), section 1. This is a lithograph of the *Siyaq-nama* text, which was originally composed in 1694. I have not seen a manuscript copy of this text.

<sup>94</sup> Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," 348.

also well-suited to Mughal ideas of governance, at least to the extent that these ideas were reflected in the Nasirean system. *Siyaq* appealed to a context which elevated the values of balance, equilibrium, and order. I will, therefore, argue in this section that the lettering and techniques of *siyaq* were themselves in harmony with Nasirean ethics.

First, *siyaq* letters suggested a quality of being well-ordered and less vulnerable to corruption. As we saw in the first section, among the persistent anxieties of the Nasirean ruler were disorder (*ikhtilal*) and corruption (*fisad*). *Siyaq* letters appeared to offer a bulwark against these destabilizing vices, at least when it came to the recording of revenue. In the *siyaq* system, each number is represented by an abbreviated form or symbol of the Arabic word for that number. Higher numbers are formed by combining the sums of different symbols, rather than simply putting numerals together. For instance, to write 79 in *siyaq*, one would form the symbol for the word seventy and the symbol for the word nine (as opposed to writing 7 and 9 together). Adding to this complexity is the fact that symbols do not have a fixed shape, and often take on minor changes when they appear in different combinations. As such, each number forms an entirely unique logogram (figure 1 below shows a table of *siyaq* symbols as it appeared in the *Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq*).<sup>95</sup> The uniqueness of these figures makes it more difficult to alter a number once written, or at least makes an alteration more conspicuous. Such was the explanation offered by a nineteenth century scholar of *siyaq*, who argued that Mughal rulers adopted *siyaq* precisely because it was less susceptible to mistakes and number-tampering. In other number systems, he argued, merely adding a numeral to the end of a number changed it entirely. This potential for mistake or alteration was not available in *siyaq*.<sup>96</sup> For example, when numbers were written in modern Arabic-Indic numerals, a figure of one hundred thousand could be changed to one

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<sup>95</sup> For more on the features of *siyaq*, see Spooner and Hanaway,” 429-47.

<sup>96</sup> Bahadur, Aziz Jang, *Siyaq-i-Deccan* (Hyderabad, 1894), 8.

million simply by adding a zero at the end. Such a thing would not be possible in *siyaq* notation since the symbols for one hundred thousand and one million would be completely different.

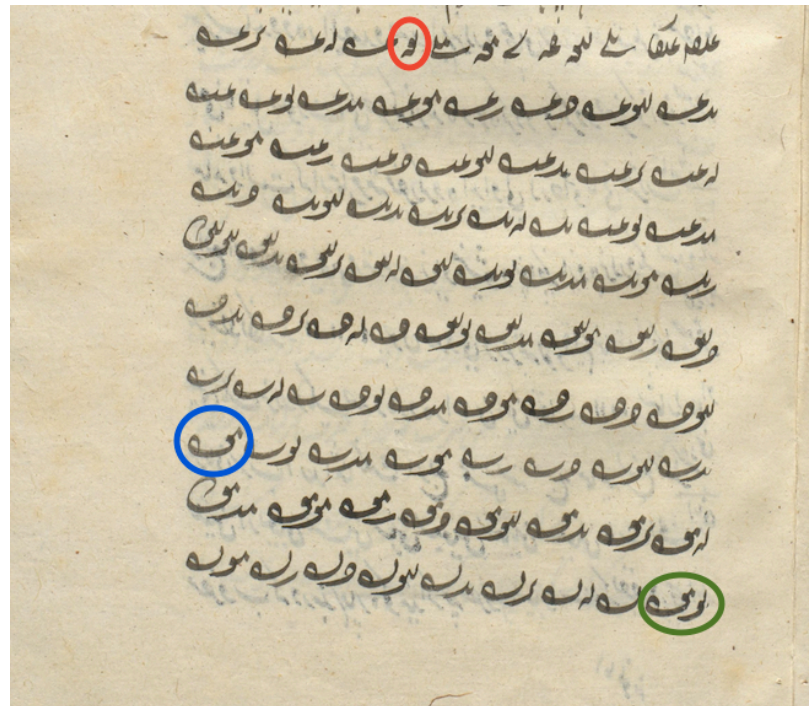


Figure 1: A table of *siyaq* symbols. The image shows *siyaq* symbols from 1 through 87. Symbols are read right to left. The symbol for 79 is circled in green (on the last row). Notice that it is made up of two symbols. From right to left, the first is the symbol for 9 (circled in red, in the first row) and the second is the symbol for 70 (circled in blue). From Add. Ms. 6588, “*Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq*,” ff. 67a.

It is difficult to say how common or widespread concerns about document tampering were, but references to fraudulent revenue figures can be found in a number of sources.<sup>97</sup> Revenue sources also suggest that corruption and collusion between officials in relation to accounting documents was a persistent concern. Todar Mal’s revenue regulations of 1582-3 explained that, in the previous accounting system, two clerks (*karkun* or *khas-nawis*) were assigned to each village, and they frequently colluded with village grandees (*kalantaran*) to inflate revenue assessments. In his recommendations, Todar Mal proposed replacing these two

<sup>97</sup> See, for instance, the sources mentioned in W.H. Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1929] 2011), 105-6.

clerks with one ‘upright’ writer, which he argued would also reduce village expenses (*ikhrajat*).<sup>98</sup> Likewise, Aurungzeb’s revenue *farman* of 1665 ordered that *chaudhuris* and *amils* (higher-ranking village officials) were not allowed to meet the provincial *diwan* in private, and were instead instructed to arrange meetings only in the *diwani* (*diwan*’s office).<sup>99</sup> This was presumably to ensure that the *diwan*, who had oversight of collections and revenue papers, did not collude with village officials to report false or fraudulent figures. It is possible to see the introduction of *siyaq* as part of this same set of initiatives to ensure greater accountability. Revenue accounting depended on the integrity of accounting documents, and *siyaq* letters seemingly offered some protection against tampering and corruption.

Also reflected in *siyaq* accounting were Nasirean ideas of balance and equilibrium. In modern accounting parlance, it is commonplace to speak of the act of ‘balancing books’. The term refers to certain accounting methods of reconciling income and expenditures, or debts and assets, but it also points to an ideal of fiscal management. ‘Balanced books’ implies a well-ordered, prudent, and fiscally responsible state of financial affairs. The concept, in fact, has a long and connected genealogy across the early modern world, which traces back to Aristotelian and medieval understandings of ‘balance’. In the case of early modern Europe, for instance, Andrea Finkelstein has argued that ideas of ‘balance’ in medieval medical philosophy and in Aristotelian theory were crucial to the development of accounting instruments like the balance sheet as well as mercantilist ideas like ‘balance of trade’.<sup>100</sup> Nasirean philosophy, which shared this Aristotelian and medieval heritage, also developed ideas of balance and equilibrium

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<sup>98</sup> Moosvi, “Todar Mal’s Original Memorandum,” 242. Moosvi has translated “kalantaran” as “the big ones”.

<sup>99</sup> Malikzadah, “Nigarnama-i-Munshi,” 1850, BL., Or. 1735, ff. 162 and translation in Moosvi, *People, Taxation, and Trade in Mughal India*, 180.

<sup>100</sup> Andrea Finkelstein, *Harmony and the Balance: An Intellectual History of Seventeenth-Century English Economic Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 171-6. For an intellectual history of ‘balance’ in medieval European thought, and its influence on political and economic ideas, see Joel Kaye, *A History of Balance, 1250-1375: The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and its Impact on Thought* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).



(*itidal*).<sup>101</sup> We saw earlier that “*itidal*” was a key part of the governing ethos of the Nasirean household, and rulers were urged to create equilibrium between the needs and responsibilities of different members of the household. These ideas came to be reflected in Mughal accounting as well, particularly in the way that *siyaq* accounts were written and tabulated. In *siyaq* account statements, revenue figures were juxtaposed with expenses and fees to create a snapshot of revenue collections much like the balance sheet did in the early modern European and English context.

A visual example of such a statement will help to clarify the point. Shown below in figure 2 is a small excerpt from a statement of receipts and disbursements from a seventeenth century *patwari*’s (clerk) account, which was included in the *Khulasa-t-ul Siyaq* as a model of how to record revenue:

جمع و خرج مال و جهات و بیروجهات برکات پور احمد خاں فیض علی مراد	لے ملا
لے ملا	لے ملا
لے ملا	لے ملا
لے ملا	لے ملا

Figure 2: A statement of *siyaq* accounts. Sen, “*Khulasa-t-ul-Siyaq*,” Add. Ms. 6588, ff. 83a.

<sup>101</sup> On the Aristotelian influences on Tusi, see Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 65-6. On the influence of Greek thought on Mughal figures more generally, especially in relation to medical ideas, see Seema Alavi, *Islam and Healing: Loss and Recovery of an Indo-Muslim Medical Tradition, 1600-1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33.

Reading from the top, we find that this is a statement of assessed revenue (*jama* ' ) and expenditures (*kharaj*), relating to land revenue (*mal-o-jihat*) and taxes (*sair-o-jihat*) for the district of Kiratpur in the province of Punjab for the winter crop (*fasl rabi*). The first figure indicates in *siyaq* notation that the total assessed revenue was Rs. 824, 10 *paise*. The next line indicates that the balance or remainder (*baqaya*) is Rs. 29.<sup>102</sup> The third line then states that the actual collections (*hal*) were Rs. 795, 10 *paise*. Finally, the fourth line shows an amount of Rs. 283, and it represents the taxes (*tumar*) or expenses that were incurred in collecting the revenue. The arrangement of this document is such that if one subtracts the actual collection amount from the assessed revenue amount, the remainder amount of Rs. 29 is reached. The statement is, therefore, balanced: the remainder amount is reconciled with the collection, and the figures presented are internally consistent with reference to other figures in the document.

This statement of receipts and disbursements is merely one among countless such statements to be found in *siyaq-namas* and in the Mughal revenue archive more generally, which show how the concept of 'balance' was reflected in accounting documents. To be sure, this statement did not become quite as standardized as an accounting instrument as the balance sheet and double-entry book-keeping did in early modern Europe, and there are many variations in style and arrangement across these statements. But, the general principle of 'balance' – the attempt to harmonize different streams of money and to set inflows against outflows – can be seen in them. Together, these statements, and the lettering that constitutes them, show that there was a close conceptual fit between ideas of wealth and ideas of how to record wealth (or, to put it another way, a close fit between economic thought and accounting). Indeed, one might conclude

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<sup>102</sup> "Baqaya" could be translated in a number of ways, including remainder, balance, arrears, or balance of revenue. See Steingass, 193.

that the reason why *siyaq* accounting became widespread so quickly was because it reflected and embodied an understanding of wealth that was already prevalent. In short, the Mughal state adopted *siyaq* because it was a way to put into practice the ideals of balance and order that were prescribed by *akhlaqi* philosophy.

### ***Siyaq-namas* in British India and the Hindustani Regime of Translation**

Throughout the eighteenth century, the use of *siyaq* accounting gradually expanded to other states in South Asia. In Hyderabad, *siyaq* accounting was introduced possibly by the Nizam-ul-Mulk, Asaf Jah I (r. 1724-748) in the early-eighteenth century. *Siyaq* in Hyderabad eventually developed into a distinctive style known as “Deccani *siyaq*”, which differed slightly from Mughal north Indian *siyaq*.<sup>103</sup> In Mysore, *siyaq* was introduced by Tipu Sultan (r. 1782-1799) in the 1790s, and many account books from this period show lists of Tipu’s courtly and military possessions, and accounts of military expenditure tabulated in *siyaq* notation.<sup>104</sup> *Siyaq* accounting was also in use in the Afghan Empire, although the exact dates of its origins there are unclear. The circulation of *siyaq* to these different regional states likely may have been facilitated by mobile networks of scribes and clerks who sought employment in Mughal successor states,<sup>105</sup> but it also speaks to the applicability of *siyaq* to the changing political economies of South Asian states in the eighteenth century.

Beginning in the late-eighteenth century, the East India Company state also began to take an interest in translating and understanding *siyaq* texts. The first major English work to examine

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<sup>103</sup> Bahadur, Aziz Jang, *Siyaq-i-Deccan* (Hyderabad, 1894), 3.

<sup>104</sup> See, for instance, the Anonymous, “Hukm-namah-i Mir Khazini-i Kachahri,” 1224 Mauludi, Royal Asiatic Society, Codrington/Reade No. 168 and Anonymous, “A Book of Accounts,” 1223 Mauludi, Royal Asiatic Society, Codrington/Reade No. 172.

<sup>105</sup> An example of this kind of mobility is described by Kumkum Chatterjee for the case of Bengal, where scribes from north India were recruited. See Chatterjee, *The Culture of History in Early Modern India: Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

*siyaq* accounting was Francis Gladwin's *A Compendious System of Bengal Revenue Accounts* (1794). Gladwin, an East India Company officer and linguist who eventually became a professor of Persian at the Company's college at Fort William, began by providing a very brief history of Mughal accounting. His account essentially reproduced the narrative, found in the *Khulasa-t-ul Siyaq* and in other sources, that revenue accounts in India had historically been kept in Hindi by Hindu scribes until the arrival of Muslim rulers who changed the language of administration to Persian.<sup>106</sup> In fact, so similar is Gladwin's account to that of the *Khulasa-t-ul Siyaq* that it may well have been a synopsis or an indirect translation. Following this history, Gladwin included tables of *siyaq* notation, multiplication tables, names and quantities of weights and measures, monetary denominations, and names of Arabic and Persian months.<sup>107</sup> Finally, he included a collection of revenue accounts in *siyaq* notation, and provided a corresponding English translation of each of them. The examples that Gladwin included were mostly *pargana* or *mofussil* level revenue accounts, and many of them were statements of receipts and disbursements (similar to the kind that appears in Figure 2 above). Gladwin's English translations hewed close to the style and arrangement of the *siyaq* statements, laying out the translated numbers in a similar fashion and position as they appeared in the original statements. Gladwin's translations were, therefore, not just intended to replicate the content of *siyaq* statements (that is, the actual revenue figures presented in them), but also the logic by which they were arranged and written.

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<sup>106</sup> Francis Gladwin, *A Compendious System of Bengal Revenue Accounts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Calcutta, 1796). Accessed online at Eighteenth Century Collections Online, <http://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online>.

<sup>107</sup> Gladwin, 1-18.

It is tempting to see these efforts to render *siyaq* into English as part of what Bernard Cohn called the British ‘command of language’.<sup>108</sup> Cohn’s influential work argued that Indians and the English occupied radically different epistemological worlds: the former lived in a “world of substances,” while the latter lived in a “world of signs”. As a result, the British invasion of India also entailed an epistemological invasion, whereby Indian forms of knowledge were converted into “European objects”.<sup>109</sup> Cohn pointed, in particular, to the role of translation and codification projects as examples of this colonization of Indian knowledge. Gladwin was, in fact, part of the cohort of Orientalist scholars and officers that Cohn described, and his efforts to translate *siyaq* could ostensibly be read in the same way. But, I think this argument overlooks the long history of Mughal translation, some of which I have tried to outline in this chapter. As the history of the Persian regime of translation shows, *siyaq* in India always relied on translation to be legible to different levels of the Mughal revenue machinery. Indeed, translation was not an incidental, but a constitutive part of Mughal accounting. Translating *siyaq* into English, therefore, did not alter its epistemological status any more than the translation of the *patwari*’s papers by the Mughal *diwan* rendered them epistemologically alien. Moreover, the similarities between the *siyaq* revenue statement and the English balance sheet further challenge the notion that they occupied radically dissimilar epistemological worlds. The connected histories of these accounting instruments suggest that there were some common points of reference in the way that both conceptualized and recorded wealth. To put it another way, for Gladwin it may not have been so unfamiliar after all to see a revenue statement organized in terms of incoming monies, outgoing monies, and balances remaining.

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<sup>108</sup> Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>109</sup> Cohn, 18-21.

This is not to say, however, that there was uninterrupted continuity or that *siyaq* accounting remained unchanged under British rule. On the contrary, by the early nineteenth century, a number of factors and changes in colonial governance converged to transform the practice of *siyaq* accounting, eventually leading to its decline under a new regime of translation. First, in the 1830s, the colonial government began to move away from their patronage of Persian and Sanskrit towards vernacular languages (a move I will describe in more detail in the next chapter in the context of colonial educational restructuring). The crucial moment in this shift in north India was the series of legislations in 1835, and in 1837, that designated Hindustani (Urdu) the official language of administration.<sup>110</sup> This had a significant impact on accounting and revenue collection, as revenue papers were now ordered to be maintained in Hindustani, rather than in Persian. As one Company officer stated, “All the oral communications of the revenue officials... are in the vernacular dialect. It is obviously desirable that all the records and the written communication should be in the same language.”<sup>111</sup> As a result of this shift, processes of revenue settlement and adjudication of revenue cases required that older Persian revenue records be translated into Hindustani. This emerging Hindustani regime of translation had the effect of re-structuring the Indo-Persian bureaucratic class of scribes and *munshis* (clerks). New skills, particularly English and Hindustani language skills, became important, and new vernacular institutions, such as schools and colleges, were established to train a new scribal class. The newly-revived Delhi College, which I will discuss in greater detail in another chapter, became just such an institution with a mandate of training Hindustani and English-speaking *munshis* (clerks).

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<sup>110</sup> On the formation of colonial language policy, see Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 27-61.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Dharma Bhanu, *The Province of Agra: Its History and Administration* (New Delhi: Concept, 1979), 125.

A second major shift in the 1830s was the transformation of revenue assessment and settlement. Earlier in the century, revenue officials had begun to apply the principles of political economy, drawn particularly from the work of David Ricardo and James Mill, to change how land revenue was assessed and calculated.<sup>112</sup> In the Northwestern Provinces, these policies led to the famous Regulation VII of 1822 and Regulation IX of 1833, both of which made rent the basis of a fixed revenue assessment.<sup>113</sup> Crucially, in north India, settlements were made directly with peasants, or with entire villages or groups of villages. This had the effect of decreasing the power of higher-ranking village figures like the *chaudhuri* and the *muqaddam*, who had previously exercised greater control over revenue collection. Moreover, under this new assessment system, calculating rent required greater reliance on historical statistics, such as average yields on different types of soils, previous revenue rates, and so on. As a result, lower-ranking intermediaries who were well-versed in the use of village papers, such as *patwaris* (village accountants), found greater demand for their services, while other layers of the Mughal revenue bureaucracy, such as *amils* and *karoris*, became increasingly redundant in the new regime.<sup>114</sup> In many places, *patwaris* and other village officials became directly accountable to British district collectors, whereas previously they might have been overseen by a higher-ranked village official. In other words, changes in revenue assessment also re-structured the lines of accountability.

Taken together, these changes had a significant effect on the practice of *siyaq* accounting. With the rise of Hindustani (Urdu), the use of *siyaq* letters in revenue accounting gradually declined, although they were never completely eliminated. Lower-level village accounts in some

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<sup>112</sup> For the intellectual underpinnings of this new system see Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), particularly chapter 2 on how Ricardo's "rent doctrine" was used to shape revenue regulations.

<sup>113</sup> 'Economic rent' is defined as the difference between the maximum yield of a piece of land and the maximum yield of the next best available free land. See Stokes, 88.

<sup>114</sup> Hayden Bellenoit, "Between *Qanungos* and Clerks: the Cultural and Service Worlds of Hindustan's Pensmen, c. 1750-1850," in *Modern Asian Studies* 48, 4 (2014): 872-910. Bellenoit argues that Kayastha *qanungos* and *patwaris* benefitted from the rise of British rule due to their training and reputation as "paper managers".

places, and accounts of some private estates, continued to be kept in *siyaq* notation, and a number of *siyaq* textbooks, both in English and in Urdu, were published in the late-nineteenth century.<sup>115</sup> Some Urdu textbooks and dictionaries published *siyaq* tables even in the twentieth century.<sup>116</sup> This was, in large part, due to the fact that, even after the shift to Hindustani, knowledge of *siyaq* remained necessary to read older revenue records. Elsewhere, a nineteenth century scholar estimated that the official use of *siyaq* in Hyderabad ended more or less after the reign of Afzal-ud-Daula, Asaf Jah V (r. 1857-1869), and he predicted that by the end of his century, *siyaq* would depart (*rukhsat*) completely, just as Persian had departed following the arrival of Urdu.<sup>117</sup> To some extent, he was right. By the early twentieth century, *siyaq* numerals could only be found in Hyderabad on the Hyderabad state bank notes, which of course were also eventually replaced when the state acceded to postcolonial India.

Finally, in addition to *siyaq* letters, the *siyaq-nama* as a genre of writing also underwent significant changes in the nineteenth century. The post-1830s period saw the publication of a number of Urdu texts that retained some of the usual content of a *siyaq-nama*, but were slightly narrower in scope than the older Persian *siyaq-namas*. In Urdu, many of these came under the general title of *Hisab-nama* (Book of Arithmetic or Accounts). Like the old *siyaq-namas*, these texts often included tables of *siyaq* notation (with Urdu equivalents), as well as information relating to weights and measures, currency denominations, and names of months, and land measures.<sup>118</sup> However, unlike *siyaq-namas*, what tended to be missing from these texts were the historical accounts of the rise of accounting, or the lengthy descriptions of the duties of different

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<sup>115</sup> English works such as Edward Palmer, *Oriental Penmanship: Specimens of Persian Handwriting* (London: W.H. Allen, and Co, 1886) included *siyaq* tables as part of a corpus of Persian writing samples. Certain Urdu textbooks published in the twentieth century

<sup>116</sup> See, for instance, Muhazzab Lukhnavi, *Muhazzab-al-lughat* (Lucknow: Anjuman-i-Muhafiz-I Urdu, 1958).

<sup>117</sup> Bahadur, Aziz Jang, *Siyaq-i-Deccan* (Hyderabad, 1894), 3.

<sup>118</sup> See, for instance, Mirza Rajab Ali Baig, “Badi al-Hisab,” 1849, Punjab University Library, Shirani Collection, Ms. 3697/670/4.



revenue officers, such as the kind one finds in a text like the *Khulasa-t-ul Siyaq*. This change in scope was perhaps a result of the reconfigured role of a *munshi* (clerk) in the post-1830s politics of knowledge. Seventeenth-century Mughal *munshis* were expected to have diverse, well-rounded knowledge in many different subjects, and this diversity was reflected in their writings. For a Mughal Persian *munshi* like Indar Sen, a text on accounting was also an opportunity to hold forth on history or ethics. In contrast, the nineteenth-century Hindustani-English *munshi* in a post-Persianate world lost some of this well-roundedness, as employment opportunities in Company service became more narrowly focused on tasks of translation or record-keeping. The *siyaq-nama* pared down as a utilitarian book of arithmetic under the label *hisab-nama* is perhaps a symbol of this change. There was, thus, some continuity and much change for *siyaq*, both as a branch of knowledge and as a genre of writing, as it moved from the Mughal to the British empires.

### **Conclusion: From Household Science to a Science of Society**

The motivation behind this chapter was to search for precursors to political economy, if any, in early modern Indo-Persian traditions. Specifically, the chapter asked: where, and in what context, can we see the use of economic language in Indo-Persian texts before the translation of English political economy into Urdu in the nineteenth century? One answer to this question lay in the rich, but under-explored history of the *siyaq-nama*. Arising out of the Persianization of the Mughal bureaucracy in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the concurrent development of Mughal accounting, *siyaq-namas* had much to say about ideas of wealth and wealth-management in early modern India. One of the main insights gleaned from these texts is that the emperor's household was central to early modern ideas of wealth and society. In

particular, *siyaq-namas* described a social structure in which relations of production (i.e. agrarian relations) were derived from the emperor and his personal entitlement to the revenue of the land. As such, all wealth was theoretically a part of the royal household. This view of wealth was supported by the *Akhlaq* (ethics) tradition of texts, best exemplified by the widely-circulating *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, in which the discussion of wealth and wealth production was linked to the sphere of household management. Together, these texts suggested that the conceptual and discursive location of the economic in early modern Indo-Persian thought was the household. Both Nasirean economics and *siyaq* accounting are, therefore, best understood as household sciences that were essentially intended to be guides for early modern rulers on how to manage and administer their personal domains.

This insight helps to clarify the distinction between political economy and the early modern discourses of wealth studied in this chapter. As we will see in later chapters, Urdu political economy shared many discursive connections with *siyaq-namas* and with *Akhlaq* literature, and it too was concerned with questions of wealth and wealth production. However, the crucial difference was that in political economy these questions were located, not in the household, but in the realm of society. Political economy took for its object social relations of production, rather than familial or feudal relations of production. The conceptual novelty of political economy was, therefore, in bringing questions of wealth out of the realm of the household and into society. In fact, as suggested earlier, the Urdu word for society (*mu'asharat*) acquired that meaning roughly around the same time as the rise of Urdu political economy in the mid-nineteenth century. So, the formation of a conception of the 'social' in Urdu thought was concurrent with, and perhaps a prerequisite to, the rise of Urdu political economy.

Building on this, the chapters that follow will trace the emergence of political economy's 'science of society' in Urdu thought in the nineteenth century. I will argue that Urdu political economy only came about once there was a conception of the 'social' as an independent domain of human organization that shaped the nature of political and economic systems. As chapter three will show, this was reflected in the work of thinkers like Syed Ahmad Khan who inquired into the ancient villages of India, and made comparisons with other village systems, to argue for the distinctiveness of Indian social and economic arrangements. In doing so, Syed Ahmad Khan was undertaking a similar intellectual project as thinkers like Henry Maine and John Stuart Mill were doing in Britain.<sup>119</sup> It is not surprising then that he turned to their work: he read Maine, and commissioned a translation of Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, published in Urdu in 1869.<sup>120</sup> So, while political economy itself circulated in India via the translation of English texts, the larger project of conceptualizing society was carried out in Britain and India contemporaneously.

A second major point the following chapters will focus on is that Urdu political economy relied on early modern Indo-Persian concepts and languages. Some of the key terms that were encountered in this chapter that appeared in *siyaq-namas* and in *Akhlaq* texts – terms such as *ma'ishat* (economy), *kifayat* (thrift or prudence), *iqtisad* (economics), and even *mu'asharat* (society) – were frequently also found in Urdu political economy texts. This is not to say that political economy was conceptually similar to early modern ideas of wealth. Instead, the argument here will be that these terms were transformed once they were plucked from the context of the household and re-situated into a conception of the social. Ultimately, the argument

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<sup>119</sup> On Maine and the rise of social theory, see Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>120</sup> Pundit Dhurm Narayan, *Rudiments of Political Economy, compiled from the well-known work of John Stuart Mill* (Aligarh, 1869). I will discuss this work, and the circumstances of its translation, in greater detail in Chapter 3.

this dissertation will make is that political economy in India refashioned certain Indo-Persian concepts into a modern science of society. The present chapter, thus, advances this argument by showing the uses and contexts of these Indo-Persian concepts before political economy. The next chapter turns to the rise of Urdu political economy in the early nineteenth century.

## Chapter 2

‘European knowledge in Indian tongues’:

### Delhi College and the Birth of Urdu Political Economy

We can hardly avoid the conclusion that Urdu should be the medium of imparting a knowledge of the sciences to the pupils of our Oriental Madrassas. Let the students of those institutions learn the Elements of Modern European Science in their Vernacular Language, and as they become more familiar with the learned languages they are studying, they will look into it for its scientific treasures if it has any.

--- Felix Boutros, Minute on Taking Charge at Delhi (1842)<sup>121</sup>

### Introduction

In 1844, Munshi Wazeer Ali, senior scholar at Delhi College, translated James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy* (1821) into Urdu, making it one of the earliest non-European translations of Mill’s work anywhere in the world. In a prefatory note in English, Wazeer Ali informed readers that the work was “not altogether a literal translation” as he had found it necessary to change many things to make them “intelligible to the native reader.” Wazeer Ali explained that he felt compelled to make changes because Mill’s ideas were so complex and philosophically abstruse that he feared “an attempt to translate them into Urdu in their original state would have impaired the utility of the translation.” Since he intended for his translation to be used as an elementary text, he anticipated that his Urdu readers would likely have “no previous knowledge whatever of Political Economy.”<sup>122</sup> He, therefore, thought it crucial to adapt Mill to the particular needs of his Indian readers.

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<sup>121</sup> *General Report of the late General Committee of Public Instruction, for 1840-41 and 1841-42* (Calcutta: William Rushton and Co., 1842), cxix. Part of British Library, IOR/V/24/948 series.

<sup>122</sup> Munshi Wazeer Ali, introduction to James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, trans. Wazeer Ali (Delhi, 1844), 1.

Wazeer Ali's comments offer a glimpse into the debates that surrounded the enterprise of translation at Delhi College in the early nineteenth century. In the 1830s and 1840s, as the College became a vibrant center of translation activity, producing Urdu versions of works such as Mill's *Political Economy*, Euclid's *Elements*, and Oliver Goldsmith's *History of England*, scholars began to grapple with theoretical and practical questions about translation: was European knowledge readily translatable to Indian contexts, or did it need to be modified for Indian readers? Should a text be translated word-for-word, or should translators focus on conveying the underlying meaning in their own words? Were Indian languages capacious enough to accommodate new concepts or would new terms have to be invented or imported from English? The answers they produced to these questions were derived not only from their own epistemological assumptions and practices of reading, but also from the political and social contexts in which they operated. As the colonial state gradually consolidated its rule across North India, it also began to extend its reach into Indian society by sponsoring vernacular languages and public instruction, though deep disagreements and anxieties persisted among colonial officials about the nature and extent of these interventions.<sup>123</sup> More importantly, this period saw the growth of a crowded education market populated with a wide range of knowledge brokers – older communities of Indian scribes, *maulvis*, and *pandits*; a new generation of Indian students, translators, and their local patrons; and, official and non-official British writers, book-sellers, and educationists – all jostling for opportunities, influence, and patronage in the new political and educational administration of North Indian society. This chapter explores the interactions between the colonial state and these different levels of society to understand the

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<sup>123</sup> For an overview of the consolidation of British power in North India, see C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), particularly chapter 4.

dynamics which produced a space for translation at Delhi College, focusing in particular on the collaborations behind the earliest translations of political economy in Urdu.

In thinking about translation, I draw once again on Naoki Sakai's argument about how translational practice restructures social relations. The previous chapter showed how the Mughal regime of translation re-oriented the relationships between different ranks and classes of revenue officers, and in doing so, produced different forms of accountability. Here, I apply this concept to the institutional culture at Delhi College to think about how translation influenced the relationships between Indian students, translators, and British officials. Specifically, I argue that the regime of translation that emerged at Delhi College in the 1830s and 1840s structured the relationship between *maulvis* and *pandits*,<sup>124</sup> Indian students, and British officials. I show that the processes of translation developed at the College challenged the authority of *maulvis* and *pandits* to act as mediators of knowledge, and instead encouraged a shift towards individual student learning. This shift represented a significant re-orientation of early-colonial instructional and translational models (such as at Benares College or at Fort William College in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, for instance), in which *maulvis* and *pandits* had greater interpretive authority over texts.<sup>125</sup> In challenging this authority, the Delhi model also moved away from pedagogical methods that privileged embodied learning, such as recitation and memory work. Instead, this new regime of translation ushered in modes of learning that emphasized reading and writing over memorizing, and it placed greater emphasis on

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<sup>124</sup> In colonial India, a *maulvi* was a learned scholar, usually trained in Islamic textual traditions, while a *pandit* was a scholar trained in Hindu and Sanskrit textual traditions.

<sup>125</sup> On how the colonial state drew upon the authority of *pandits* at Benares College, see Michael Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770-1880* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). On the importance of *munshis* and *maulvis* to the educational system at Fort William College, see Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College at Fort William* (New Delhi: Orion Publications, 1978), though Das argues that Indian *munshis* were always subordinate to British officials and were paid far less. A similar point is made by Michael Fisher in "Persian Professor in Britain: Mirza Muhammad Ibrahim at the East India Company's College, 1826-44," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 21, no. 1 and 2 (2001): 24-32.

understanding a text through individual reflection rather than studying under an established teacher. These changes had a significant impact on the social structure of colonial educational institutions.

My second concern in this chapter is to think specifically about the origins of Urdu political economy at the moment of its first articulation. Drawing once again on Sakai's notion that translation is an attempt to create commensurability, I am interested in thinking about how Urdu translators negotiated the meaning of political economy in their attempts to relate it to Indian intellectual traditions. What kinds of languages, metaphors, and conceptual tools might have they drawn upon to articulate the arguments of English political economy in Urdu? To answer questions such as these, I try to re-construct the mental universe of translators like Wazeer Ali. Tracing their educational training, I inquire into the kinds of texts they read and the sources of knowledge they drew upon. Ultimately, I argue that Urdu translators related political economy to older Indo-Persian genres of knowledge, which were a central part of their training. In a number of cases, this meant drawing on *akhlaq* (ethics) texts to explain political economy. My focus here is, thus, on how political economy became a speech-act in Urdu, rather than on the emergence of political economy as a concept. While a different historical narrative might explain what socio-historical conditions allowed political economy to emerge as an ideological formation, my argument here focuses solely on how political economic ideas were expressed in Urdu.

I explore these arguments below in the following five sections. The first section examines the history of Delhi College, particularly in the context of colonial debates surrounding the dissemination of European knowledge and texts. I argue in this section that these debates were shaped both by British officials and a wide range of Indian knowledge brokers. The second



section then turns to the formation of the regime of translation at Delhi College. Here, I look at the activities of the College's Vernacular Translation Society, founded in 1843, and I argue that the specific rules of translation adopted by the Society re-structured the relationships between Indian teachers, students, and British officials. With this background in hand, the third section returns where the chapter began: Wazeer Ali's translation of Mill. I follow Wazeer Ali's career as a student and as a translator and speculate on the concepts and languages he harnessed for his translation. The fourth section looks at the other major translation of political economy that also emerged from Delhi College in this period, namely the American thinker and preacher Francis Wayland's *Elements of Political Economy* (1838). The fifth section takes a step back from the educational world of Delhi College and looks instead at other Urdu writing from this period, such as memoirs and travelogues. Picking up the thread introduced in the previous chapter about the rise of the 'social' in Indo-Persian writing, this section argues that travel writing and descriptions of other places became one of the ways in which Urdu writers conceptualized 'society' as a distinct category of analysis.

### **“The great business of the education of the people of India”: Knowledge and Public Instruction at Delhi College**

The history of Delhi College has been well-documented, and so I do not intend to narrate it here in great detail.<sup>126</sup> In this section, my aim is simply to place this history in the context of debates surrounding translation and the dissemination of Western texts and knowledge, and to show that these debates were influenced both by the colonial state and by changes in North Indian society.

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<sup>126</sup> The most recent scholarly work on Delhi College is Margrit Pernau's excellent edited volume *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education Before 1857* (New Delhi and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Pernau has also noted that “translation stood at the centre of the endeavours of the Delhi College” (3) and should be seen as the key to understanding its activities. In non-English scholarship, the two classic works on Delhi College are Malik Ram, *Qadim Dilli Kalij* (Delhi: Maktab-i-Jamia, 1975) and Maulvi Abdul Haq, *Marhum Dilli Kalij* (Karachi: Anjuman Taraqqi-i-Urdu, 1962).

What became known as Delhi College was founded in the eighteenth century as the Madrasa Ghazi al-Din by Nawab Ghazi al-Din II (1709-1752), the son of Hyderabad's ruler Nizam-ul-Mulk, Asaf Jah I (1671-1748).<sup>127</sup> Margrit Pernau has argued that, given the theological affiliations and networks of its founders, the madrasa's teaching was likely in the Chishti tradition, with an emphasis on the famous *dars-i Nizamiyya* curriculum.<sup>128</sup> Devised by scholars at the Firangi Mahal school in Lucknow in the eighteenth century, the curriculum put a greater emphasis on the study of the rational sciences (*maqulat*), such as philosophy (*hikmat*) and logic (*mantiq*), than on the transmitted sciences (*manqulat*), such as exegesis (*tafsir*) and prophetic tradition (*hadith*).<sup>129</sup> Although there was a great deal of variation in how this curriculum was taught in different places, one could reasonably expect that students at the Ghazi al-Din madrasa would have studied extensive Arabic and Persian under an established *maulvi*. For training in logic (*mantiq*), they might have studied a text such as the *Sharh-i Shamsiyya*, among others; in philosophy (*hikmat*), they might have been asked to read the *Sharh-i Hidayat al-Hikmah*; and, in mathematics (*riyaziyyat*), they likely would have studied the *Tahrir Uqlidis*, which was Nasir al-Din Tusi's translation of Euclid.<sup>130</sup> In other words, long before Ghazi al-Din Madrasa became Delhi College, the institution was producing students trained in science and philosophy.

In contrast, at the Madrasa Rahimiyya, situated at a short distance from the Ghazi al-Din madrasa's Ajmeri Gate location, the emphasis was more on the transmitted sciences (*manqulat*). Established by the father of Shah Wali Ullah (1703-62), the Rahimiyya curriculum privileged the

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<sup>127</sup> The exact date of foundation is disputed. Many colonial and Urdu sources state that the *madrasa* was founded in 1792, though as Pernau has noted, there are references to the *madrasa* in earlier eighteenth century sources. Pernau estimates that the *madrasa* was likely founded in the early eighteenth century. See Pernau, "Introduction," *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education Before 1857*, 4-5.

<sup>128</sup> Pernau, "Introduction," *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education Before 1857*, 6.

<sup>129</sup> On the *dars-e Nizamiyya* curriculum, see Francis Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (London: C. Hurst, 2001), 42-55 and Jamil Malik, *Islam in South Asia: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 198-200.

<sup>130</sup> Robinson, 49-50.

study of revelation and prophetic tradition.<sup>131</sup> Though rational sciences were also taught at the Madrasa Rahimiyya, they were seen as secondary to the study of the Quran, the *hadith*, and *tafsir*. It was only when students had gained mastery over these sources of religious authority that they turned to logic and philosophy.<sup>132</sup> Importantly, Wali Ullah and his followers believed in the dissemination of religious texts and ideas in vernacular languages. Wali Ullah himself translated the Quran into Persian in the eighteenth century, while his sons translated it into Urdu in the early nineteenth century.<sup>133</sup> These translations, along with a wide range of other religious texts and disputations by Rahimiyya scholars were published by Delhi's new lithographic presses in the early nineteenth century. There was, thus, a vibrant translational culture in Delhi's madrasas at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the differences between the Nizamiyya and the Rahimiyya curricula also meant that there was considerable debate about approaches to learning and knowledge. It was this educational and translational culture that the East India Company state tapped into when it began to expand public instruction in the city in the 1820s.

The East India Company had, of course, sponsored scholarly activity and educational institutions in India in the eighteenth century, but these projects acquired a new scale and commitment in the early nineteenth century.<sup>134</sup> In 1813, as part of the renewal of the Company's charter, the promotion of public education in India was enshrined in law. Specifically, section 43 of the 1813 Charter Act stipulated that an amount of 100,000 rupees would be set aside each year

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<sup>131</sup> On Shah Wali Ullah and Rahimiyya madrasa, see S.A.A. Rizvi, *Shah Wali Ullah and His Times* (Canberra: Marifat Publishing, 1980).

<sup>132</sup> Robinson, 50.

<sup>133</sup> Avril Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993), 66.

<sup>134</sup> On early British interventions in education, see David Kopf, *British Orientalism and Bengal Renaissance: the Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) and Bruce McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1966). For more on the 1813 Charter Act and its implications for educational policy, see Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir, eds, *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781-1843* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 5-7.

from the Company's surplus revenues for the "revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories of India."<sup>135</sup> As a number of scholars have noted, these proposals seemed to contain seemingly contradictory impulses: on the one hand, they called for the "revival" of Indian knowledge, while on the other hand, they proposed the "introduction" and "promotion" of European knowledge in India. These differences have been attributed to the so-called Anglicist-Orientalist controversy. In particular, it has been suggested that what determined the nature of colonial Indian education was a heated debate between 'Anglicists,' such as Charles Grant, William Bentinck, and T.B. Macaulay, who favored the introduction of English-language education, and Orientalists, such as Thomas Munro, John Malcolm, and Mountstuart Elphinstone, who favored the revival of classical Indian languages.<sup>136</sup> The 'Anglicist' versus 'Orientalist' framework certainly does explain a great deal of educational policy and debates at the high governmental level. But, as I want to suggest here, the development of colonial education at Delhi College was shaped more by local factors and influences, and less by debates among officials in Calcutta. In short, it was the madrasa milieu of Delhi and North Indian society and its interactions between patrons, students, colonial officials, and educationists that helped to shape public instruction in the city.

In 1824, following a survey of existing educational institutions in the North-western Provinces, the newly-formed General Committee of Public Instruction recommended the expansion of public instruction in Delhi and chose the Ghazi al-Din Madrasa as the site for its provision. A modest staff of four *maulvis*, five *munshis*, and one *pandit* were recruited to begin

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<sup>135</sup> East India Company Charter Act of 1813. 53 Geo. III, c. 155, s. 43.

<sup>136</sup> See, for instance, Zastoupil and Moir's introduction.

teaching.<sup>137</sup> Although initially intended as an institute of education in oriental languages, the College added an English class in 1828, which was later separated into a distinct institution in a set of buildings near the Kashmir Gate. Although both the oriental and the English branches shared the same administrative and governance structure, the different locations required them to operate almost as separate institutions. This was cause for some inconvenience and duplication of costs. Officials complained that the “great distance at which the two Colleges are situated” meant that “whenever Scientific or Law Lectures are given in the Vernacular... they can only be attended by the pupils of one or the other college” or, instead, lectures had to be “reduced one-half by the necessity of having each lecture repeated at two different places.”<sup>138</sup> This setup was temporary, however, as by the 1840s, the two branches were amalgamated into one location.

The government had initially allocated 600 rupees per month to support the institution, but the funding soon became a joint Anglo-Indian effort.<sup>139</sup> In addition to government funds, there were also “a few donations by opulent Natives.”<sup>140</sup> The largest of these was by the Nawab of Awadh, E’timad ud-Daula Fazal Ali Khan, who in 1829 donated a very grand sum of 170,000 rupees to establish an Oriental College for “the promotion of Mohammedan Education in the City of Delhi.”<sup>141</sup> Rather than setting up another separate institution, the government convinced the Nawab to support their existing efforts, and in this way Ghazi al-Din Madrasa became the Delhi Oriental College (and the English section became the Delhi English Institute). An additional income of approximately 550 rupees per month, derived from the interest earned on the donation, was added to the government’s monthly contribution towards the College

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<sup>137</sup> *Report of the Colleges and Schools for Native Education Under the Superintendence of the General Committee of Public Instruction in Bengal, 1831* (Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1832), 35. Part of the British Library, IOR/V/24/946 series. Henceforth, *Public Instruction Report*, 1831.

<sup>138</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, 325.

<sup>139</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1831, 33.

<sup>140</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1831, 41.

<sup>141</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1831, 41.

expenses.<sup>142</sup> Thus, government funds and the Nawabi donation together underwrote this new educational initiative in Delhi.

E'timad ud-Daula's donation specifically called for the teaching of Arabic and Persian at the Oriental College, though eventually a Sanskrit department was also added. These developments highlight the fact that the focus on classical languages at Delhi College was not primarily a result of an ideological debate between Orientalists and Anglicists, but was instead brought about by the commitments and preferences of local patrons and donors in negotiation with colonial officials. There are a number of reasons why E'timad ud-Daula might have chosen to sponsor the teaching of Arabic and Persian in colleges within the Company's administration. In his testament, he explained that he was moved to donate this money as a gesture of piety and godliness; by furthering the cause of Muslim education, he hoped to attain "divine mercy" and receive just reward in the afterlife.<sup>143</sup> At the same time, however, we can also see his donation as a political intervention and as part of a longer tradition of Indo-Muslim rulers sponsoring scholarship and madrasa education. In fact, E'timad ud-Daula's own predecessors in Awadh, in the eighteenth century, had sponsored teaching at the aforementioned Firangi Mahal seminary from where they also recruited *maulvis* and *munshis* to serve as tutors and secretaries at the court.<sup>144</sup> In the same way, E'timad ud-Daula's decision to donate to the Company's system of public instruction could be seen as an attempt to increase his authority and standing, gain influence in the new colonial administration, and create patronage links in the community. Many other princely rulers also engaged with the Company administration and its new colleges and institutions in a similar way. At Benares College, Raja Kali Shankar Ghosal donated a sum of

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<sup>142</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1831, 41

<sup>143</sup> Testament of Nawab E'timad ud-Daula, quoted in note by J.R. Colvin, 15 July 1840, Home Proceedings, National Archives of India.

<sup>144</sup> Madhu Trivedi, *The Making of Awadh Culture* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2010), 23.

Rs. 20,000; at Hindu College, Calcutta, Raja Baidynath Roy and Raja Harinath Roy donated Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 22,000 respectively;<sup>145</sup> at Agra College, the Raja of Bharatpore endowed a sum of Rs. 200 annually for prizes to scholars, and so on.<sup>146</sup> These financial contributions show both how local rulers and elites participated in and shaped the new system of public instruction, as well as how older forms of educational patronage and money were channeled into the Company's regime.

E'timad ud-Daula designated his son-in-law, Hamid Ali Khan, to oversee the donation. As the "representative of the individuals who have liberally endowed Delhi College," Hamid Ali earned a not insignificant voice in the management of the College.<sup>147</sup> In 1835, he was appointed to the College's local governing body, the Delhi College Local Committee, as a voting member and was named a co-visitor of the institution.<sup>148</sup> By 1842, another "Mohammedan noble," Nawab Hisam-uddin Haider, presumably also a donor, was also appointed to the Local Committee.<sup>149</sup> Hamid Ali's influence was apparently considerable enough that, on at least one occasion, he was able to overrule and delay the decision to appoint a new principal of the College on account of disagreement over the quality of Arabic and Persian teaching.<sup>150</sup> In fact, Hamid Ali continued to have a somewhat strained relationship with the Local Committee, owing to his frequent complaint that his father-in-law's donation was being employed for English and Sanskrit teaching contra to its intended purpose, or that the quality of Arabic and Persian teachers was

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<sup>145</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1831, 57.

<sup>146</sup> Board of Control Collections, July 1841, IOR/F/4/2067/94928. Also see IOR/E/4/781, f. 392.

<sup>147</sup> *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction of the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal for the year 1837* (Calcutta: William Rushton and Co., 1838), 52. Part of the British Library, IOR/V/24/947 series. Henceforth, *Public Instruction Report*, 1837.

<sup>148</sup> *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction of the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal for the year 1836* (Calcutta: William Rushton and Co., 1837), 106. Part of the British Library, IOR/V/24/947 series. Henceforth, *Public Instruction Report*, 1836.

<sup>149</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-2, 318.

<sup>150</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1837, 50.

subpar.<sup>151</sup> To rectify these perceived deficiencies, he often nominated *maulvis* of his own choosing to take up teaching positions. In turn, other Committee members expressed concern that Hamid Ali might be using his position to unduly favor *shi'a* candidates. J. Thomason, one of the members, noted that Hamid Ali “professes a great zeal for the Sheea[sic] persuasion, and this disposition, unless carefully watched, may tend to make the College the scene of Sectarian controversy.”<sup>152</sup> One episode in particular highlighted by Thomason was Hamid Ali’s nomination of a Shi’ite candidate, Hafiz Jafar Ali, for a *maulvi* position in 1841. Jafar Ali was opposed by the Principal Suddur Ameen, Sadar-Uddin Khan and others on grounds that he was “not a first rate scholar” and they, instead, had put up their own candidate for the position on whose behalf they were lobbying the committee.<sup>153</sup> It is unclear which candidate was eventually selected, but these incidents highlight the extent to which the Company’s new regime of public instruction found itself enmeshed in local rivalries and politics, as it drew upon older networks of educational patronage.

Even as the Company was plugging into these local educational networks and madrasa milieus, these spaces were themselves being transformed gradually by the rise of a private education market in English. Colonial public instruction did not entirely create this market, but the growth of colonial schools and colleges certainly accelerated its development in the 1820s and 1830s. As one colonial official remarked in 1834, “a taste for English has been so widely disseminated that independent schools conducted by young men... are springing up in every

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<sup>151</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1836, 106. Also, see correspondence between Hamid Ali Khan and the General Committee of Public Instruction in Board of Control Collections, IOR/F/4/2067/94890.

<sup>152</sup> General Proceedings Connected with Native Education in India, Board of Control Collections, IOR/F/4/2067/94987, 189. Also quoted in *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, xxvii.

<sup>153</sup> Mr. Thomson’s Minute on the Agra and Delhi Colleges, 8 April 1841. *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42.



direction.”<sup>154</sup> In 1835, the colonial government passed the English Education Act, making English the official language of instruction in colonial schools. Although the Act has sometimes been seen as a watershed moment for the introduction of English-language instruction in India, it was in many ways a lagging measure which instituted changes that were already underway.<sup>155</sup> Even before the English Education Act, there was a growing “desire for acquiring an English education” partly due to a rise in new job opportunities, in both private and government service, which required English.<sup>156</sup> A look at Delhi College graduates and their job placements in the early-1830s provides a sense of the kinds of jobs a student could get with an English education: while the majority of Delhi College students acquired jobs in government service (with the positions of Writer and Assistant Surveyor being the most common destinations), there were a sizable number of students who got jobs outside of the colonial government as well. These included students working as clerks or private tutors for landowners and princely rulers, or as secretaries in banks and agency houses.<sup>157</sup> The rise in independent schools helped to meet this growing demand for English-language education.

In some ways, the government’s system of public instruction saw itself as being in competition with these independent schools. An 1838 report noted that some of these independent schools were run by Indians who themselves had “an imperfect knowledge of the English language” and, therefore, there was an opportunity for the government to peel away their customers. One way in which it hoped to encourage more Indians to attend government schools,

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<sup>154</sup> India and Bengal Dispatches, Bengal Pub, 16 April 1834, IOR/E/4/740. Originally referenced in *Public Instruction Report*, 1831, 47.

<sup>155</sup> On the English Education Act, see Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

<sup>156</sup> *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction of the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal for the year 1838-9* (Calcutta: William Rushton and Co., 1839), 5. Part of the British Library, IOR/V/24/947 series. Henceforth, *Public Instruction Report*, 1838-9.

<sup>157</sup> *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1848-9* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1850), 67-8. Part of the British Library, IOR/V/24/906 series. Henceforth, *Public Instruction Report*, 1848-9.

instead of independent schools, was by introducing school fees. As the report noted, the introduction of fees would “raise our Schools in estimation of the Natives.”<sup>158</sup> This was because, the report argued, “respectable natives” were not inclined to send their children to free government schools because they saw it as a form of charity; instead, they tended to opt for independent fee-paying schools, which were considered more ‘respectable’.<sup>159</sup> The report estimated that the introduction of schools fees would, therefore, have “a most favorable effect on the success of our schools.”<sup>160</sup> Fees had, of course, been a part of government schools from the beginning, but the vast majority of students had been funded by stipends, provided either by the government or by local patrons. Starting in the mid-1830s, the number of fee-paying students increased and government stipends began to be rolled back (a move which was also in line with the austerity policies of William Bentinck’s administration).<sup>161</sup> For instance, at Delhi College in 1833, there were 152 registered students at the English Institution, of which 134 were on stipends and only 18 were fee-paying. Likewise, at the Oriental College, there were 279 registered students, of which 243 were on stipends and only 36 were fee-paying.<sup>162</sup> Within a decade, these numbers had shifted substantially and fee-paying students had become the majority. In 1842, for instance, there were 216 students at the English Institution, of which only 28 were on stipends and 188 were fee-paying. Similarly, at the Oriental College that year, there were 371 students, of which 147 were on stipends and 224 were fee-paying.<sup>163</sup> These changes

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<sup>158</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1838-9, 5.

<sup>159</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1838-9, 6.

<sup>160</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1838-9, 6.

<sup>161</sup> In 1835, the General Committee of Public Instruction ended all government stipends at Delhi College, a move which was criticized by the Local Committee. Upon their recommendations, some stipends were re-instated in 1840, though the number of stipends was far lower than before. On Bentinck’s cost-cutting agenda, see C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, 120-2.

<sup>162</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1837, 51.

<sup>163</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, 325.

show how the colonial government's public instruction policies responded to and tapped into the private education market as it expanded in the 1830s.

The growth of the English education market also brought new attention to the question of how to teach English texts and knowledge. T.B. Macaulay's famous statement about producing a "class of persons Indians in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" has tended to dominate the historiography of English education in India.<sup>164</sup> Yet, once again, focusing on an 'Anglicist versus Orientalist' framework obscures other fault lines in this debate. At Delhi College, for instance, the debate was not so much about choosing between Western knowledge and 'Oriental' knowledge, as it was in Bengal; instead, the debate here was between those who believed in 'engrafting' Western knowledge onto classical Indian languages and those who preferred teaching Western knowledge through translation into vernacular Indian languages, like Urdu.<sup>165</sup> Those in the former camp argued that there were deep similarities between forms of Western knowledge and classical Indian traditions, and therefore, one could inculcate Western knowledge simply by teaching classical Indian traditions and encouraging students to draw out the similarities between them. As one proponent of this view stated as an example, David Hume's "Vedanta-like scepticism" showed that there were inherent affinities between European and Indian philosophy.<sup>166</sup> In contrast, those in the latter camp believed that modern Western knowledge was new and unfamiliar to Indian traditions and, as such, it ought to be translated into vernacular languages. They argued that the best mode of learning was to read material in one's native tongue.

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<sup>164</sup> See T.B. Macaulay's Minute in Papers Regarding the Promotion of Native Education in India, Board of Control's Collections, 2 Feb 1835, IOR/F/4/1846/77633, 128-46.

<sup>165</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, 330.

<sup>166</sup> *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1851-52* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1853), 52. Part of the British Library, IOR/V/24/907 series. Henceforth, *Public Instruction Report*, 1851-2.

As these debates raged on, the colonial state was itself undergoing a period of restructuring, as successive Governor-Generals reformed their administrations by cutting expenses and rationalizing their operations.<sup>167</sup> This process, in some ways, helped to resolve the heated debates about the correct mode of knowledge dissemination in India, though not decisively in any direction. In 1840, as part of the restructuring, the government ordered a review of public instruction, and a number of changes were proposed. First, the Delhi Oriental College and the English Institute would be united in one location, though they would continue to have separate curricula. At the Oriental College, the main language of instruction would be Urdu and at the English Institute, it would remain English. In a sense, these changes affirmed the importance Western knowledge, while also giving a boost to vernacular Indian languages. The changes also brought about new personnel. Felix Boutros, a collector in Behar and a scholar of classical languages, was appointed to be the joint principal of both institutions. Boutros's deep interest in languages quickly transformed Delhi College into a vibrant center for translation, and set the stage for the emergence of Urdu political economy. The next section turns to Boutros's tenure as principal and examines the translational policies he implemented.

### **Delhi College and a New Regime of Translation**

In 1841, Felix Boutros, newly made principal of Delhi College, made a passionate case for the importance of acquiring knowledge in vernacular languages. Boutros argued that it was not possible to make advances in science and knowledge until one had studied the material in one's own language. Though Boutros was a believer in the importance of classical languages, he argued that, for Western knowledge to be readily accepted, the concepts had to be presented in a language that students felt at home in on a daily basis. Boutros argued that once students became

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<sup>167</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, chapter 4.

comfortable with the material in their own language, they might themselves seek out English-language texts, and therefore, it was crucial to start with vernacular texts, even if the ultimate goal was to expand the influence of the English language. To facilitate this goal, Boutros founded the Vernacular Translation Society at Delhi College in 1843, which quickly became the leading association in India for the translation and dissemination of English texts. Importantly, however, Boutros had a very specific understanding of translation, which had a profound impact on the relations between *maulvis* and *pandits*, Indian students, and British officials. In this section, I will examine some of the rules of translation devised by Boutros and think about how they reshaped social relations within this colonial educational setting.

A few months before the launch of the Vernacular Translation Society, Boutros conducted an extensive review and discussion about best practices in translation. The guidelines that emerged from this process were used to govern translational practice at Delhi College. The guidelines were also shared with the General Committee of Public Instruction for circulation to other colleges that were also engaged in translational work. As such, these guidelines provide a unique look into the practice of translation in early-nineteenth century India. These guidelines show that Boutros and his translators were keenly aware of the ways in which translation was bound up in social relations. Thus, by reforming practices of translation, they were also restructuring the relationships between students, teachers, and colonial officials. Specifically, the rules of translation that Boutros developed had the effect of challenging the authority of *maulvis* and *pandits* to interpret texts, and instead placed greater emphasis on individual student reading and learning.

Boutros began his translation guidelines by explaining how to translate scientific terms from English to Urdu. First, he argued, if an English word had no equivalent in Urdu, then it

should be “transferred bodily from the English into the Vernacular language.”<sup>168</sup> Here, he gave the example of chemical terms such as “sodium” or “potassium” which he claimed did not have direct equivalents in Urdu, and were therefore to be transliterated in the Urdu script. On the other hand, if an English had an equivalent in Urdu, “as *loha* for iron” or “*gunduck* for sulphur,” then the Urdu word must be used.<sup>169</sup> Second, Boutros instructed, if an English word had no direct equivalents into Urdu, but a combination of several words could be used to create equivalence, then it was preferable to use those words rather than transliterating the English word. Here, he gave the example of the word “chronology” which he argued did not have a single term equivalent in Urdu, but could be expressed by using the words “*ilm zamane*.”<sup>170</sup> The only exception to this rule was if the combination of words could not “conveniently be adhered to the foreign word,” such as when the combination of words was too long. In such a case, it was acceptable to use the foreign word in transliteration. These rules show, rather vividly, the ways in which Boutros attempted devise a process for creating commensurability between English and Urdu words. For Boutros – as for any translator – this was a process of negotiating meaning and making discursive choices about how to create equivalence between disparate signs.

However, as might be evident from the description, the key issue on which Boutros’s translational process depended upon was the question of what was considered to be an “equivalent” word. In other words, how could one determine whether an Urdu word was equivalent in meaning to an English word? Boutros addressed this by clarifying: “When I speak of a word having an equivalent in Urdu, I mean that some word similar to it in meaning *is well-*

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<sup>168</sup> “Mr. Principal Boutros’s Minute on taking charge at Delhie,” 1 July 1842, in *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, cxxv.

<sup>169</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, cxxv.

<sup>170</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, cxxv.

*known among the middle and educated classes of the Native community.*”<sup>171</sup> Crucially, he added, this meant that the word ought to be well-known enough by the general population that it does not presume the knowledge of a “learned Moulvee or Pundit.”<sup>172</sup> In other words, for Boutros, translational equivalence had to be brokered based on general, rather than on expert, knowledge. In doing so, it was his aim that *maulvis* and *pandits* should no longer hold the ultimate authority to mediate between students and texts. Students should not need expert language teachers to understand a text, but instead be able to read them on their own. As he put it, the advantage of a system which relied on general and widely-available knowledge would allow the “the Translator... [to] proceed in his translation without any Moulvee’s or Pundit’s assistance.”<sup>173</sup> This was, in other words, an attempt to downgrade the authority of *maulvis* and *pandits* to interpret texts.

Downgrading the authority of *maulvis* and *pandits* would have important implications for teaching and learning, as it would allow more English-trained students to take up teaching positions. As Boutros explained, giving the example of teachers he had recently hired, “the duty of instructing the pupils of the madrasa in European science has since been entrusted to two young men, who have received an English education, and are better qualified than Moulvees.”<sup>174</sup> Boutros argued that, under his translational scheme, anyone who had received an English education and was familiar with colloquial Urdu would be qualified to teach since texts would no longer need expert teachers. Likewise, a move away from *maulvi* and *pandit*-focused pedagogy meant less emphasis on embodied forms of learning, such as recitation and memory work, and more focus on individual reading. For instance, Boutros criticized the notion that students needed

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<sup>171</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, cxxvi. Emphasis added.

<sup>172</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, cxxvi.

<sup>173</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, cxxvi.

<sup>174</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42.

to learn texts by heart, as *maulvis* and *pandits* might have encouraged them to do, and instead focus simply on understanding them through reading and reflection.<sup>175</sup> All together, this was a startlingly different model of learning than the one at older colonial colleges, such as Benares College, where *maulvis* and *pandits* enjoyed immense pedagogical authority on the strength of their deep expertise of classical texts and languages. Boutros was, instead, proposing a system in which anyone with knowledge of English and Urdu could teach a subject, regardless of their expertise in the subject matter.

Boutros's criticism of *maulvis* and *pandits* was not new. In fact, many British officials resented the role *maulvis* and *pandits* played as gatekeepers of knowledge, and had long seen them as the main obstacles to the wider dissemination of scientific knowledge in India. As early as 1831, colonial educational reports noted that the "Maulvi and Pundit, satisfied with their own learning, are little inquisitive to anything beyond it, and are not disposed to regard the Literature and Science of the West as worth the attainment."<sup>176</sup> Another report remarked, "It was the pseudo-learning of these people (Moulvees and Pandits) which hitherto chiefly opposed the introduction of modern Science in India."<sup>177</sup> Boutros new regime of translation was, thus, a reaction to complaints such as these. He aimed to restructure the colonial education model in such a way that *maulvis* and *pandits* no longer enjoyed uncontested authority to teach and interpret texts.

At the Vernacular Translation Society, Boutros established a process in which he worked directly with young scholars who had been trained in Urdu and English (as opposed to working with *maulvis* and *pandits* who previously might have supervised those scholars). Boutros chose

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<sup>175</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42.

<sup>176</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1831, 72.

<sup>177</sup> *Reports of the Vernacular Translation Society for the Year 1845* (Delhi: Delhi Gazette Press, 1845), 3. Part of the British Library, Tr. 166(s) series. Henceforth, Vernacular Translation Society Report, 1845.



texts in consultation with the Committee of Public Instruction, and then assigned a scholar to translate it, while checking in regularly on the work. Boutros reported that he personally checked all translations himself to ensure accuracy.<sup>178</sup> This process also had the effect of raising the profile of a number of young scholars, such as Wazeer Ali and Dharam Narayan, who both became well known translators. Indeed, the title pages of their translated texts bore their names, rather than Boutros's or the Society's, an indication of the near-authorial stature accorded to them (Figure 3 below shows the title of Wazeer Ali's translation of James Mill). Their relative fame, at least in Urdu scholarly circles, also made them sought-after as translators. Dharam Narayan, for instance, as I will discuss in the next chapter, was recruited by Syed Ahmed Khan in the 1860s to translate John Stuart Mill's political economy based on his reputation for doing translational work at Delhi College.

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<sup>178</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42.

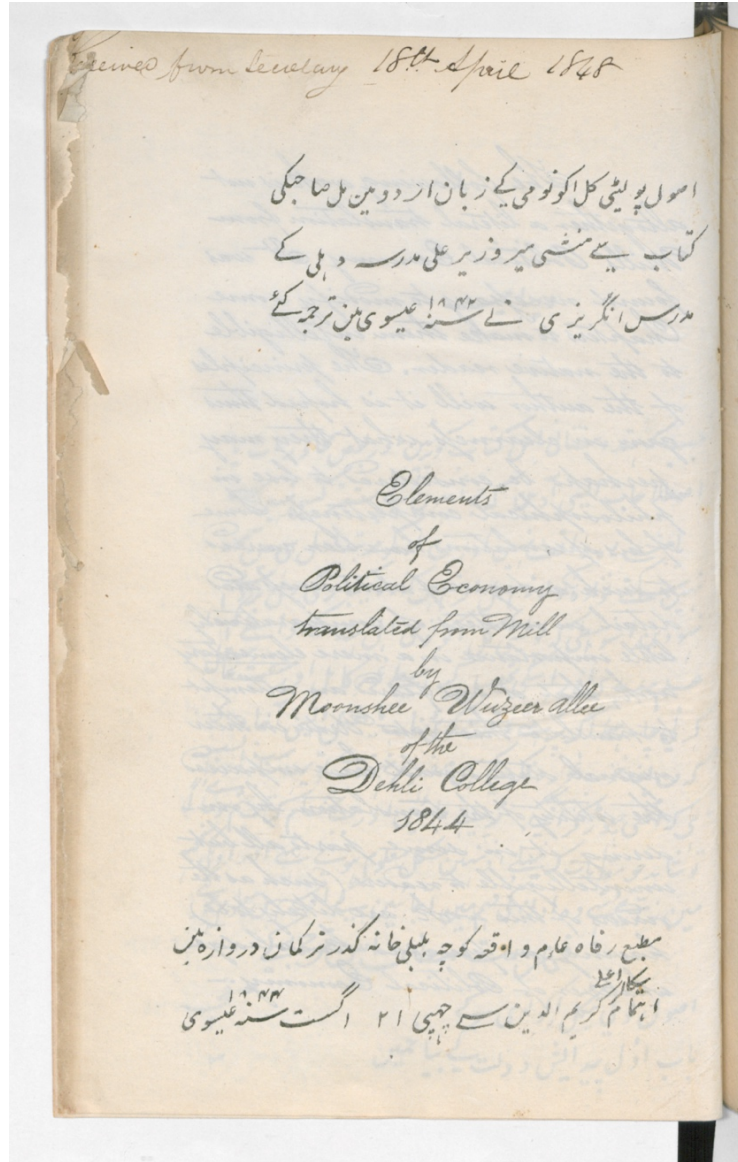


Figure 3: Title page of Wazeer Ali's translation of James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*

Within a few years, the Society had become a vibrant and important center for translation and book-selling. The Society not only supplied books to other colonial schools and institutions, but also started selling books to a slowly-growing market of Indian readers, though the latter remained a small percentage of total sales. In 1845, the Society reported that it had sold 1,656 books in the first half of 1845, of which nearly 80 per cent had been purchased by the Council of Education for use in other government schools. 12 per cent had been purchased by Europeans in

India, while 8 per cent had been bought by Indians, including 35 copies of Euclid, 21 copies of *Gulistan*, 15 copies of a work of Natural Philosophy, 19 copies of History of India, and 12 copies of History of England. The Society thought, overall, that these sale numbers were disappointing, but noted that these are “seeds fallen in fertile ground.”<sup>179</sup> In a few more years, Boutros hoped, local Indian readers would multiply and the Society’s attempts to disseminate Western knowledge in an accessible idiom would bear fruit. With this background in mind, the next section now looks in greater detail at one particular text produced by the Society, which was the Urdu translation of James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy* (1821).

### **The Making of a Colonial Translator: Wazeer Ali’s translation of James Mill**

In 1831, twelve-year old Wazeer Ali, identified as being from the Shaikh caste, was a student in the Oriental section of Delhi College, studying texts in Arabic and Persian. The examiners of the College noted that Wazeer Ali and his classmates had successfully read all of the *Amad-nama* (a popular manual on Persian grammar and the conjugation of Persian verbs); all of the *Karima* (a manual of Persian, commonly attributed to the medieval poet Sheikh Sa‘adi and described by scholars as a text which “formed the inaugural course of every little boy and girl studying Persian”<sup>180</sup>); a portion of the *Qawaid-ul Muftadi* (a guide to Arabic grammar); and, the first chapter of Sa‘adi’s *Gulistan*.<sup>181</sup> For much of the nineteenth century, these texts constituted the standard beginner-level curriculum of an Indo-Islamic education across North India. In fact, so firmly established was this curriculum that the narrator of the wildly popular 1899 Urdu novel *Umrao Jaan Ada* recalled that these were the very texts she was taught as a young girl at the

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<sup>179</sup> Vernacular Translation Society Report, 1845, 1-2.

<sup>180</sup> Nabi Hadi, *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Abhinav Publications, 1995), 396.

<sup>181</sup> Papers regarding the promotion of native education in the Bengal Presidency, Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction for the year 1830, Board of Control’s Collections, IOR/F/4/1289/51641.

beginning of her classical education as a courtesan in Lucknow.<sup>182</sup> The writer of the novel, Mirza Hadi Ruswa, likely had had such an education himself, as Muslim intellectuals continued to do so throughout the nineteenth century.

By 1835, Wazeer Ali had progressed to the senior level at Delhi College and his uncommon proficiency in Arabic and Persian had brought him to the attention of school administrators who recognized him as one of their star students. The principal noted that Wazeer Ali possessed “merits that entitle him to the distinction of being deemed the ornament of the College.”<sup>183</sup> Wazeer Ali’s “laborious course” of Arabic and Persian continued. In 1835-36, he read all of *Sharh-i Tajreed* (a Quranic commentary), the *Sharh-i Isharat* (a commentary on Avicenna’s *Remarks* written by Nasir al-din Tusi), and a number of other Arabic works making him the “most advanced student of this College.” In fact, so advanced was Wazeer Ali in language work, and apparently so aware of his own excellence, that in 1836 he “voluntarily declined combating with his less qualified fellow collegians” for a contest in Arabic composition, which finally gave an opportunity to the second-best student (one Aleem-ullah) to win a prize.<sup>184</sup> By this point, Wazeer Ali was also taking lessons in the adjoining English Institution at Delhi College, where he was promptly declared the “best” student in the study of English grammar.<sup>185</sup>

As they progressed further in their studies, Wazeer Ali and his classmates read more Persian, including both the classic works of medieval poetry and philosophy from Iran and Central Asia as well as more recent Indo-Persian texts. The Persian curriculum consisted of the

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<sup>182</sup> Hadi Ruswa, *Umrao Jaan Ada* (New Delhi: Zubaan Books, 2013), chapter 4.

<sup>183</sup> *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction of the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal, for the year 1835* (Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1836), 54. Part of the P/V150 series. Henceforth, *Public Instruction Report*, 1835.

<sup>184</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1836, 104-5.

<sup>185</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1836, 111.

poems of Sa‘adi and Ferdowsi; the philosophical works of Nasir al-din Tusi, including primarily the *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*; and, the *Anwar-e Soheli*, a collection of fables also belonging to the *akhlaq* genre. From the Mughal era, they read the writings of Abu‘l Fazl, the chief minister during Akbar’s reign and the *Siyar al-Mutakherin*, the late-Mughal work of politics and history.<sup>186</sup> The *akhlaq* (ethics) genre, in particular, formed an important element of the curriculum. In addition to Tusi’s text, students also read various other *akhlaq* texts, including the the *Akhlaq-i Mohsini*, and the *Akhlaq-i Jalali*. Teachers at the College noted how much of each text the students had read, and examined them not only on their reading fluency of these texts, but also on their ability to translate the Persian into Urdu.<sup>187</sup> These works, therefore, formed the mental universe of translators like Wazeer Ali. The Arabic and Persian training he received furnished the stock of languages, metaphors, and conceptual tools and frameworks that he would use in his Urdu translations. By 1841, Wazeer Ali had finished his studies and was employed as the fifth-ranked master in the Oriental section of Delhi College at a salary of 50 rupees per month, which made him the highest ranked (and highest paid) Indian teacher at the College.<sup>188</sup> Wazeer Ali’s talent for languages and translation made him one of Boutros’s key associates when the latter started the Vernacular Translation Society in 1843. Indeed, Boutros immediately selected him for the task of translating one of the first texts to be translated by the Society, which was James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy*.

Boutros’s reasons for choosing to translate political economy were that he believed it to be a useful science for understanding colonial society. In his discussions with the Committee of Public Instruction on which texts to select, Boutros cited correspondence with Lancelot Wilkinson, a colonial educational official in Sehor, who argued that Indian students had

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<sup>186</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1831, 34-5.

<sup>187</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1838-9, 101.

<sup>188</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1839-40, 319.

“erroneous opinions” on range of topics, such as debt, slavery, expensive marriages, benefits of roads and bridges, joint stock associations, agriculture, rent, and so on.<sup>189</sup> Boutros agreed with Wilkinson that study of political economy could help to rectify opinions on these matters, and could encourage Indians to learn more about the government of the country. Beyond these broad reasons for choosing political economy, Boutros did not specify why he chose James Mill’s text in particular, though it is likely because Mill was seen as the most authoritative, up-to-date, and accessible text on political economy, at least until the publication of John Stuart Mill’s political economy in 1848.

Wazeer Ali’s translation of the text was, by and large, faithful to Mill’s text. Following Mill, he organized it in four sections: Production (*paidaish*), Distribution (*Taqsim-i daulat*), Exchange (*ijnas ka tabadla*), and Consumption (*kharch*), although he considerably shortened many chapters within these sections and omitted some passages entirely. Wazeer Ali began by writing that he believed political economy to be a new and modern (*jadid*) science, which would likely be unfamiliar to most Indian readers. Notably, in writing the term ‘political economy,’ Wazeer Ali choose to transliterate it into Urdu script, rather than translating it.<sup>190</sup> Wazeer Ali’s decision to transliterate ‘political economy’ into Urdu is particularly revealing given what we know about Boutros’s rules of translation. Recall that Boutros instructed his translators that if a term did not have exact equivalents in Urdu, they ought to “[transfer] it bodily from the English into the Vernacular language” (that is, transliterate it).<sup>191</sup> Thus, Wazir Ali’s move to transliterate political economy suggests that he saw it as a science that did not have any direct equivalents in Urdu, or at least not any that might be well-known among general, non-expert readers. Yet, at the same time, Wazeer Ali attempted to create comparisons that might help his readers to situate

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<sup>189</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, xlvi.

<sup>190</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, trans. by Wazeer Ali (Delhi, 1844), i.

<sup>191</sup> *Public Instruction Report*, 1840-41 and 1841-42, cxxv.

political economy as a science. He explained that political economy was like household management for a country (*mulk ki kifayat sha 'ari*).<sup>192</sup> The term he used to denote household management was “*kifayat sha 'ari*,” which as we saw in chapter one, appeared in *Akhlaq* texts to denote thrift or prudence in managing one’s home. By drawing on this *akhlaqi* term to describe political economy, while transliterating it at the same time, Wazeer Ali was indicating that political economy was a new science, but one that was comparable to certain Indian concepts.

A second major term of political economic theory that Wazeer Ali transliterated was ‘rent,’ which was likely an indication that he saw it as a technical term that could not be translated into Urdu without losing meaning. In his explanatory passage he defined ‘rent’ as the *mal-guzari* (revenue) that the *ryot* (peasant) pays to the *zemindar* (landlord).<sup>193</sup> While this is a standard understanding of rent, it is interesting to note how the translation fails to capture Mill’s exact definition of rent. In Mill’s theory, following from Ricardo, rent is technically the difference between the return on investment applied to the most productive land and the return on investment applied to the least productive land.<sup>194</sup> Rent, therefore, differs from revenue. Mill and Ricardo both argued that in an ideal system, revenue would approximate rent, but in technical terms the two are different. Wazeer Ali’s comparison of the two shows how he negotiated commensurability. His decision to transliterate the term ‘rent’ marked it as a new and unfamiliar technical term. At the same time, his decision to compare it to an existing form of revenue relation shows his attempt to situate political economic theory in terms and contexts that could be understandable to the average student reader.

Some of the most revealing passages of the text are the rare instances where Wazeer Ali appended his own commentary to Mill’s text, as they point to how he understood political

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<sup>192</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, trans. by Wazeer Ali, 1.

<sup>193</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, trans. by Wazeer Ali, 19.

<sup>194</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1821), Book II, Chapter I.

economy and what critiques of the subject he might have held (although it is important to note that he did not specify which passages were his own writing and which were Mill's, so his contemporary Urdu readers would not have seen this as commentary or critique but just a regular part of the text). One of these moments occurs in the chapter on wages in the section on distribution. In that chapter in the English text, Mill explained that wages represent the share of the laborer in the production of the commodity, and that the capitalist buys the share in the form of wages. Further, Mill argued that the rate of wages depends on the population and on the quantity of capital. When population rises, there are more available laborers, and therefore, wages decrease. On the other hand, when capital rises, it seeks more laborers to employ, and as a result, wages increase. The caveat, Mill added, was that population tends to increase at a faster rate than capital.<sup>195</sup> Wazeer Ali translated all of this in a fairly direct way. However, at the end of the chapter, he added a note about how this explanation might look different in India as compared to in England. He wrote that it was quite clear that, in England, there are no restrictions (*rok*) on the basis of caste (*zaat*), such as that a cobbler might not make his son a blacksmith, or a tailor might not make his son a cleaner. As a result, he argued, in England people can switch from one occupation to another (*aik peshe se doosra pesha ikhtiyar kar sakein*).<sup>196</sup> In contrast, he argued, in India due to the benefits of caste (*zaat ke faidon*), there are restrictions on who can obtain which employment, and every boy must follow his father's occupation. As a result, this causes a difference (*farq*) in how the theory of wages must apply to India.<sup>197</sup> Wazeer Ali was essentially suggesting that capital and population were not the only determinants of wages; there were also particular Indian factors like caste which determined the supply of labor to a particular occupation. In doing so, Wazeer Ali offered an implicit critique of

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<sup>195</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, Book II, Chapter II.

<sup>196</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, trans. by Wazeer Ali, 23.

<sup>197</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, trans. by Wazeer Ali, 24.



the universality of political economy, suggesting that political economic theories were not applicable everywhere in the same ways.

In other parts, Wazeer Ali's additions to the text appear to comment on and support colonial economic policies. For example, in the chapter on the circulation of precious metal between countries, Mill argued that countries are better off trading with one another in those commodities that each can produce cheaply. He used the example of England and Poland, and argued that since it was cheaper in England to produce cloth relative to Poland, and cheaper in Poland to produce corn relative to England, it would be in both countries' interest to trade cloth and corn.<sup>198</sup> Wazeer Ali changed this example to the trade between England and India. He explained that India exported a great of indigo to England, while importing a great deal of cloth, an exchange which was beneficial to both. He wrote that some people say that it would be better for India to produce more of its own cloth, so that less cloth can be imported from England. However, he argued, this would be a mistake (*ghalat*) since England can produce cloth more cheaply.<sup>199</sup> Wazeer Ali's vague reference to people who call for India to produce more of its own cloth is not in Mill's text, and seems to be a comment drawn perhaps from a contemporary debate or conversation on trade. His apparent endorsement of the arrangement that India continue to export raw materials and import finished goods brings to mind Boutros and Wilkinson's comment that political economy might be a way to rectify 'erroneous' opinions on Indian government. It is possible, then, that such commentary was included by Boutros or other officials to make a positive case for colonial economic policy.

In this same vein, Wazeer Ali's omissions are equally revealing. All together, there were only three chapters from Mill's text that Wazeer Ali did not include in his translation. These

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<sup>198</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, Book III, Chapter XV.

<sup>199</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, trans. by Wazeer Ali, 120.

included the chapter on bills of exchange, the chapter on bounties and prohibitions, and the well-known chapter on colonies. It is possible that Wazeer Ali chose not to include these chapters out of concern for length or complexity. However, it is also true that these were among the most polemical chapters of the book, and they contained some of Mill's harshest attacks on protectionism, monopolies, and colonies. In the chapter on bounties and prohibitions, Mill sharply criticized the Corn Laws, arguing that those who supported restrictions on the grain trade were purveyors of "sophistry," ignorant of history, and damaging to the greater good of the country.<sup>200</sup> Mill, of course, wrote this in 1821, which was a very different moment for anti-Corn Law activism than the 1840s. By the time Wazeer Ali was translating the text in 1844, debates over the Corn Laws were at a fever pitch, leading up to the repeal of the laws in 1846. As such, it is possible that Wazeer Ali may have been dissuaded by Boutros or other officials from translating a chapter that was so harshly critical towards domestic British policy, especially at a time when that policy was the subject of so much internal debate. Similarly, in the chapter on colonies, Mill sharply questioned the economic value of colonies. He rebutted the idea that colonies provided a market for goods produced by the home country, writing "If it be said that colonies afford a market; I reply, the capital, which supplies commodities, for that market, would still prepare commodities, if the colonies were annihilated; and those commodities would still find consumers."<sup>201</sup> Here, again, Boutros or other officials may have felt it unwise to translate something that was critical of British policy in India. These absences, therefore, hint at the idea that these translations were inevitably bound up with imperial politics. Although translators like Wazeer Ali seem to have had quite a bit of latitude in putting their own mark on the texts, the omissions suggest that they were still expected to tow the official line.

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<sup>200</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, Book III, Chapter XVII.

<sup>201</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, Book III, Chapter XVIII.

### **An American in Delhi: Dharam Narayan's Translation of Francis Wayland**

The second major translation of political economy produced at Delhi College was that of Francis Wayland's *Elements of Political Economy* (1837). Wayland's text is particularly notable because it is the only political economy work by an American writer that was translated at Delhi College, suggesting that there was some circulation of political economic ideas between India and the wider Anglo-Atlantic world as well. Wayland, a Baptist minister, teacher, writer, and eventually the president of Brown University, wrote the text in 1837. The text is mostly an abridgement of James Mill's political economy, and as such, is not considered to be an original contribution to political economic theory. It was, however, very widely read, and has been described by one historian as "by far the most popular political economy textbook prior to the Civil War."<sup>202</sup> Indeed, its translation in Delhi in 1846, less than ten years from its initial publication in America, shows how quickly and widely it circulated. For this translation, Boutros chose Dharam Narayan, another young Delhi College scholar.<sup>203</sup> I will describe Dharam Narayan's career in more detail in the next chapter in association with his translation of John Stuart Mill at Aligarh, but it is worth noting here that Dharam Narayan followed a similar path as Wazeer Ali, going through the same type of Indo-Persianate education and language training. Dharam Narayan's text borrowed many translational choices from Wazeer Ali's earlier translation, while also making some striking innovations in some areas that made his text unique in the early history of Urdu political economy.

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<sup>202</sup> Quoted in Donald E. Frey, "Francis Wayland's 1830 textbooks: Evangelical Ethics and Political Economy," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 24, 2 (2002): 215.

<sup>203</sup> Boutros left Delhi College in 1845, so by the time the book was completed, there was a new principal, Aloys Sprenger.

One of the first things to note about the text is the title itself. Unlike Wazeer Ali's decision to transliterate the term 'political economy,' Dharam Narayan chose instead to translate it as "*ilm intizam al-madan*" (the science of the administration of cities). "*Intizam al-madan*" is a term with a deep *akhlaqi* genealogy: as we saw in the first chapter, it appears prominently in Tusi's *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* to refer to the third sphere of ethical action, which is the city as an ideal of civic cooperation. Recalling once again Boutros's instruction about choosing equivalent terms, Dharam Narayan's choice is significant because it suggests that he saw commensurability between political economy and the *akhlaqi* concept of *intizam al-madan*, an interpretation that would shape the reception of Urdu political economy throughout the nineteenth century. Dharam Narayan's decision to use the term, in contrast to Wazeer Ali's transliteration, also suggests that there were competing interpretations of political economy within the Vernacular Translation Society itself. While both of them drew on *akhlaqi* language to describe political economy, Dharam Narayan made a more explicit connection to a particular aspect of *akhlaqi* philosophy represented by the science of managing cities and polities. Dharam Narayan's more explicit comparison to *akhlaq* was possibly shaped by the fact that Wayland himself, unlike Mill, sought to highlight the moral and ethical dimensions of political economy. In his preface, Wayland noted that the "principles of Political Economy are so closely analogous to those of Moral Philosophy, that almost every question in one, may be argued on grounds of belonging to the other."<sup>204</sup> At other places, Wayland made distinctions between ethical questions and political economy questions. Given these discussions, Dharam Narayan may well have seen a more direct comparison between *akhlaq* and political economy than Wazeer Ali did in Mill.

Importantly, we can also read within Dharam Narayan's comparison between *akhlaq* and political economy an incipient sense that political economy was a science of society, and that it

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<sup>204</sup> Francis Wayland, *Elements of Political Economy* (New York: Leavitt, Lord and Company, 1837), vi.

described the ways in which society operated as a unified entity composed of an aggregate of people. In his chapter on labor, for instance, Wayland explained that society could be divided between three classes of labor: those who were philosophers (industry of discovery); those who belonged to the professions (industry of application); and, those who were laborers (industry of operation). Wayland argued that these different classes of people composed “civil society.”<sup>205</sup> Dharam Narayan’s translation of these passages is quite revealing in regards to the status of social thought in Urdu writing in this period. Dharam Narayan did not have a term for “society” specifically: in instances where Wayland used the term “society,” Dharam Narayan simply translated it using the plural pronoun “*hum*” (we), or the plural of ‘people’ (*ashkhas*) to indicate an aggregate of people.<sup>206</sup> However, he did use the term “*jama‘at*” to denote “classes.” As mentioned in the previous chapter, *jama‘at* was often used in Indo-Persian writing to denote an assembly of people, such as the assembly of people in the household, or the assembly of Englishmen, or some such. By using this term, Dharam Narayan signalled that he read political economy as a science that described social collectivity. His translational choices show that there was not yet a single term equivalent to denote the concept of ‘society,’ but there were other Urdu terms to denote forms of aggregation or social collectivity. By the late-1860s, however, when Dharam Narayan would translate John Stuart Mill, the term “*mua‘sharat*” had become a frequently-used term to describe “society.” Yet, in this moment in the early 1840s, it did not appear in Dharam Narayan’s writing. Urdu political economy as a science of society was, thus, still in an early stage of development.

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<sup>205</sup> Francis Wayland, *Elements of Political Economy*, 44.

<sup>206</sup> Francis Wayland, *The Elements of Political Economy*, trans. Dharam Narayan as *Usul Ilm Intizam al-Madan* (Delhi: Urdu Akhbar Press, 1846), 15.

## Travel Writing and the Development of the Social Concept

Although a term to describe the concept of ‘society’ did not appear in Dharam Narayan or Wazeer Ali’s translations in the early-1840s, there are indications that other writings in this period, including some associated with Delhi College, were starting to articulate this concept (although not with the same frequency or precision with which it would be articulated in the 1860s and beyond). In this section, I will take a brief detour from the political economic translations and turn to other genres of writing that were circulating in Delhi during this period. In particular, I am interested in the genre of travel writing to think about how the social concept was beginning to be articulated in Urdu writing. Travelogues, of course, have a long history in Indo-Persian writing. The famous travelogues of figures like Dean Mohamed, Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, and Munshi I’tasamuddin all recorded journeys from India to Europe in the eighteenth century and discussed the different customs and conditions of other countries.<sup>207</sup> Before that, early modern *tarikh* texts frequently discussed history of particular places, including its climate, former rulers, dynasties, and so on. However, what made nineteenth century travel writing distinct was not only its increased frequency (as travel in general increased) but, more importantly, its tendency to describe ‘society’ as a distinct sphere of human interaction shaped by particular customs and institutions. It was in early-nineteenth century travel writing, I argue, that we see some of the earliest articulations of the ‘social’ concept in Urdu.

A vast number of travelogues were written in Urdu and Persian from the 1820s onwards, many of them about Indian travellers going to Britain. Here, I want to discuss two of them briefly. The first is the travelogue of Karim Khan of Delhi, who was sent by the Emperor Bahadur Shah II on a mission to London in 1839. His travel diary titled *Siyahat-Nameh*, which

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<sup>207</sup> On Dean Mohamed, see Michael Fisher, *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mohamed in India, Ireland, and England* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996). For others, see Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Exploring the West: Three Travel Narratives* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

remained unpublished, detailed his two-year journey and stay in London, along with his impressions of English society and customs. The second is the travelogue of Yusuf Khan Kambalposh (1803-1861), whose memoir *Tarikh-i Yusufi*, detailed his journey to London. The memoir was written in Persian and published in 1843. Both works capture the moment in the early 1840s, when the social concept was beginning to develop to describe society as a unified and self-contained unit.

Karim Khan left Delhi for Calcutta in December 1839, and then embarked from Calcutta to London in April 1840, arriving there in July. Karim Khan's diary detailed his impressions of English society, including the customs of its inhabitants, the style of its houses, the nature and modes of its commerce, and many other such observations. Karim Khan visited English factories (*kar khane*), noted the ingenuity of steam technology (*bhaap*), marvelled at the usefulness of insurance companies, and observed the efficiency of English merchants (*saudagar*) and businesses.<sup>208</sup> One of the things that continually caught his attention was the robustness of English civil society and public sphere. Although he did not use those terms, he constantly found himself noticing instances of public interactions and associational cooperation. At a visit to a London social club, he noted how different merchants could come together and pay a small subscription fee to associate together.<sup>209</sup> At a hospital, he noted how public charity had made possible the availability of care.<sup>210</sup> At the Zoological Gardens, he observed with surprise that a space existed where different people could congregate and mix socially, noting that on the occasion he visited there were at least four thousand there.<sup>211</sup> Throughout these observations,

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<sup>208</sup> Karim Khan, "Siyahat-Nameh," 1841, British Library, Or. 2163, f. 164, f. 212, f.182.

<sup>209</sup> Karim Khan, "Siyahat-Nameh," f. 127.

<sup>210</sup> Karim Khan, "Siyahat-Nameh," f. 166.

<sup>211</sup> Karim Khan, "Siyahat-Nameh," f. 89a

Karim Khan was essentially registering his awareness of ‘society’ as a distinct space of human interaction, one that was set apart from either the family or the state.

One of the key ways in which he signalled his understanding of society was through comparison. I will explore in greater detail in the next chapter how comparison became a central methodological tool of sociological theory, but suffice it to say here that Karim Khan’s constant comparisons between England and India point to an understanding of societies as being distinct entities. He compared English dress to Indian dress; English homes to Indian homes; English agriculture to Indian agriculture; and, so on. The implication behind these comparisons was that societies were commensurate units of analysis and could be compared to each other in terms of customs and institutions. By experiencing the difference of another place, Karim Khan could articulate how his own society was a distinct entity, and how it had shaped his own views and preferences.

The same comparative perspective is evident in Yusuf Khan’s travelogue. Yusuf Khan, a government official in Lucknow, left for London from Calcutta in March 1837, arriving there in August 1837.<sup>212</sup> His initial period in London was spent sight-seeing in places such the Botanical Gardens, St. Paul’s Cathedral, the Vauxhall Gardens, and a variety of theatres and museums. At these and other locations, Yusuf Khan constantly compared British customs to Indian customs, noting differences on matters relating to dress, food, personal comportment, manners, and so on. He met with Anglican priests, and discussed differences between the religious traditions of India and England.<sup>213</sup> During his trip, Yusuf Khan also visited Paris, which offered the opportunity to make further comparisons between English and French society. Throughout his writing, Yusuf

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<sup>212</sup> For more on Yusuf Khan Kambalposh, see the introduction in Mushirul Hasan and Nishat Zaidi, eds. *Between Worlds: The Travels of Yusuf Khan Kambalposh* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>213</sup> Yusuf Khan Kambalposh, *Between Worlds*, 37.



Khan exhibited a heightened awareness of his own social difference and, in doing so, signalled a growing recognition of the social concept.

Although Yusuf Khan had originally written the travelogue in Persian, he prepared an Urdu copy of it, which was published by Delhi College in 1847. By then, Felix Boutros had been replaced by the Orientalist scholar Aloys Sprenger, who continued many of Boutros's initiatives and translation activities. In fact, it may well have been Sprenger's intervention that allowed Yusuf Khan's travelogue to be published in Urdu by the College, a move which suggests that Sprenger perhaps saw some connection between the travelogue and the other translation work that the College was producing, including works of political economy.<sup>214</sup> Of course, as genres, travel literature and political economy could not be more different. But, if one thinks of the travelogue genre as an early form of sociological observation, then the links between the travelogue and political economy become more apparent. To the extent that both were invested in exploring the 'social' as a category of analysis – albeit in very different registers – one might even see them as belonging to the same family of texts.

## Conclusion

Political economy certainly arrived in India long before it was ever translated into Urdu. Because of its close institutional relationship to the colonial government, it was instrumentalized by the colonial state for a range of policy ends. But, political economy was first articulated in the vernacular in a systematic way in the 1830s and 1840s, when the colonial re-ordering of Indian education, and the related debates about the dissemination of Western knowledge, created a space for the translation of English texts into Indian languages. I have argued in this chapter that the origins of Urdu political economy – not necessarily as an ideological formation but as a

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<sup>214</sup> Yusuf Khan Kambalposh, *Between Worlds*, xvi.

vernacular speech act – are to be found in the creative collaborations between British officials and Indian translators at Delhi College. The translational choices and decisions that came out of these collaborations shaped the initial reception of political economy in Urdu. Indian translators like Wazeer Ali and Dharam Narayan drew on *akhlaqi* concepts to explain political economy. Dharam Narayan, in particular, read political economy as a science of society, and attempted to relate it to other associational models with which he was familiar. These efforts ran parallel to the gradual development of the social concept in Urdu writing, as evidenced in some of the travel writing of the period. The next chapter delves into greater detail on how the ‘social’ began to be articulated in Urdu writing with greater frequency by the 1860s, and how that shaped subsequent translations of political economy. Unsurprisingly, Dharam Narayan continues to play a role in that part of the story as well.

## Chapter 3

### An Urdu Science of Society: Social Theory and Political Economy in India

Political Economy is a Science almost unknown to Asiatic literature and yet so essential to all who aspire not only to improve the Social and Political condition of their country, but also to those who wish to see their efforts in the sphere of their domestic economy crowned with desired success.

--- Pundit Dharam Narayan, *Usul Siyasat al-Madan* (1869)<sup>215</sup>

#### Introduction

By the 1860s, Urdu terms like “*mua ‘sharat*” and “*jama ‘at*” had undergone profound conceptual transformations. If one had consulted an Urdu dictionary in the earlier part of the century, one would have discovered that *mua ‘sharat* was taken to mean “living or eating together” or “conversation” and “association.”<sup>216</sup> In Indo-Persian texts, the term often had an ethical (*akhlaqi*) connotation, and was used to describe households or the set of mutual obligations between individuals in a household. By the end of the century, however, the term had acquired the meaning of “social life” or “society” in the modern sense of an aggregate of people living together with shared customs and institutions.<sup>217</sup> Similarly, *jama ‘at* had earlier connotations of “assembly” or a group of people, such as the *jama ‘at* of people in a household. By the late-nineteenth century, *jama ‘at* too had come to be associated with society as a distinct entity. To be sure, these uses of *mua ‘sharat* and *jama ‘at* to denote a social collective outside the household was not entirely new to Indian writing: as I mentioned in previous chapters, there were early

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<sup>215</sup> Pandit Dharam Narayan, *Usul Siyasat Madan* (Aligarh: Institute Press, 1869), 1.

<sup>216</sup> John Shakespear, *A Dictionary, Hindustani and English, with a Copious Index, Fitting the Work to Serve, also, as a Dictionary of English and Hindustani*, Third Edition (London: J.L. Cox & Son, 1834), 1641. See also, Duncan Forbes, *A Dictionary, Hindustani and English: Accompanied by A Reversed Dictionary, English and Hindustani*, Second Edition (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co, 1866), 691.

<sup>217</sup> S.W. Fallon, *A New Hindustani-English Dictionary, with Illustrations and Folk-lore* (Benares: E.J. Lazarus and Co., 1879), 1103.

modern Persian accounting manuals that referred to the “*mua‘sharat*” of peasants (*ra‘iyat*).<sup>218</sup> Likewise, *jama‘at* sometimes appeared in Indo-Persian texts to describe certain groups, such as the *jama‘at* of Englishmen. But, by the late-nineteenth century, these usages came to be articulated more frequently and with a new theoretical precision and elaboration. A great deal of Urdu writing appeared in this period, such as Syed Ahmed Khan’s article on the problems of “Muslim society” (*mua‘sharat-e-musulmanan*) which appeared in his journal the *Mohammedan Social Reformer* (*Tahzib al-Akhlaq*). In that article, as in other writings, Syed Ahmed attempted to delineate the customs of different places and argued that those customs shaped the behaviour and character of people who lived there.<sup>219</sup> This shift in the meaning of terms like “*mua‘sharat*” and *jama‘at* – from household to society at large – represented an important aspect of late-nineteenth century Indian Urdu thought, which was the continued development of a concept of the social. In chapter two, I showed how the early development of the social concept in Urdu writing coincided with the earliest translations of political economy in the 1840s. In this chapter, I continue this narrative to think about how the intellectual changes in the next several decades allowed the social concept to be articulated in Urdu with increased frequency. As before, the articulation of the social concept went hand-in-hand with the development of Urdu political economy. Indeed, I want to suggest that efforts to translate political economy into Urdu were part of a project of understanding the social concept as it pertained to India. By translating political economy, Urdu translators aimed to create an Indian vernacular science of the social.

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<sup>218</sup> See chapter 1. There were also other early modern Indo-Persian terms that encapsulated some meaning of social or society. For instance, in her study of Indo-Persian texts in the eighteenth century, Gulfishan Khan translated “*ma‘ishat*” as meaning “social living” or “socio-economic life”. See Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim Perceptions of the West during the Eighteenth Century* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 125.

<sup>219</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, “Maslehan Mua‘sharat Musulmanan,” *The Mohammedan Social Reformer, Tahzib al-Akhlaq* 2, no. 9 (January 1860), 1.

This chapter is, thus, about the intertwined Urdu-language histories of social theory and political economy in the second half of the nineteenth-century India.

In European intellectual history, the development of social theory is typically associated with what Sheldon Wolin and Karl Polanyi called “the discovery of society.”<sup>220</sup> For Wolin, this discovery originated in the premises of Lockean liberalism, which he argued naturalized the existence of society by envisioning a pre-political community of property owners. Wolin argued that this theoretical move meant that liberal political and economic thinkers following Locke treated society as a “self-subsistent entity” that constituted its own autonomous sphere of human activity distinct from the state.<sup>221</sup> Polanyi arrived at similar conclusions, but began from a rather different origin point. He traced the ‘discovery’ of society to late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century concerns about scarcity in a rapidly commercializing world. Polanyi read these concerns in the works of Joseph Townsend, and later in Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo among others, who, according to him, argued that certain natural principles, such as the laws of population and the fertility of soil, regulated the production and distribution of finite resources in a market system. Polanyi argued that the recognition of these dynamics helped to reveal the existence of a “new realm” that was synonymous with “economic society.”<sup>222</sup> Crucially, for Polanyi, because this realm – “this human aggregate” as he put it – was understood by nineteenth century thinkers as being governed by natural principles and biological imperatives, it meant that the emerging society was “not subject to the laws of the state, but, on the contrary, subjected the

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<sup>220</sup> Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 273. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), see chapter 10.

<sup>221</sup> Wolin, 280.

<sup>222</sup> Polanyi, 120.

state to its own laws.”<sup>223</sup> In other words, in both Wolin’s and Polanyi’s reading of nineteenth century social theory, the social was conceived as being prior to the political.

Wolin’s and Polanyi’s narratives share many similarities, not the least important of which is that they both place questions of political economy at the center of their explanations. Methodologically, however, they offer different approaches that are relevant to studying the history of the social in India. On the one hand, a traditional intellectual history approach like Wolin’s, which traces the influence of texts and ideas, can explain a great deal of how the social concept circulated in India. Indian thinkers were certainly influenced by their readings of European social theorists – indeed they even translated many of them. But, this is not only a story of the diffusion of ideas. Indian thinkers were also influenced by the social transformations around them, and their articulation of a social concept was in part also a result of experiencing and recognizing those changes. And yet, a socio-historical approach alone does not tell the whole story either. It cannot explain, for instance, how the social concept came to be articulated as “*mua‘sharat*” or “*jama‘at*.” How did the specific histories and meanings of these terms – namely their ethical connotations of mutual obligation between people – inflect how the concept was deployed? To answer these sorts of questions, I offer neither a solely diffusionist, nor a socio-historical model of intellectual change. Instead, I argue here that the development of social theory in Indian Urdu writing had its own trajectory, shaped by social and economic transformation, the experience of comparison in foreign encounters, and the diffusional influence of European liberal thought. The figure whose work most often described and analyzed many of these changes was Syed Ahmed Khan, and he is, therefore, central to this account. Ultimately, I argue that it was within the confluence of these different factors that Syed Ahmed and other Indian thinkers were able to recast early modern Indo-Persian ethical models of sociality into a

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<sup>223</sup> Polanyi, 116.

modern concept of the social. In making this argument, I read within their works an important critique of modern society, which I argue highlighted an absence of ethical obligations in the modern social.

At the same time, this chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive reading of Syed Ahmed, nor an exhaustive account of his works (given his prolific output, such a thing would not be possible in one chapter, in any case). Nor do I want to claim that Syed Ahmed was the pivotal figure who was singularly responsible for inventing the social concept in Urdu writing, or even one whose work shows an original and sophisticated theoretical account of the social. Instead, I want to suggest that in Syed Ahmed's writing, it is possible to read an incipient theory of society, which by the early-twentieth century would become more fully elaborated in the works of Indian sociologists and in the institutionalization of vernacular social scientific disciplines (*mua'sharati uloom*). This is an aspect of Syed Ahmed's thought that has been obscured in scholarship on him and on the Aligarh movement. Much of this scholarship has tended to view him primarily through the lens of Muslim separatism and the consolidation of communal identities in the late-nineteenth century, or as the progenitor of a Muslim modernism.<sup>224</sup> This is certainly a valuable perspective, and it correctly highlights Syed Ahmed's preoccupation with the study and re-interpretation of Islamic texts and traditions, as well as his self-professed leadership of and advocacy for Indian Muslims. Without negating the importance of these interventions, then, my argument here aims to shift the focus and highlight a new reading of Syed Ahmed by situating

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<sup>224</sup> The classic works on Syed Ahmed and the history of Indian Muslims include David Lelyvled, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) and Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces, 1860-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974). On Syed Ahmed as a 'modernist' and Muslim reformer, see a contemporary biography by G.F.I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1885) and J.M.S. Baljon's *Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Leiden: Brill, 1949). For a recent re-interpretation of Syed Ahmed's "apologetic modernity" see Faisal Devji, "Apologetic Modernity," in *Modern Intellectual History* 4, 1 (2007): 61-76.

him as part of the history of Indian economic thought and the vernacular social sciences more broadly.

This chapter is organized in three sections, beginning with Syed Ahmed's intellectual activities in the 1860s. In the first section, I offer a re-reading of Syed Ahmed's involvement with the Aligarh Scientific Society and its journal the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*. While these projects have typically been interpreted through the lens of cross-cultural encounter or the meeting of 'Eastern' and 'Western' knowledge, I read them instead as reflective of his intellectual engagement with social theory. I argue that Syed Ahmed's articulation of society as a unified entity was expressed in terms of a comparative analysis of the customs of different societies, as well as in terms of a concern for Indian poverty. A crucial part of Syed Ahmed's understanding of society was also a preoccupation with the ethics of living in society. This section, therefore, also explores his interest in sociability as an element of his social theory. The second section then turns to the Scientific Society's 1869 Urdu translation of John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), one of the earliest non-European translations of Mill's work anywhere in the world. It examines how the translation drew upon concepts from the early modern *akhlaq* (ethics) tradition, particularly the concepts of *mua'sharat* (society), *jama'at* (assembly), and *madan* (city), among others, in an effort to create a modern Indian science of the social. The third section examines one of Syed Ahmed's least-known works, the *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan (Treatise on the Ancient Village System of India)*. Published in 1878, the work was intended to be a historical sociology of ancient Indian villages. Partly also a nod to Henry Maine's *Village Communities in the East and West* (1871), it echoed Maine's argument that the ancient Indian village was a primitive and traditional society, but challenged the idea that Indian customs needed to be preserved. Following these three sections, a



brief conclusion will reflect on what the use of *akhlaq* (ethics) to read political economy means for the history of economic thought.

### **Custom, Comparison, and the ‘Discovery’ of Society**

Long before Syed Ahmed formally engaged with political economy and social theory, he was interested in sociological observation and analysis. His early writings show a sustained interest in comparing different societies and understanding how the customs and manners of different places shaped the characters and institutions of people who lived there. One of his earliest works, the *Asar-us-Sanadid* (*The Remnants of Ancient Heroes*), was an encyclopedic account of monuments and buildings in old Delhi. Published in 1847, with a second substantially-revised edition in 1854, the work also included a kind of social history of Delhi, exploring the ways in which the “ways and manners” (*atwar-o-auza*’) of Delhi inhabitants were shaped by their urban environment.<sup>225</sup> His other major work was the *Asbab Sarkashi-e-Hindustan ka Jawab-e-Mazmun* (An Essay on the Causes of the Indian Revolt), in which he argued that the British ignorance of and disregard for Indian customs was a major cause of the 1857 Indian Mutiny. The work showed that Syed Ahmed’s view of Indian society was bound up in his understanding of custom. Throughout the work, he used terms like “*rasm-o-rawaj*” (custom and practice), “*aadat*” (habits), and *taba’e* (dispositions) to highlight the role custom played in organizing people’s lives. Custom, for him, was something that determined the habits and behaviours of an entire society, as well as the inclinations and dispositions of individuals living in that society. Thus, by the time he encountered political economy and social theory, he already had a well-developed view of how custom shaped societies.

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<sup>225</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Asar-us-Sanadid*, edited by Syed Moin-ul-Haq (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1966), 33/1.

Syed Ahmed's intellectual activities in the 1860s reflected his attempts to address some of the problems he had identified following the Mutiny, particularly what he saw as Indians' lack of knowledge about their government, and likewise, the government's lack of understanding of Indian customs. His projects during this period saw him engaging in a number of educational and translational ventures to disseminate English texts in Indian languages. Along these lines, the project that most occupied his time was the Scientific Society he founded at Ghazipour in 1864 (which later became the Aligarh Scientific Society after his move to Aligarh in 1865). Much like the Vernacular Translation Society at Delhi College two decades earlier, the stated purpose of Syed Ahmed's Scientific Society was to translate European ideas into Urdu for an academic as well as a popular audience. Speaking at the Society's inaugural meeting on 9 January 1864, before "a large assemblage of European and native gentlemen,"<sup>226</sup> Syed Ahmed explained that the way Indians could learn more about government was by comparing different nations around the world.<sup>227</sup> He argued that Indians were unaware of how some smaller nations (*choti qaumein*) had grown to become big and powerful empires that were ruling the world (*dunya mein badshahi aur shahenshahi kar rahi hein*), and likewise, how powerful empires had declined and withered.<sup>228</sup> To understand these dynamics, he argued, it was important for Indians understand the customs and sciences of different nations. To that end, the Scientific Society, in addition to its translations of texts, would also publish a journal inviting Indians to learn more about the world. This journal, which started publishing from 1866 onwards, became the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*. The thousands of pages of the *Gazette* that have survived show, in many ways, Syed

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<sup>226</sup> G.F.I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 72.

<sup>227</sup> *Proceedings of the Scientific Society*, No. 1 (Ghazipour), 26. Digitized online at Sir Syed Today project. <http://www.sirsyedetoday.org/>

<sup>228</sup> *Proceedings of the Scientific Society*, No. 1 (Ghazipour), 26.

Ahmed applying his understanding of custom to societies around the world. It shows, too, his interest in comparison as a central methodological tool of his social theory.

The *Gazette* was a weekly publication, distributed for free to members of the Scientific Society, or for an annual subscription price of Rs. 12 to non-members. Although there was some original writing in the journal (often from Syed Ahmed or another Society member), much of the journal consisted of articles already published in other places, in newspapers such as the *Gazette of India*, *The Englishman*, *Friend of India*, *Delhi Gazette*, *Hindoo Patriot*, and a number of others. This suggests that the project of sociological observations and comparisons was not unique to Syed Ahmed or the Scientific Society in this period. Many of these publications, like the *Gazette*, were catering to a growing appetite for knowledge about societies by curating reports about customs and manners in different parts of the world. The *Gazette* was bilingual, with some articles reproduced in both English and Urdu. The first issue in March 1866 noted the purpose of the journal was “to instruct and please the native mind” with a selection of essays and newspaper articles “applicable to the people of India.”<sup>229</sup> The content was a mix of local news, international news, proceedings of Scientific Society meetings, and informational articles on a dizzyingly wide range of topics. There were articles on the benefits of railways, the cotton trade, etiquettes for eating and dressing in different societies, new scientific inventions, the highest mountain peaks around the world, comparison of the naval strengths of different European powers, the English civil war, architecture in London, population tables for different world regions, world exhibitions, agricultural products, and many, many more.<sup>230</sup> A regular reader

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<sup>229</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, Vol 1, 30 March 1866, 1. Digitized online at Sir Syed Today project.

<http://www.sirsyedetoday.org/>

<sup>230</sup> In sum, I have examined 5 years of the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, from 1866 to 1870. These observations, and what follows, is based on a survey of these five years of the journal.

could, thus, expect to learn much about the social and economic circumstances not just of India, but also of other societies.

The notion of comparison as an important tool of sociological analysis was, of course, not novel to the *Gazette*, nor original to Syed Ahmed. Karuna Mantena has argued that “ideas about comparison and ‘the comparative method’ were given a heightened investment in the nineteenth century” by British imperial thinkers like Henry Maine following a retreat of liberal universalist justifications for empire in the second half of the century.<sup>231</sup> Before Maine, social theorists such as Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill had also elaborated on the importance of comparison as one of the three main methods of positive social science (experiment and direct observation were the other two).<sup>232</sup> Syed Ahmed had reportedly read Mill’s *A System of Logic* (1843) and may have been influenced by Mill’s project of creating a complete social science through these methods.<sup>233</sup> But, Syed Ahmed’s adoption of a comparative method need not only be seen within a diffusionist framework. Increased world travel and foreign encounters by the mid-nineteenth century, the identification of poverty as a social problem, and the need to rethink relations between Indian subjects and the colonial state after 1857 were all factors that helped to produce an internal impetus towards sociological analysis and comparison (though, this impetus was undoubtedly refined, sharpened, and articulated more precisely through the influences of European social theory). More importantly, existing Indian genres, concepts, and terminologies were already available to support such an analysis: the early modern genre of *tarikh* as a deep history of a place; the concept of a household (a *mua‘sharat*) as a self-contained entity with its

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<sup>231</sup> Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (), 13.

<sup>232</sup> For an overview, see Robert C. Schraff, *Comte After Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31.

<sup>233</sup> Syed Ahmed’s familiarity with Mill’s *A System of Logic* is cited in Shafey Kidwai, *Cementing Ethics with Modernism: An Appraisal of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan’s Writings* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2010), 262. I have not independently seen this work referenced in Syed Ahmed’s writings, though he frequently discussed other works by Mill, so it is reasonable to assume that he had read this one as well.

own rules and rhythms; and, the concept of '*madan*' as a space of civic interaction, to name only a few. These discursive traditions must have seemed in this moment to be readily suited to answering the questions raised by the confluence of these changes in Indian society as well as to make sense of the European texts and ideas that were circulating in India. Thus, what we see in the pages of the *Gazette* are these early modern concepts re-purposed for the modern project of sociological comparison.

In the *Gazette*, the comparative method was deployed along three main aspects of Syed Ahmed's social theory. First, the notion that society was a discrete, self-contained entity was reinforced by the increase in travel accounts and foreign encounters in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>234</sup> The *Gazette* drew upon these accounts and frequently published excerpts from travelogues and descriptions of different places. These descriptions implicitly posited that there were a number of generalizable categories of sociological analysis – such as, manners, dress, culinary habits, patterns of habitation, systems of government, and so on – and all societies could be compared across these categories. All societies had unique and different customs, but by analyzing these customs across these general categories, they could be made comparable and, therefore, familiar. In its quest to catalogue these comparisons, the *Gazette* aimed at a broad geographical scope: there were articles about Canada, China, California, Britain, Egypt, Java, and many other. The article on Canada, for instance, described its system of government (*a colony of Queen Victoria with a governor general*); its main agricultural products (*wheat, apples, potatoes*); and its notable rivers (*Ottawa, St. Marys*). The article also noted differences in customs (*rasm-o-rawaj*) between Canada East and Canada West, explaining that the language

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<sup>234</sup> On the rise of Indian travel writing in the nineteenth century, see Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), chapter 3.

and culture of the former was influenced by France and the latter by England and Scotland.<sup>235</sup>

Descriptions such as these did not just serve an informational purpose; they also helped readers to think about their own societies. Reading about other societies as distinct entities with unique customs enabled, in turn, the prospect of imagining one's own society as a distinct entity with unique customs. An article on "Social Prejudices" (*majlis-y-nuqsanat*), for example, explained that people in different societies had different opinions and prejudices, but these differences could be accounted for by the same factors:

The European looks at everything with his own spectacles, the Englishman with his, and the Frenchman with his prejudices. The Asiatic likewise has first his general, and then his particular spectacles, so that the Hindu, Moslem and the Parsee considers the world, and his fellow-men, and everything else from his point of view, according to the notion enforced by climate, nationality, association and education."<sup>236</sup>

In this vein, the *Gazette* also aimed to highlight aspects of "native society" (*Hindustani mua'sharat*). There were articles about the decline of population in Punjab; the landscape of Kashmir; ritual customs of the Marwari community; buildings in Calcutta; and, many other such topics.<sup>237</sup> By cataloguing and explaining Indian society to Indian readers, this comparative project was, thus, also a project of 'discovering' Indian society.

Second, in the *Gazette*, as in numerous other contemporary writings, the recognition of society as a distinct entity was often expressed in terms of a concern about social conditions, particularly poverty. In the *Asbab*, Syed Ahmed had already pointed to poverty caused by Company policies as one of the causes of the Mutiny. But, starting in the 1860s, as rural indebtedness, land transfers, and commercialization and monetization of the countryside

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<sup>235</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, Vol. 1, 13 April 1866, 36.

<sup>236</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, Vol. 1, 5 October 1866, 449.

<sup>237</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, Vol. 1, 7 September 1866, 383.

accelerated, particularly in North India and Punjab,<sup>238</sup> a number of Urdu works on poverty as a social problem began to appear.<sup>239</sup> In these analyses, what made poverty a specifically ‘social’ problem was not just that it was a problem afflicting the aggregate, but rather that it was a result of the unique customs of a society. There was an implication that some societies were poor because they had either retained certain outmoded customs, or lost other, more virtuous customs that had been beneficial to Indian civilization in the past. One text, for example, argued that Indian poverty (*aflas-i-Hind*) was a result of the custom of profligate spending on weddings and jewels (a criticism which grew increasingly common in the late-nineteenth century).<sup>240</sup> The social concept was, thus, a way to make sense of these large-scale transformations underway in Indian society. By attributing these transformations to custom, they could be made more legible and, in a way, more manageable. If poverty was due to Indian customs, then Indians had the ability to alleviate it through social reform. Here, too, the comparative method played a role. Articles in the *Gazette*, and Syed Ahmed’s writings elsewhere, compared the customs of poorer societies with wealthier societies, arguing that poorer societies had much to learn from wealthier ones and to emulate their paths of becoming wealthy. In a speech given at the inaugural meeting of the Scientific Society at Ghazipur, George Graham argued that the purpose of the Society ought to be to explain “how England’s wealth has increased with her education within the last century” with a view to understanding “how to make India a wealthy... and an enlightened country.” In his answer, he proposed that it was the dissemination of scientific knowledge and its practical applications that been crucial to making England a wealthy country. England had, he

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<sup>238</sup> For Punjab, see Himadri Banerjee, *Agrarian Society of the Punjab, 1849-1910* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1982) and Imran Ali, *The Punjab under Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). For Awadh and North India, see Asiya Siddiqi, *Agrarian Change in a Northern Indian State: Uttar Pradesh, 1819-1833* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>239</sup> See, for instance, the 1869 text by Munshi Shyam La‘l, *Kimiya* (Lahore, 1869), which devoted a chapter to “Poor and Wealthy” (*Gharib aur Matmul*), p. 28-36.

<sup>240</sup> Mahboob Alam, *Karz aur us se mukhlisi ke tadabir* (Lahore: Talim Lahore, 1892).

argued, spent years trying to “invent, experimentalise upon, and finally to bring into general use” new scientific applications and industry, which enriched the whole country.<sup>241</sup> Thus, for India to emulate this path of development, there was a need to improve education and literacy, translate scientific texts into vernacular languages, and disseminate scientific knowledge widely. In this way, comparisons between societies could also help to set aspirations for social reform.

Finally, a third theme around which discussions of society were gathered was sociability. The question of how to live in society in the company of others was central to any imagining of society as a unified entity. For Syed Ahmed, this line of thinking had been spurred by his feeling that the Mutiny was partly a result of a lack of communication and even ordinary interaction between Indians and the British. He, therefore, set about trying to rethink colonial sociability on an elementary, everyday level. Which kinds of social interactions could Indians and the British have with one another? Could they eat meals together? What were the respective etiquettes of each other’s customs that each needed to learn? These kinds of questions animated the pages of the *Gazette*. In 1866, for instance, Syed Ahmed wrote a short article arguing that it was religiously permissible for Muslims to eat with Christians (a topic he would eventually write more about following his trip to Britain in 1869-70). Citing a number of *ulema* and religious texts, he argued that such “social intercourse” was lawful according to Islamic law and custom.<sup>242</sup> Other articles behaviour and manners that were appropriate to polite society. In a moralizing lecture given to the Native Reading Club, and subsequently published in the *Gazette*, Devanath Ganguly argued that “Man is a social being... and physically and morally bound to mingle in society.” (*insaan aik aisi makhluq hai jisko apne humjimson mein shamil ho kar rehna*

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<sup>241</sup> G.F.I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 75.

<sup>242</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, Vol. 1, 14 September 1866, 396.



*be-taba 'i marghub aur zaruri hai*).<sup>243</sup> Ganguly then enumerated several social vices (*buri rasmein aur bad kaam*) that obstructed the objective of mingling harmoniously in society. The main culprits according to him were drunkenness (*sharab khawari*) and lust (*khwahish nafsani*). He argued it was through the moral improvement of society that such vices could be eliminated. Ganguly argued that the spread of European civilization and English education, while useful and beneficial, would not be alone in bringing about this improvement. Indians also had to rediscover their own knowledge and learn about their own civilization.

Ganguly's argument suggests that these discussions of sociability were underpinned not only by comparisons between contemporary societies, but also between ancient and modern societies or even the same society at different stages of development. There was a sense that many important and virtuous customs had existed in Indian civilization in the past, but were now being discarded or ignored. In an article on "The Etiquette of Good Native Society as Distinguished from that of English Society," (*Hindustanion or Angrezon ke adab suhbat aur Aao Baghat ka farq aur Imtiaz*), the writer argued that, although the etiquette of the highest levels of Indian society and the highest levels of English society were similar, certain Indian customs in relation to sociability were superior to English customs. For instance, he explained that when greeting someone in English society, it was customary to offer a handshake, while in Indian society it was more common to embrace and bow.<sup>244</sup> Such differences, he argued, indicated a higher level of civilization since the action was imbued with a deeper meaning. The challenge for Indians, then, was to retain these customs of their own, while still learning from and emulating the scientific successes of European civilization.

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<sup>243</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, Vol. 1, 7 September 1866, 386.

<sup>244</sup> *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, Vol. 1, 3 August 1866, 296.

Comparison as a tool of sociological analysis, therefore, worked across different levels, fields, and time scales. It allowed Indian thinkers to locate Indian society within the cluster of contemporary societies, as well as within the trajectory of its own historical development. Although they recognized that aspects of Indian society, particularly scientific knowledge and education, were not as advanced as in European societies, the comparative method allowed them to envision ‘Indian society’ as an equivalent unit of analysis as any European society. Importantly, this mode of analysis also supplied the language with which concerns about social reform, whether it was poverty, illiteracy, or wedding reform later in the century, could be articulated. The next section turns to how this understanding of society engaged with and drew upon the emerging science of political economy.

### **Political Economy as the Science of Society**

No sooner than the ‘discovery’ of society was made, a science was required that would explain its principles. Political economy was thought by many as just such a science. In his masterly introduction to John Stuart Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy*, W.J. Ashley argued that, for Mill, political economy held out the prospect of being the complete social science for which he had been searching ever since he had discovered Auguste Comte’s sociology in the 1830s.<sup>245</sup> By this time, Mill was already growing disillusioned with his father’s and David Ricardo’s utilitarian rationalism, or the political economy of the “old school” as he put it in his autobiography, which he believed to be too abstract and cold to make sense of the complexity of society.<sup>246</sup> At the same time, Mill did not want to discard this ‘old’ political economy completely, but thought it could be revised and refreshed with ideas drawn from social theory.

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<sup>245</sup> W.J. Ashley, “Introduction,” to John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with some of their applications to Social Philosophy*, edited by W.J. Ashley (London: Longman Greens and Co, 1923).

<sup>246</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1875), chapter VII.

Ultimately, Comte could not be convinced on this point, as he saw political economy as being too “metaphysical” to be methodologically sound for the project of creating a positive sociology.<sup>247</sup> Mill, however, pressed ahead, believing that he could reconcile Ricardian political economy with sociology through a couple of methodological fixes. First, by drawing on comparison and the historical method, he could bolster the deductive reasoning of political economy. Second, by drawing on a new “science of character” that described the character of a society or an age (a science which he called “political ethology”), political economy could more firmly locate its observations in society. Political economy could, thus, become the complete science of the social. As he suggested in his *Essay on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* (1844): “this science stands in the same relation to the social, as anatomy and physiology to the physical body.”<sup>248</sup> Just as those sciences explained the workings of the physical body, so too would political economy explain the workings of the social body, or society.

This was certainly the spirit in which Syed Ahmed, an avid reader of Mill, interpreted political economy. He, too, believed that political economy could serve as the science of the social, and one of his major goals during the early years of the Scientific Society was to produce a definitive Urdu translation of a work of political economy, so that there could be a vernacular version of such a science specifically tailored for Indian society. Speaking in 1864, Syed Ahmed argued that lack of knowledge of political economy meant that Indians were woefully unaware of even the basic principles of government or society.

The natives of India are utterly in the dark as to the principles on which the government of their country is carried on. They do not know that the revenue is collected for their own benefit, and not for the Government. Millions are under the idea that the rupees, as

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<sup>247</sup> W.J. Ashley, “Introduction,” xiii.

<sup>248</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Essay on some unsettled questions of Political Economy* (London: John W. Parker, 1844), 135.

fast as they are collected, are hurried on board ships, and carried off to England! Why is this? Only through their ignorance of Political Economy.<sup>249</sup>

More troublingly, he argued, the lack of knowledge of political economy meant that Indians had no understanding of how to be financially successful in a commercial society. Because they did not understand the principles of how wealth was produced and distributed, they did not know how to organize their private affairs (*za'ati intizam*), how to manage their money, and how to use their labor (*mehnat*) to increase their wealth (*daulat*).<sup>250</sup> It was, thus, imperative to have wide dissemination of political economic texts and ideas in India.

The text that Syed Ahmed chose for translation was, of course, Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848). He explained that he had chosen it because he believed it was the most excellent (*umdah*) of all the works on political economy.<sup>251</sup> But, part of the reason for his choice also seems to be that Mill, like him, was also invested in questions of custom and comparison, themes which were largely absent from the works of the Ricardian generation of political economists who had more abstract and universalist pretensions. As Syed Ahmed noted, Mill's sensitivity to social context meant that not every aspect of his work was directly applicable to matters of Indian society; some of it was more relevant for England and Europe. But, he argued, this was all the more reason why Mill's political economy was important, as Indians needed to learn through comparison how wealth was produced in other societies.<sup>252</sup>

For the task of translation itself, Syed Ahmed commissioned Pandit Dharam Narayan, an alumnus of Delhi College, who as we saw in the last chapter, already had considerable experience in translation as well as knowledge of political economy. Dharam Narayan was part

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<sup>249</sup> *Proceedings of the Scientific Society*, No. 1 (Ghazipur), 31. The quoted passage is the English translation of Mill's remarks, which were originally given in Urdu.

<sup>250</sup> *Proceedings of the Scientific Society*, No. 1 (Ghazipur), 31.

<sup>251</sup> *Proceedings of the Scientific Society*, No. 1 (Ghazipur), 31.

<sup>252</sup> *Proceedings of the Scientific Society*, No. 1 (Ghazipur), 31-2

of the first generation of Indians who had studied political economy at Delhi College in the 1840s. Dharam Narayan had excelled in his class in the English department of the College, particularly in the study of political economy. In 1843, his examination essays on political economy were deemed to be of sufficiently high quality to be sent to the Committee of Public Instruction as samples of excellent student work.<sup>253</sup> In those essays, Dharam Narayan already demonstrated a keen talent for sociological comparisons. In a response to a question about why laborers in England received higher wages than those in India, he answered, “The difference of climates, of institutions, and of the price of corn, are the causes which make the price of labor higher in England than in India.”<sup>254</sup> In response to other questions, he showed a fluent understanding of political economic theory. He correctly answered questions about why it was preferable to have free trade in grain (*because competition would regulate grain supplies*); what the effect would be on the price of cotton if the import duty were increased (*prices would rise*); and why the rate of revenue assessment had little effect on the price of corn (*because the rate of assessment was equal to the unearned rent on the land*).<sup>255</sup> Given his aptitude for the material and his facility with English, Dharam Narayan was asked by the Vernacular Translation Society at the College to translate Francis Wayland’s *The Elements of Political Economy* (1837), which he completed in 1846. Following his time at Delhi College, he found a job as an English teacher in Indore, while continuing to dabble in translation work.<sup>256</sup> In fact, he recalled, he had already been planning to produce a “more comprehensive work” on political economy, one which would not necessarily be a direct translation of any single work, but rather a “free compilation”

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<sup>253</sup> *General Report on Public Instruction in the North-Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency, 1843-1844* (Agra: Agra Ukhbar Press, 1845), Appendix O, LXXXII. Also part of the BL, IOR/V/24/905 series.

<sup>254</sup> *Public Instruction Report 1843-1844*, Appendix O, LXXXIV.

<sup>255</sup> *Public Instruction Report 1843-1844*, Appendix O, LXXXII - LXXXIV.

<sup>256</sup> *General Report on Public Instruction in the North-Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency, 1848-49* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1850), 67. Also part of the BL, IOR/V/24/906 series.

of the works of many thinkers. It was at this point that he heard from Syed Ahmed about the prospect of the Mill translation, and being all “too glad to make [his] effort subservient to the views and labours of the Society,” decided to refocus his energies on a single translation of Mill.<sup>257</sup> This work, published in 1869 by the Scientific Society, became the first Urdu translation of Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy*.

This 1869 text was, in fact, a translation of only one book of Mill’s *Political Economy*. Mill’s original work consisted of five books: Production (Book I), Distribution (Book II), Exchange (Book III), Influence of the Progress of Society on Production and Distribution (Book IV); and, On the Influence of Government (Book V). Dharam Narayan only translated the first book on Production and added a long introduction, which had a summary of the other books. The introduction was an amalgam of Wayland’s “Introductory Remarks” from the 1857 edition of his *Elements of Political Economy* and Mill’s “Preliminary Remarks” from his work. It is worth dwelling for a moment on why Dharam Narayan only chose to translate the first book. The cover of the translated text stated that this was “Part I,” which suggests that perhaps other parts of the book were planned to be translated for a subsequent volume (though, to my knowledge, no second volume was published). Syed Ahmed had also made it known that he believed the original Mill text to be too voluminous (“*taveel*”),<sup>258</sup> and given his desire to bring out a translation as quickly as possible as well as his constant anxiety about the high cost of publishing, may well have settled for a partial translation. Besides these practical reasons, however, there may also have been intellectual reasons to focus only on the question of production. These differences have to do with the novelty of Mill’s distinction between the production and distribution of wealth. Specifically, in Ricardian political economy, production

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<sup>257</sup> Dharam Narayan, *Usul Siyasat Madan* (Aligarh: Institute Press, 1869), 2-4.

<sup>258</sup> *Proceedings of the Scientific Society*, No. 1 (Ghazipur), 31.

and distribution were both determined by universal principles. Mill, on the other hand, believed that only the production of wealth was based on universal principles; the distribution of wealth was based on the customs of society. The laws of production were, therefore, universally applicable, while laws of distribution varied across societies. As he explained: “The laws and conditions of the Production of wealth partake of the character of physical truths. There is nothing optional or arbitrary in them...It is not so with the Distribution of wealth. That is a matter of human institution solely.”<sup>259</sup> In fact, in his book on “Distribution,” Mill, unlike his father, added a section on “competition and custom,” which he believed were the two “determining agencies” of wealth distribution in different societies.<sup>260</sup> And so, Syed Ahmed might well have decided that, for an Indian reader, the book on production was more directly relevant while the book on distribution could be deferred to a later time. Indeed, he believed that the publications and activities of the Scientific Society were themselves best positioned to explain the customs of Indian society as they pertained to wealth distribution, and therefore, may have felt that those parts of Mill’s work, while useful for comparative purposes, were not an immediate priority for translation.

The main argument of Mill’s work on production was that the production of wealth depended upon three fundamental elements: land (or “appropriate natural objects”), labor, and capital.<sup>261</sup> Wealth was produced when labour, which was either mental or physical, was applied to nature using the help of capital such as tools, machinery or money. Mill explained how this process of wealth production bound together people in society. For example, in the production of any commodity or product, say bread, there were multiple levels of direct and indirect labor. In

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<sup>259</sup> Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book II, chapter I. On this point, see also Pedro Schwartz, *The New Political Economy of J.S. Mill* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), particularly chapter 4.

<sup>260</sup> Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book II, chapter IV.

<sup>261</sup> Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book I, chapter I.

addition to the direct labor of the baker, there was also the indirect labor of the ploughman who had prepared the ground to sow the wheat, the plough-maker who had made the plough, the miners who had extracted the iron for the plough, and so on. Crucially, all these forms of labor were dependent on the price received for the final product (in this case, the bread) for their remuneration.<sup>262</sup> In this way, the process of production linked people together in relations of mutual interdependence. The web of these relations of interdependence was society. Mill explained that political economy was the science of society precisely because it was able to show how this “economical condition of nations” was dependent on “institutions and social relations.”

Turning now to the translation itself, it is evident that Dharam Narayan adhered to Mill’s organization and structure quite closely, save for a number of specific translational choices. In analyzing these choices, I am interested in exploring two levels of interpretation. On the first level, there were some minor cosmetic changes to the text, such as excising some longer paragraphs and providing a summary. Dharam Narayan argued that this kind of interpretation was necessary to “make the book free from that heaviness and ambiguity which generally attend a too strict regard for literal translation.”<sup>263</sup> Another set of changes was involved inserting Indian names and references alongside, or instead of, European ones. For example, in a passage on how “natural advantages” impact on productiveness, Mill argued that, despite all efforts, England had not been able to emulate the quality of fabrics in Southern Europe because of the superior atmosphere in those countries.<sup>264</sup> Here, Dharam Narayan inserted a comment about Kashmiri shawls, and echoed Mill’s point that the unique and superior atmosphere of Kashmir had made it impossible to produce the same shawls elsewhere.<sup>265</sup> These kinds of minor translational changes

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<sup>262</sup> Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book I, chapter II.

<sup>263</sup> Dharam Narayan, *Usul Siyasat Madan*, 4.

<sup>264</sup> Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book I, chapter VII.

<sup>265</sup> Dharam Narayan, *Usul Siyasat Madan*, 128.



served to ‘indigenize’ the text and allowed readers to orient themselves better with references that they recognized.

More substantively, however, Dharam Narayan’s translational choices also show how he made sense of political economy on a theoretical level. In particular, the ways in which he translated terms such political economy, capital, society, and others, show that he drew upon early modern Indo-Persian concepts, particularly from the *akhlaq* (ethics) tradition. In *Akhlaq* texts, which Dharam Narayan had certainly studied in detail at Delhi College, he found a discourse about the household, the community, and the city that was analogous to the social concept. Nowhere is this more evident than in the title of the work itself. Similar to his earlier translation of Wayland, Dharam Narayan translated the title *Principles of Political Economy* as *Usul Siyasat-i-Madan*, which translates roughly to “Principles of the Government of Cities.” In fact, *siyasat-i-madan* was a well-known concept in medieval and early-modern Persian literature and referred broadly to a body of princely advice literature on rulership. The most famous example of *siyasat-i-madan*, and the one with which Dharam Narayan would have been most familiar, was in Nasir al-Din’s Tusi’s *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* (The Nasirean Ethics). As I discussed in chapter one, the Nasirean Ethics was intended to be a complete system of ethics, consisting of three domains of knowledge, each of which established guidelines for ethical conduct relating to a particular aspect of kingship. The three domains were: the refinement of manners (*tahzib-i-akhlaq*); the management of households (*tadabir-i-manazil*); and, the administration of cities (*siyasat-i-madan*).<sup>266</sup> It was in the third domain that Tusi, moving out of the space of the individual and the household, discussed the duties of the ruler with respect to the city (*madan*).

Dharam Narayan’s use of *siyasat-i-madan* to describe political economy, therefore, suggests that

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<sup>266</sup> For references to the *Akhlaq*, I have drawn on the published Persian text and the well-known G.M. Wickens English translation. See Nasir al-din Tusi, *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* (Tehran: Intisharat Ilmiyah Islamiyah, [1993] 1413 hijri) and Nasir al-Din Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd).

he was drawing a parallel between the *akhlaqi* concept of city and the political economic concept of society.

He extended this parallel further in the introduction, when he wrote that human beings are by temperament civic creatures [city-dwellers] (“*insaan madani al-taba‘i hai*”).<sup>267</sup> This line appeared in exactly the same wording in the *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* and was most likely borrowed directly from there.<sup>268</sup> Why might have Dharam Narayan insisted on drawing this parallel between *madan* and society? A possible answer lies in the Nasirean understanding of the city as a domain of mutual dependence. Tusi argued that what was meant by “*madan*” was not simply a physical city, but rather a network of association (*jam‘iyat*) and mutual co-operation (*mua‘vanat*) between individuals.<sup>269</sup> He explained that people had a diversity of needs, which could not all be fulfilled individually or by the same person. Luckily, divine wisdom (*hikmat-i-ilahi*) had ordained that there was a diversity of trades (*tijarat*) and crafts (*san‘aat*), and so by combining together (*ijtima‘*), people were able to meet each other’s needs. The city (*madan*) was thus “a place of combination for individuals carrying, by their various trades and crafts, the co-operation which is the means of procuring a livelihood.”<sup>270</sup> This notion of mutual dependence as a way to secure livelihood and fulfill needs offered a compelling analogy to the political economic concept of society, which as we saw earlier was premised upon the idea of mutual dependence through relations of production.

The same reasoning applied in the case of “*mua‘sharat*” and “*jama‘at*” which Dharam Narayan (as well as Syed Ahmed in other writings) used interchangeably as the Urdu word for

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<sup>267</sup> The direct translation of “*madani*” is city-dweller, but Dharam Narayan likely meant something along the lines of civil or social. Dharam Narayan, *Usul Siyasat Madan*, 1.

<sup>268</sup> See Nasir al-din Tusi, *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, 210. Wickens translated this line as “Man is naturally a city-dweller.” See Tusi, *Nasirean Ethics*, trans. Wickens, 190.

<sup>269</sup> Nasir-al-Din Tusi, *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, 210; Tusi, *Nasirean Ethics*, trans. Wickens, 190.

<sup>270</sup> Tusi, *Nasirean Ethics*, trans. Wickens, 190.

‘society’. In early modern *akhlaq* texts, “*mua‘sharat*” was used to describe the relations of dependence in a household. In the *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, for instance, Tusi referred to the “*mua‘sharat*” of individuals in the household, which included the head of the household, his wife, children, and servants, all of whom had specific duties and were dependent on one another for sustenance, livelihood, and household production.<sup>271</sup> Here again, the notion of relations between people living in close proximity to one another to fulfill each other’s needs offered a way to make sense of the social concept. Simply put, in *akhlaq* literature, Dharam Narayan was able to find an Indian language to describe a theory of mutual interdependence. In making this argument, I certainly do not want to suggest that relations of dependence in the early modern household, community, or city were socio-historically similar to modern relations of production. Instead, I am arguing that for nineteenth century Urdu readers, understanding and interpreting political economy within their own intellectual worlds required repurposing an older language of duties and relations between people. The implication of this repurposing was that Urdu discussions of economy and society in the late-nineteenth century became imbued with the moral and ethical concerns of that older language as well. To put it another way, if one was comparing the Nasirean household to modern society, then it was inescapable that the ethical imperatives of the household, its values of prudence and thrift (*kifayat*) for instance, or its requirements for love (*mahabbat*) and justice (‘*adl*’), were also transferred in the comparison and influenced how people read political economy.

In the same line of inquiry, a number of other translational choices in the text are also worth highlighting. As discussed above, the central argument of Mill’s book on production was that the interaction between land, labor, and capital produced wealth. Dharam Narayan translated land as “*zameen*,” labor as “*mehnat*,” and capital as “*ras al-mal*.” While the words for land and

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<sup>271</sup> Tusi, *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, 166; Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, 155.

labor were standard Hindustani (Urdu-Hindi) translations, the choice of translating capital as “*ras al-mal*” was highly unusual because it was not the Hindustani or the Indo-Persian word for capital. Almost all other contemporary translations of political economy used the Urdu and Indo-Persian term for capital, which was “*sar-maya*” or “*asal*.”<sup>272</sup> In fact, in Dharam Narayan’s own 1846 translation of Wayland’s political economy, he had translated capital as “*asal*.”<sup>273</sup> *Ras al-mal*, however, was, and continues to be today, the Arabic word for capital. In medieval Islamic law, *Ras al-mal* had a specific meaning as the price agreed upon by two contracting parties for delivery of merchandise.<sup>274</sup> Some types of *ras al-mal* required that the contracted merchandise be physically present at the time of the transaction, while others allowed for delivery in the future. There were also significant differences on these points between the main Islamic schools of jurisprudence.<sup>275</sup> Given that *ras al-mal* was not the commonly-used term for capital in nineteenth century Hindustani, in what contexts might Dharam Narayan have encountered it and why might he have chosen to use it instead of the more common Urdu word?

One place where *ras al-mal* appeared frequently was in *akhlaq* literature. A text that Dharam Narayan would certainly have been familiar with was the medieval Persian philosopher Al-Ghazali’s *Kimiya-i-Sa’adat* (The Alchemy of Happiness). The *Kimiya-i-Sa’adat* was a standard text in the Oriental department at Delhi College, as well as at other colonial schools and colleges, and an Urdu translation was also made in 1897. The *Kimiya-e-Sa’adat* was intended to be a comprehensive treatise on ethics, which combined traditional Islamic tenets with Sufism and rationalist philosophy. The ethical system of *Kimiya-i-Sa’adat* had four main parts, which have

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<sup>272</sup> See, for instance, Munshi Wazeer Ali’s translation of James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy*. Munshi Wazeer Ali, *Usul Political Economy* (Delhi, 1844), 8.

<sup>273</sup> Pundit Dharam Narayan, *Usul Intizam Madan* (Delhi, 1846).

<sup>274</sup> J.D. Latham, “Salam,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition (1913-1936)*, edited by P. Bearman, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Hinrichs. (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Accessed online. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com>

<sup>275</sup> Haider Hamoudi, “Ras a-mal,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Legal History*, edited by Stanley Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Accessed online. [www.oxfordreference.com](http://www.oxfordreference.com).

been translated as the knowledge of self; the knowledge of God; the knowledge of this world; and, the knowledge of the next world.<sup>276</sup> The third part on the knowledge of this world included guidelines of ethical behaviour as pertaining to matters of trade, occupations, and money. It was in this section that Ghazali discussed *ras al-mal*. The section began by laying out some general ethical principles regarding wealth (*mal*) and trade (*tijarat*). These included that one was not allowed to contract with certain categories of people, such as a minor child, a mentally-unsound person, an enslaved woman, or a blind person.<sup>277</sup> Ghazali also stated that it was unlawful to invest or trade in certain kinds of ventures, such as those that involved anything prohibited or considered ritually unclean. Other guidelines emphasized the importance of fairness and justice (*insaaf*) in transactions, and acting in good-faith and virtue (*bhalai*).<sup>278</sup> With regard to *ras al-mal*, Ghazali advised that the contracted merchandise should be defined as specifically as possible at the time of the contract, including its quality, weight, volume, and so on; that merchandise should be carefully weighed before giving; that the payment should be made at the time of the transaction; and, that it was not advisable to do a future contract for any merchandise the qualities of which would not be known until it was physically present.<sup>279</sup>

To be sure, these guidelines only reflected the thinking of one particular school of thought. Ghazali belonged to the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence, and was not the definitive word on the ethical treatment of *ras al-mal*. But, Ghazali's theory of these topics was the most widely-read in the kinds of curricular and academic training that a translator like Dharam Narayan had received. As such, these ideas would have been a part of his intellectual universe and set of

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<sup>276</sup> Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, revised and edited based on Claude Field's translation (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007).

<sup>277</sup> My references to the text are from the 1897 Urdu translation. Mohamad Al-Ghazali, *Kimiya-i-Sa'adat*, trans. Haji Islam (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1897), 142.

<sup>278</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Kimiya-i-Sa'adat*, 150-4.

<sup>279</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Kimiya-i-Sa'adat*, 146.

references. This does not mean that Dharam Narayan was personally invested in any of these particular interpretations of *ras al-mal*, but rather that his choice to use this term (instead of the more common Urdu term) meant that his understanding of capital, and that of his readers, was inevitably freighted with these ethical considerations. To put it another way, in the *Akhlaq* texts, Dharam Narayan located a tradition that had already reflected at great length about the question of how to trade with others, how to create contracts with others, and ultimately, how to live in the company of others. These ideas shaped his reading of political economy as a science of the social.

### **The Sociology of the Ancient Indian Village**

In 1869, Syed Ahmed embarked on his first overseas trip, travelling to Britain with his two sons, Syed Hamed and Syed Mahmud, who had been awarded university scholarships. The months he spent in London allowed him to sharpen his sociological insights and analysis, and he regularly sent back travel dispatches and sketches of English society, which were published in the *Gazette*.<sup>280</sup> While in London, Syed Ahmed also conducted research at the India Office Library on the history of Muslims in India, a topic about which he planned to write more.<sup>281</sup> His research and reading from this period also ignited his interest on the question of revenue, property, and the history of land tenures in India. The work that resulted from this thinking was a short tract titled *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan (Treatise on the Ancient Village System of India)*, published in 1878. This work has not received much attention from historians, partly because it is not theoretically significant, either in Syed Ahmed's oeuvre or among works on the

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<sup>280</sup> His travel reports and correspondences from London are collected and translated in Syed Ahmed Khan, *A Voyage of Modernism*, translated and edited by Mushirul Hasan and Nishat Zaidi (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011).

<sup>281</sup> Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 3-4.

history of land tenure. Nevertheless, it is useful to discuss it briefly here because it offers a window into how Syed Ahmed's views on custom changed over time.

In writing a text on the ancient village system of India, Syed Ahmed was stepping into a heated contemporary debate about property and custom, and in effect, about the British Empire itself. As Karuna Mantena has shown, one of the chief participants in this debate was Henry Maine who argued in his *Village Communities in the East and West* (1871) that in the ancient Indian village community property was communally-owned. Maine saw the Indian village community as being a model of a primitive and traditional society, and he argued that the British government in India had made a mistake by trying to introduce modern private property rights, instead of preserving the traditional and customary communal ownership of the village community. Maine believed that societies followed a natural evolution from communal to private ownership institutions – that is, from status to contract – and the British government, by artificially introducing private property, had hastened the collapse of the Indian village community.<sup>282</sup> Maine's argument was, thus, implicitly a critique of classical political economy and its purported lack of applicability to 'traditional' Indian society, and a defense of preserving custom.

Syed Ahmed largely agreed with Maine's assessment of the ancient Indian village as a traditional and primitive community, but praised the British government for getting rid of certain outmoded customs and bringing more security and order. He began by describing the social structure of the village (*jama 'at-haye-dehi*), which he argued consisted of two classes: a landowning class (*zamindars*) and a subject class (*ra'iyat*). The subject class were further divided into four groups: cultivators (*kashtkar*); craftsmen (*ahl-e-hirfat*); laborers (*mazdur*); and, those who were independent in means or had free land granted by the landowners (*khush*

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<sup>282</sup> Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, chapter 4.

*bash*).<sup>283</sup> Land cultivation was divided up into four kinds of lands. The best quality land was typically taken up the landowners themselves, who did their own cultivation. The second best quality of land was given to cultivators, and a share of the produce was taken by landowners. Next, land that was not fit for cultivation was usually reserved for landowners, who could try to bring it under cultivation or choose to grant it to cultivators. The fourth type of land was communal (*mushtarqa*), which was set aside for communal purposes, but landowners had great authority over it, as well as over those who lived on it.<sup>284</sup> Sometimes, conflicts between landowners would change the configuration of these divisions of land and bring into being new types of revenue arrangements. For instance, he argued, conflicts led to the splitting up of landowners into different groups (*giroh*), each controlling certain tracts of land, which eventually evolved into the *patidari* system of revenue assessment.<sup>285</sup> When the British government took over the administration of India, he argued, they continued many of these older arrangements, while providing more safety and security of tenure. Thus, unlike his previous view that the British government had ignored Indian customs as pertaining to land revenues and agricultural management, here he argued that the British system of revenue collection was built on previous systems, but had the additional advantage of greater security.<sup>286</sup>

The major change in the British era, however, was in the administration of justice. Syed Ahmed argued that peasants in the ancient village community faced a great deal of oppression, a key source of which was the arbitrary and unjust system of justice. Peasants frequently experienced persistent insecurity of life and possessions and frequent violence at the hands of the landowning class. There was no centralized system of taxation, and peasants could face arbitrary

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<sup>283</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan* (Aligarh: Aligarh Scientific Society, 1878), 3.

<sup>284</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan*, 5.

<sup>285</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan*, 7.

<sup>286</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan*, 10.



and steep taxes and duties (*mahsulaat*) merely for traveling from one village to another.<sup>287</sup> Local village chieftains would sometimes force people into labor (*begar*), with little recourse. There was a village council (*panchayat*) to adjudicate crimes, but the council was typically made up of landowners, and therefore was not always fair or just to peasants.<sup>288</sup>

Under the British government, however, a number of changes were made that helped to improve security and order. Syed Ahmed argued the introduction of a more regularized system for the administration of justice, and an organized system of policing, had improved the overall feeling of security and had the effect of reducing incidence of crime (*waardaat*).<sup>289</sup> The practice of forced labor had also ended under British rule.<sup>290</sup> In some areas where local landowners still exercised a great deal of power, the collection of arbitrary taxes and duties had continued, but in the country as a whole, these practices had largely been ended. More importantly, he argued, the British government also had a positive effect on the reform of social customs. In particular, the government had put an end to harmful customs (*rasmlein*), such as *sati* and the killing of daughters (*dukhtar kashi*).<sup>291</sup> In these ways, the transformation of the Indian village community under British rule had been beneficial to Indian society.

Syed Ahmed's praising of the British government for reforming Indian customs represented a change in his views compared to what he had argued following the Mutiny. At that time, he had argued that the Company's ignorance and misunderstanding of Indian customs had contributed to the feeling of mistrust and anger that caused the Mutiny, and he had specifically pointed to issues like widow remarriage as examples of customs that the British had ignored. Here, he seemed to be suggesting that the reform of certain customs was beneficial and

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<sup>287</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan*, 20.

<sup>288</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan*, 14.

<sup>289</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan*, 19.

<sup>290</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan*, 19.

<sup>291</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, *Risala dar bayan Qadim Nizam Dehi-e-Hindustan*, 18.

necessary. Unlike Maine, then, he no longer believed that Indian customs had to be preserved and protected from change, or that the modernization of Indian society was a mistake. In this, Syed Ahmed represented something of a countervailing tendency in the history of nineteenth century liberalism. It has been suggested that the ascendancy of culturalism and the retreat of universalist liberalism in the second half of the nineteenth century meant that liberal thinkers demonstrated an increasing “deference to the imperatives of custom.”<sup>292</sup> Syed Ahmed, on the other hand, represented a view that grew more, not less, committed to certain liberal universalist ideals as the century wore on. His late-career advocacy for social reform and women’s education, and modern re-interpretations of scripture, though not a part of the present discussion, might well be read in this same light.

## **Conclusion**

Philosophical and theoretical reflections on the ‘social’ were not new to Indian intellectual traditions. But, in the 1850s and 1860s, these reflections reached a greater level of elaboration and popular dissemination than ever before. A cluster of developments in this period drove this change. A breakdown of the social order as grave as the Indian Mutiny invited questions about what was holding it together in the first place. For Syed Ahmed Khan, the answer lay in the category of custom, which he saw as unique, historically-produced attributes of a society that were reflected in the institutions of that society as well as in the manners and behaviours of its inhabitants. Syed Ahmed believed that it was the misunderstanding and ignorance of Indian customs on the part of the East India Company state that caused the Mutiny (though by the late-1870s, he had come to accept that certain customs needed to be changed). Moreover, in the post-Mutiny transformations of the colonial state and society, increased travel and foreign encounters,

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<sup>292</sup> Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 147.

the recognition of poverty as social problem, and questions of sociability further solidified the notion of society as a distinct entity. It was in this context that political economy was marshalled to explain the workings of society. It did so by suggesting that society was composed of networks of mutual interdependence. Specifically, in a political economic model of society, people were dependent on one another through relations of production. Indian thinkers and translators made sense of this model by relating it to other models of social and civic interaction and dependence with which they were familiar, such as the early modern *akhlaqi* concept of city (*madan*) or the society (*mua 'sharat*) of the household. These earlier models provided a language and a conceptual analogy with which political economy could more clearly be seen as a science of the social.

The ways in which *akhlaqi* concepts were used to read political economy have a number of implications for studying the history of economic thought in India. On the one hand, this history might be read as confirming the universality of political economy by showing how easily and seamlessly political economic concepts were able to latch on to Indian intellectual traditions. Indeed, we might take it as given that, as economic ideas travel to different contexts, they draw on local idioms and traditions.<sup>293</sup> But, an exercise in showing how these ideas drew on local traditions need not necessarily be an exercise in confirming their universality (or their difference). It can also point to critiques that only become articulable in a new conceptual and linguistic terrain. In the present case, the use of *akhlaqi* concepts to read political economy points to an important critique of political economy and, specifically, to its conflation of 'society' and 'commercial society.' We might revisit here Karl Polanyi's argument that the "new realm" that was discovered in the nineteenth century and that became known as "society" was, in

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<sup>293</sup> For a critique of this 'diffusionist' method of studying the global history of political economy, see Andrew Sartori, "Global Intellectual History and the History of Political Economy," in Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 110-133.

fact, “economic society.” Political economic theory assumed rules of economic society to be synonymous with the rules of human society. As Polanyi described it, “Since the emerging society was no other than the market system, human society was now in danger of being shifted to foundations utterly foreign to the moral world of which the body politic hitherto had formed part.”<sup>294</sup> The use of *akhlaqi* concepts to describe political economic society pulls apart this conflation of society and market society. By comparing the *akhlaqi* concept of city (*madan*) or the household to the modern concept of society, it becomes possible to see that in these earlier models of social interdependence, people were dependent on each other not only through relations of production, but also through mutual obligations, civic duties, and the demands of ethical conduct. An *akhlaqi* reading of political economy, therefore, restores some of the ‘moral world’ that, according to Polanyi, had become alienated from society.

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<sup>294</sup> Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 116.

## Chapter 4

### The Enchantment of Urdu Political Economy:

#### Wealth and its Sciences in Colonial India

Of course, as in the instances of alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, and other such popular creeds, political economy has a plausible idea at the root of it.

--- John Ruskin, *Unto the Last* (1881)<sup>295</sup>

### Introduction

John Ruskin's comment about the underlying similarities between "popular creeds" like alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, and political economy was intended to be a humorous dig at what he saw as political economy's self-important pretensions of being a serious science. Yet, in making this comparison, even in jest, Ruskin touched on an important way in which political economy was received in the late-nineteenth century. For, many readers of Urdu political economy saw it very much as a science of wealth in the way that they saw alchemy as a science of wealth. In exploring this comparison, this chapter moves away from the academic and scholarly circles of Delhi and Aligarh that the dissertation has explored thus far, and instead turns to the popular reception of political economy. In doing so, this chapter is an attempt to bring closer two distinct fields of historical study – alchemy and political economy – that are not typically studied together, but may in fact have more in common than is apparent at first glance. Alchemy as a branch of the natural sciences and political economy as a branch of the social sciences often inhabit separate domains of inquiry, each speaking a different language and bound

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<sup>295</sup> John Ruskin, *Unto the last*: *Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1881), 1.

by a different intellectual lineage.<sup>296</sup> Alchemy resides at a further distance still because of its perceived association with magical thinking, occult arts, and mystical beliefs, which are seen as being fundamentally incommensurate with a modern science such as economics.<sup>297</sup> Yet, in the material and sources I study here, there was some shared ground between these seemingly disparate sciences. A concept such as wealth, which is the central concern of this chapter, was not restricted to a unified and self-contained body of knowledge that we might now call ‘economic thought’ but instead spanned across many fields, genres, and types of texts. The works I have in mind took a broad, holistic view of wealth: discussions of wealth ranged from accounts of economic activity to commentaries on the social and political effects of wealth to descriptions of physical and chemical properties of wealth-generating natural substances, often all in the same text. Consider, for instance, an 1806 Persian text titled *Qanun-i-Tijarat* (*The Law of Commerce*). Written purportedly by Ilahi Bakhsh ‘Shauq’, an Urdu and Persian poet born in Akbarabad (Agra),<sup>298</sup> the book included explanations of concepts such as trade, coinage, and

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<sup>296</sup> Alchemy has largely been studied as part of the history of natural philosophy and the physical and chemical sciences, as opposed to the history of the social or human sciences. Although often dismissed as an obscure and fantastical pseudo-science, alchemy has now generally been accepted as a constitutive moment in the history of the scientific revolution and a key influence on the thought of canonical figures like Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle. See, for instance, Betty J.T. Dobbs, *The Janus Face of Genius: The Role of Alchemy in Newton's Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). On Boyle and alchemy, see Lawrence Principe, *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and his Alchemical Quest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). On alchemy and the scientific revolution, see Bruce Moran, *Distilling Knowledge: Alchemy, Chemistry, and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>297</sup> Although some historians of science have criticized the tendency to conflate alchemy and magic (see Principe, *The Aspiring Adept*, 188), the perception that the two are linked is widespread, both in popular and scholarly works. See, for instance, Rosemary Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2006) or Lawrence E. Sullivan, ed., *Hidden Truths: Magic, Alchemy, and the Occult* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), among many others. For a discussion of the stakes of linking alchemy and magic, see Stuart McWilliams, *Magical Thinking: History, Possibility and the Idea of the Occult in Western Culture* (London: Continuum, 2012), 92-4. On alchemy and religious belief, see Bruce Janacek, *Alchemical Belief: Occultism in the Religious Culture of Early Modern England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2011).

<sup>298</sup> Neither the text itself, nor the catalogue entry, contains the name of the writer, but the *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature* identifies an Ilahi Bakhsh ‘Shauq’ as the writer of a text titled “Qanun-i-Tijarat,” published in the same year as the text in question. See Nabi Hadi, *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature* (Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1995), 564. This is possibly the same Shauq who wrote an Urdu prose version of the classical

currency, but also went on to include mathematical lessons, multiplication tables, and classifications and descriptions of agricultural products, minerals, and metals.<sup>299</sup> Likewise, in these works, abstract questions of what constituted wealth were frequently inseparable from practical questions about how to acquire wealth, how to enhance it, and how to spend it wisely. In this vein, take another text, from later in the century, an 1891 Urdu book titled *Kimiya-i-Daulat* (*The Alchemy of Wealth*). Published as a guide for students, the book included lessons on economic concepts such as interest, banking, investment, and the value of gold, alongside moral and ethical advice on how to avoid debt and save money.<sup>300</sup> Texts like *Qanun-i-Tijarat* and *Kimiya-i-Daulat*, and many others like them which I discuss in detail in this chapter, suggest that studying the intellectual history of wealth requires stitching back together these different sciences, moral, physical, and economic, that have since been hived off into separate disciplinary enclosures. In doing this, the primary objective of this chapter is to reflect on some of the different ways in which political economy spoke to existing popular understandings of wealth in colonial India. But, I hope that it will also be of interest to fields outside of Indian history as a case study of sources that question the arbitrary distinction between pre-modern and ‘modern’ economic ideas, as well as the hard boundary that exists between the history of the natural sciences and the history of the social sciences.

As with previous chapters, my broader concern here is to understand the reception and translation of political economy in India. In doing so, I focus particularly on the ways in which these translations drew upon existing Indian ideas of wealth. Such an approach is important because translating political economy was not a one-way transfer of ideas from English to Urdu,

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story of Nal-Daman in 1802/3. See Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 205.

<sup>299</sup> Anonymous, “Qanun-i-Tijarat,” 1806/1221 AH, Punjab University Library, Shirani Collection Ms. 2182/5193.

<sup>300</sup> Shaikh Gulāb Din, *Kimiya-i-Daulat* (Sialkot: Punjab Press, 1891).

nor was it a like-for-like exchange of commensurate words, as translation is sometimes assumed to be. Instead, as theorists of translation have long argued, any act of translation is an attempt to create reciprocity of meaning at the point of incommensurability.<sup>301</sup> As Lydia Liu puts it, an act of translation is a “reciprocal wager” which posits a relationship between two incommensurate signs, thereby inventing a “hypothetical equivalence” between them.<sup>302</sup> In other words, rather than assuming that a translated text is inherently equal in meaning to the original text, translation theory calls for interrogating the ways in which equivalence is posited in the first place – that is, the ways in which meaning is negotiated in an act of translation. Using this insight as a starting point, a central question behind this chapter is: how did Urdu translators understand the meaning and subject-matter of political economy, and through what discursive moves did they render it into Urdu? And, consequently, how did this process transform political economy?

Specifically, this chapter explores one particular framework that Indian readers used to read and understand political economy in Urdu (though it was not the only one), which is the discourse of *kimiya* (alchemy). With roots in medieval Arabic science and the Indo-Persian *akhlaqi* (ethics) tradition, *kimiya* was a remarkably capacious concept that encompassed a range of meanings, including: the science of turning base metals into gold and silver; a method of studying the chemical composition of natural substances; a recipe, formula, or prescription for creating something valuable; the means by which “fortune or advantage is attained” or “hearts are moved”; and, in the most general sense, a way of transforming things of lesser value into those of greater value.<sup>303</sup> *Kimiya* was, therefore, a multi-faceted concept that linked ideas of

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<sup>301</sup> Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On ‘Japan’ and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). On the issue of (in)commensurability and translation, see Lydia Liu, ed., *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 1-41.

<sup>302</sup> Liu, *Tokens of Exchange*, 34.

<sup>303</sup> Wiedemann, E., “al-Kimiya,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*, edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Accessed online. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com>



wealth and fortune to the transformation of the natural world. I argue in this chapter that Urdu translators used the language and conceptual lens of *kimiya* to interpret political economy as a science of wealth, change, and improvement. In their interpretation, political economy was analogous to alchemy – it was an enchanted discourse that promised the attainment of great wealth and self-improvement much in the same way that alchemical knowledge promised the transmutation of ordinary matter into precious metals.

The argument unfolds below in three parts. The first part explores the prevalence of alchemy and other sciences of wealth in colonial India to understand the intellectual context in which political economy was translated. The second part then turns to the rise of political economy, focusing on the ways in which certain political economic translations drew upon the language and literary conventions of alchemical texts. At the same time as these traditions were intermingling, alchemy itself was being challenged by the rise of modern chemistry. As chemistry gradually supplanted alchemy as the only legitimate science of matter and its composition, there was increasing skepticism about the truth of alchemical claims of transforming metals and producing wealth. The third part of the chapter picks up this parallel narrative, and suggests that the enchantment of political economy, in some ways, coincided with a *disenchantment* of alchemy and other magical discourses of wealth. Or, to put it another way, the story of the rise of political economy is also the story of the decline of other intellectual traditions and ways of thinking about wealth.

In short, this chapter traces the intertwined history of political economy and alchemy in late-nineteenth century colonial India. Within the historiography of modern South Asia, the argument presented here could be interpreted as an example of how European ideas were, in the

words of C.A. Bayly, “hybridised” with Indian intellectual traditions.<sup>304</sup> The hybridisation thesis is a useful framework to explain this narrative, and the texts I study certainly are hybrid Urdu-English objects. However, by pointing to this particular instance of hybridisation, my intent here is not merely to document a case of harmonious cross-cultural fusion, nor is it to privilege the historical difference of Indian economic writing by claiming that political economy dressed in an Indian garb becomes alchemy. Instead, I want to suggest that the use of alchemy to explain political economy reflects a larger, relatively underexplored history of the ways in which magical and mystical thinking has always been a constitutive part of political economic arguments, not just in India but in other places as well. Political economy is too often read as the “dismal science” that Thomas Carlyle saw it as,<sup>305</sup> or as the “hard-hearted” doctrine of “cold calculation” that John Stuart Mill feared it had become.<sup>306</sup> Much to the contrary, in fact, political economy has frequently relied on the language of the divine, the magical, the sacral, the mystical, and the occult to explain the workings of commercial society. This overlooked history of political economy is replete with images of invisible hands, providential gifts, and magical transformations, to say nothing of the various spectres, spirits, ghosts, and demons that haunt it. In the conclusion to this chapter, I briefly turn to a discussion of this history and offer a brief comment on what the notion of an ‘enchanted economics’ means for the global intellectual history of political economy, and how the Urdu texts I study here fit into it.

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<sup>304</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 277.

<sup>305</sup> Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13.

<sup>306</sup> Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68. For an insightful discussion of the use of the language of “cold” and “warm” to describe economic thought in the late-eighteenth century, see Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 25-29.

## How to Become Wealthy in Colonial India

In 1883, an Indian newspaper reported a curious case of deception about a “Parsee family in search of wealth.”<sup>307</sup> The story went something like this: a few years earlier, a Parsi merchant named Sorabjee Eduljee met one Vulee Mohamed, who claimed to have saintly ties to a city in Arabia. Vulee Mohamed convinced Sorabjee that he was well-versed in the “practical truths of science of alchemy” and promised him overnight riches by turning any ordinary metals into gold. In “anticipation of the promised wealth,” Sorabjee immediately acquired various quantities of mercury, lead, copper, zinc, and other minerals to give to Vulee Mohamed, along with money and other objects, so the latter could carry out alchemical experiments. Vulee Mohamed’s experiments, however, failed to produce the desired wealth, and eventually Sorabjee began to suspect foul play. Following a convoluted series of events, Sorabjee discovered that Vulee Mohamed had been defrauding him all along. He filed criminal charges, and the case was referred to the sessions court at Surat where it led to the imprisonment of one of Vulee Mohamed’s associates (though he himself seems to have escaped jail by reaching a monetary agreement with Sorabjee).<sup>308</sup>

I begin by narrating this incident because it conveys some sense of the compelling attraction that alchemy held in the popular imagination as a science of wealth. In fact, incidents such as these were not particularly rare or unusual occurrences. Newspapers frequently reported cases of people soliciting the services of alchemists who pledged to make them rich instantly. Fraud and deception abounded in this alchemical economy, so much so that a popular Urdu school book of aphorisms and moral lessons warned readers to beware of fraudulent *kimiya-gars* (an alchemist, or one who practices *kimiya*), who, according to the book, were the scourge of

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<sup>307</sup> *The Times of India*, 21 May 1883, p.3

<sup>308</sup> *The Times of India*, 21 May 1883, p.3

every third village in India.<sup>309</sup> These tales of alchemical fraud circulated alongside countless stories of successful alchemical experiments, of fortunes suddenly made and wealth achieved overnight. For instance, the same newspaper that printed Sorabjee's tale reported some years earlier that an alchemist had "at last succeeded in converting a lingot [ingot] of silver into a lingot [ingot] of gold by the combined action of nitric acid and electricity."<sup>310</sup> The circulation of these stories of fortune and misfortune fuelled the demand for alchemical knowledge, particularly for alchemical texts, guide books, and treatises, and represented what the newspaper called a "prevalence of a belief in the power of alchemy".<sup>311</sup>

The association of wealth and alchemy through the production of gold, of course, has a long history in Indo-Persian literary traditions. There are famous episodes, for instance, in the sixteenth century *Ain-i-Akbari* which depict how the emperor himself "learned alchemy and shewed [sic] in public some of the gold made by him."<sup>312</sup> But, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the expansion of print revived older alchemical texts and enabled alchemical knowledge to be circulated more widely than ever before.<sup>313</sup> Aided by the rise of commercial publishing and vernacular presses, as well as the proliferation of printed educational material for government schools and colleges, a wide variety of alchemical texts were published, ranging from works of high philosophy to popular and occult science. Although this chapter focuses primarily on Urdu and Indo-Persian works of *kimiya*, it is worth mentioning that many other

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<sup>309</sup> Babu Shiv Prasad, *Dil Bahlao*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Allahabad: Government Press, 1869). Although the term "*kimiya-gar*" directly translates as "one who practices *kimiya*, in some contexts it has also come to be a synonym for one who is a fraudster.

<sup>310</sup> "Article 10, no title," *The Times of India*, 2 August 1869, 4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com>.

<sup>311</sup> "A Parsee Family in Search of Wealth," *The Times of India*, 21 May 1883, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com>.

<sup>312</sup> *The Ain-i-Akbari of Abu'l Fazl 'Allami*, translated by H. Blochmann, vol. I (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1873), 201.

<sup>313</sup> On print cultures in nineteenth century India, see Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: the Naval Kishore Press and the diffusion of the printed word in colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007) and Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2009).

alchemical traditions in other languages also flourished in India, including Sanskrit works belonging to the Vedic and Siddha traditions. Urdu and Indo-Persian works of *kimiya* frequently drew upon these traditions, blending medieval Arabic and Persian alchemical ideas with older Sanskrit ones. Many of these Sanskrit works also benefitted from the expansion of print in this period and were translated into Hindi in the burgeoning Hindi publishing sphere.<sup>314</sup> The growth and development of a print culture was, therefore, crucial to the popular dissemination of alchemical ideas in the nineteenth century.

Readers of nineteenth century alchemy saw it as a science of wealth in a number of ways. Beyond the question of how to make gold and other precious metals, alchemical texts also offered knowledge of how to prepare miraculous medicines, healthful tonics, and life-prolonging elixirs. Thus, the state of being wealthy was not only linked to material and economic wealth, but also to bodily well-being and good health. The Urdu term “*khush ma‘ash*” aptly captures this conjunction of health and wealth: the term might be translated literally as the condition of living in prosperity, but also has connotations of eating well. It appears, for instance, in a nineteenth century Hindustani (Urdu) to English dictionary as meaning “well-fed,” combining notions of abundance and plenty with healthfulness.<sup>315</sup> The word *ma‘ash* is especially noteworthy in this context because it also came to be the Urdu word for ‘economics’ (and its variant *ma‘ishat* came to mean ‘the economy’). It is outside the scope of this chapter to track the linguistic change that led *ma‘ash*, which often meant subsistence, livelihood, or nourishment in eighteenth and nineteenth century Indo-Persian texts, to acquire the meaning ‘economics’ in Urdu. Suffice it to say, notions of living and eating well were deeply tied to conceptions of wealth, and therefore, a

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<sup>314</sup> David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (London and Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996)

<sup>315</sup> John Shakepear, *A Dictionary, Hindustani and English & English and Hindustani*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Pelham Richardson, 1849), 1005.

science of wealth such as alchemy necessarily addressed both economic and bodily well-being. It is not a surprise then to find recipes both for making gold and precious metals on the one hand, and for health potions on the other hand, in the same alchemical text; the two were, in fact, inextricably linked.

The fundamental proposition of an alchemical recipe, whether for making gold, other precious metals, or health potions, was that a set of natural elements could be transformed into something more valuable and useful through a carefully-controlled process. Mercury could become silver; copper could become gold; zinc could provide the basis for a health-giving tonic; and so on. Wealth, in other words, was the result of the improvement of natural substances. Such a view of wealth assumed that wealth resided in nature and was unlocked when natural substances interacted with one another in particular ways. This is perhaps what Mirza Ghalib, the doyen of Urdu poetry in the nineteenth century, had in mind when he wrote that alchemy was the science of “the effects of things,” that is, the beneficial and improving effects that were produced when natural substances were mixed in purposeful ways. Ghalib’s definition of alchemy, mentioned as an aside in a letter to the poet Munshi Har Gopal Tafta who had written an Urdu couplet on *kimiya*, reflects a larger, unifying logic within the diverse range of nineteenth century alchemical writings.<sup>316</sup> Although different alchemical texts had different purposes and uses, as well as different types of alchemical recipes, they all seemed to share this concern with understanding the “effects of things” and how those effects could be harnessed for useful and valuable ends. This logic runs throughout nineteenth century alchemical writing, whether it was a scholarly textbook on alchemy, a translation of a medieval alchemical treatise, or a popular work of ‘practical’ alchemy.

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<sup>316</sup> Mirza Ghalib to Munshi Har Gopal Tafta, October 4, 1861, in *Urdu Letters of Mirza Asad’ullah Khan Ghalib*, trans. Daud Rahbar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 72.

An example of the textbook variety is an Urdu work such as *‘Ilm Kimiya-i-Mashraqi*, subtitled in transliterated English as “Oriental Chemistry” and published in Delhi in 1892. The book was written by Munshi Ghulam Nabi, an employee of the Ambala post office, in collaboration with Durga Prasad, headmaster of the Normal Army School in Ambala. Ghulam Nabi explained that the work was inspired primarily by Vedic and Rasayana alchemy, and was an attempt to bring the knowledge and recipes of those alchemical traditions to a broader audience. But, Ghulam Nabi struck a careful balance between theoretical and practical knowledge. Although he declared at the outset that the book contained recipes for making gold, silver, brass, copper, lead, tin, iron and other metals, he went on to argue that *kimiya* was in fact much more than simply a way to make precious metals.<sup>317</sup> In his view, *kimiya* provided knowledge of all natural elements, including metals and non-metals, and showed how they could be used for beneficial and healthful purposes. As he explained, “The science of *kimiya* is that science through which the ingredients, properties, and states of matter of *dihat* (metals, minerals, and ores) and *opdihat* (manufactured substances) become known.”<sup>318</sup> This knowledge could then help to identify cures for diseases, improve health and bodily strength, and create valuable and useful products. Ghulam Nabi therefore had an expansive conception of *kimiya*: it was fundamentally a science for understanding the natural world and of using that knowledge to improve life.

The bulk of *‘Ilm Kimiya-i-Mashraqi* reads like a catalog of different natural substances and their characteristics, such as color, weight, malleability, and reactive properties, along with instructions for preparation and possible uses. It aimed, it seems, to be an encyclopedic overview

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<sup>317</sup> Ghulam Nabi, *‘Ilm Kimiya-i-Mashraqi, meaning Oriental Chemistry* (Delhi, 1892), 1. All translations from Urdu are mine. I have provided the original Urdu, transliterated, in the footnotes.

<sup>318</sup> “*ilm Kimiya voh ilm hai jis se dihaton aur opdihaton ke ajza aur unke khawas aur unke ma‘adon ke darje ma‘alum hon.*” Nabi, *Ilm Kimiya-i-Mashraqi*, 7.

of natural substances. One of the ways in which it classified natural substances was based on the theory that every element had an intrinsic set of *mizaj* (states, tempers, or dispositions) which characterized it. There were four fundamental *mizaj* – hot, cold, dry, and wet – and each element could have one or two of the four at once. For example, gold, copper, and iron were hot and dry, while silver, lead, and zinc were cold and dry. These states or dispositions, along with other characteristics like weight and reactivity, determined how each metal interacted with the human body and, consequently, what possible uses and practical applications it could have. For instance, a metal like copper, which was hot and dry and of medium weight, could have a poisonous effect on the human body, and therefore, storing food in copper utensils was not recommended. But, its strength and warmth made it useful in making products such as dyes.<sup>319</sup> In essence, then, the different configurations of natural characteristics of each element gave it unique uses and applications.

*Ilm Kimiya-i-Mashraqi* also described each element in terms of its commercial value and healing properties. For example, according to the book, gold had the greatest commercial value and could be used to produce valuable jewellery, toys, and other ornamental objects, and could also be mixed with certain food products to improve liver strength.<sup>320</sup> The value of silver was secondary to that of gold, but commercially it could be used to produce jewellery and courtly utensils, and could also act as a healing agent for coughs (incidentally, the description of silver also claimed that drinking alcohol in a silver utensil resulted in a particularly potent state of intoxication).<sup>321</sup> In contrast, an element such as zinc had low commercial value, and therefore could be used to produce jewellery and utensils for use by the poor. Zinc, the book explained,

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<sup>319</sup> Nabi, *Ilm Kimiya-e-Mashraqi*, 14-5.

<sup>320</sup> Nabi, *Ilm Kimiya-e-Mashraqi*, 14.

<sup>321</sup> Nabi, *Ilm Kimiya-e-Mashraqi*, 14.



could also be used to make certain soothing ointments to alleviate skin conditions.<sup>322</sup> These conjoined descriptions of commercial usage and healing benefits bring to mind the conjunction of health and wealth described earlier. They reinforce the notion that *kimiya* considered material wealth and bodily wellness to be inseparable parts of the same body of knowledge.

Ghulam Nabi saw *kimiya* as one of the ancient ‘*uloom* (sciences) of India. It is worth dwelling for a moment on the relationship between the concept of ‘*uloom* (plural of ‘*ilm*) and the concept of science, as it helps to explain how ideas of commerce, health, and the natural world all coalesced in the same body of knowledge. Nineteenth century sources frequently translated ‘*uloom* as meaning ‘sciences’. Take, for instance, the *Makhaz-i-Uloom*, a well-known religious text by Maulvi Syed Karamat Ali, translated into English in Calcutta as *A Treatise on the Origin of Sciences* (1867).<sup>323</sup> Or, consider various nineteenth century dictionaries which, too, show ‘*ilm* as meaning ‘knowledge’ or ‘science’ and ‘*uloom* as ‘sciences’. Such translational moves required reading ‘*uloom* as forms of scientific knowledge. Yet, the concept of ‘*uloom* was not entirely analogous or equivalent to the concept of science. As Franz Rosenthal has explained, the term ‘*ilm* in the Islamic tradition referred to an “absolute totality of all that can be known and can be done and is worth being known and being done.” It represented, in a sense, “total knowledge,” an ideal of learning which implied that “all ‘*uloom* must be considered interdependent.”<sup>324</sup> In other words, the study of natural substances was not separate from the study of wealth which in turn was not separate from the study of healing. In contrast, the concept of ‘science’, with its remit of specialization and disciplinarity, does not capture fully this sense of total and interdependent knowledge. There is, thus, a conceptual and translational mis-match between

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<sup>322</sup> Nabi, *Ilm Kimiya-e-Mashraqi*, 17.

<sup>323</sup> Maulvi Sayyid Karamat Ali, *Makhaz-i-uloom or A Treatise on the Origin of Sciences*, trans. Maulvi Obeyd-Olla and Maulvi Syed Ameer Ali (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1867).

<sup>324</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: the concept of knowledge in Medieval Islam*, vol. 2 (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2007), 43.

'*uloom* and science. Understanding this mis-match is important because it explains how discourses like alchemy that were seen as 'science' could encompass seemingly different bodies of knowledge into one whole.

The relationship between science and '*uloom* also points to the revivalist motivations of the text. Ghulam Nabi wrote that he feared ancient Indian '*uloom* such as *kimiya* were in danger of disappearing as a result of the encroachment of Western '*uloom*. "It is well-known to everyone," he wrote, "that in the present age, this ancient '*ilm* of Hindustan is vanishing as new discoveries of western '*uloom* ('*uloom-i-maghrabi*) become prevalent."<sup>325</sup> This threat posed by Western '*uloom* could be countered, he argued, by returning to traditions of Eastern or Oriental '*uloom* ('*uloom-e-Mashraqi*). By juxtaposing '*uloom-i-maghrabi* and '*uloom-i-Mashraqi* as commensurate objects, Ghulam Nabi made the reciprocal move of recasting science as '*uloom* and '*uloom* as science. In doing so, he portrayed *kimiya* as something new but that which was still rooted in ancient Indian traditions. He compared his project to that of watering a plant which had dried up, but now could bloom once again in revitalized form. As he explained, he had written the book with the hope that it would enable "our deceased '*ilm* to reanimate and our ancient experiments to rise once again."<sup>326</sup> Drawing a reciprocal relationship between '*uloom* and science, then, opened the door to a project of reviving Indian '*uloom*, recast as science.

The revivalist aspirations of '*Ilm Kimiya-i-Mashraqi* were part of a broader trend of revivalism in the late-nineteenth century, which included movements of religious reform, re-discovery of spiritual traditions, and translation of older texts and '*uloom*.<sup>327</sup> In particular, a

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<sup>325</sup> "Yeh to sab ko khub ma'alum hai ke fee zamana mulk Hind ka qadimi ilm bilkul nist-o-nabud hota jata hai '*uloom maghrabi* ke naae naae ijad or baatein phailti jati hain." Nabi, '*Ilm Kimiya-i-Mashraqi*, 2.

<sup>326</sup> "hamara murdah ilm jee uthe aur qadimi tajarbe phir karwat le lein." Nabi, '*Ilm Kimiya-i-Mashraqi*, 3.

<sup>327</sup> Barbara Metcalf has argued that in the late-nineteenth century a number of Islamic revivalist movements flourished, the most notable of which was the movement of reformist '*ulama* at Deoband. See Metcalf, '*Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

number of medieval Arabic and Indo-Persian alchemical treatises were translated into Urdu. One such treatise was a thirteenth-century Persian text titled *Haft Ahabab* (Seven Friends). The *Haft Ahabab* was a collection of seven loosely-connected books of alchemy, each written by a Sufi saint, which were subsequently compiled together. The compilation was attributed to Sheikh Hamid al-Din Nagouri (a disciple of Sheikh Mu‘in al-Din Chishti, the progenitor of the Chishti order of Sufism in India) who wrote the first of the seven books.<sup>328</sup> The seven books were not only linked thematically, but each also contained “seven” in the title. The first book was Sheikh Hamid al-Din Nagouri’s *Haft Ahabab*, which gave the entire collection its name. The others were: *Haft Kaukab* (Seven Stars) by Sheikh Suleiman Mandawi; *Sapt Sagar* (Seven Seas) by Guru Gyan, a Nath Jogi who, according to the book, converted to Islam and acquired the title of Sheikh Sa‘adat mand; *Haft Tabaq* (Seven stories or Seven strata) by Baba Hashim Bukhari; *Haft Jauhar* (Seven Jewels) by Hazrat Meeran Sayyid Awadhi; *Haft Aiyam* (Seven Days) by Sheikh Nasir al-Din Narnoli; and, finally, *Haft Dozakh* (Seven Inferno or Seven Hell) by Sheikh Sa‘adiq Multani.

*Haft Ahabab* was translated into Urdu in 1902 in Jaunpur under the title *Al-Kimiya*. The translator, Maulvi Husain-uddin Ahmad, was the manager of the estate of Maulvi Abdul Jalil, a prominent landowner in the Jaunpur area who also appears to have sponsored the translation. The work spurred a series of related publications. In 1905, Maulvi Husain-uddin wrote a commentary on the *Haft Ahabab*, and in 1907 he published one of the seven books – Guru Gyan’s *Sapt Sagar* (Seven Seas) – as a stand-alone text, titling it “*Qadimia*” a word-play on “*Qadim*” (ancient) and *kimiya* (alchemy). Second editions of both these texts were published posthumously under his name in Lahore in 1913. In his commentary, Maulvi Husain-uddin

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<sup>328</sup> Fabrizio Speziale, “Haft Ahabab, resla-ye dar kimiya mansub be Hamid al-Din Nagawri,” *Monthly Journal of Philosophical and Mystical Studies*, 10 (2008): 17-21.

described the painstaking process of translating the thirteenth-century text from numerous surviving manuscripts. He explained that because some of these manuscripts were incomplete or inconsistent with each other, he undertook the enormous task of locating different manuscripts and consulting other “ancient books” (*kutub qadimi*) of alchemy to ensure accuracy. Although these other books are not named in the text, their use in producing the translation reflects the revivalist impulse to re-discover ancient texts. Maulvi Husain-uddin mentioned in particular the assistance of Hakim Noor Alam, a collector of ancient manuscripts, whose supposedly vast “alchemical library” (*Kimiya-i-kutb-khana*) at Attock was crucial in providing access to the texts that were used for the translation.<sup>329</sup> The case of *Haft Ahab*, thus, suggests that translation and collection of manuscripts played an important role in the revival and renewal of ancient Indian ‘uloom.

Maulvi Husain-uddin’s commentary and the text itself both emphasized the utility of *Kimiya* as a science of wealth, and in particular, as means of acquiring enough wealth so as to fulfill the necessities of life. *Haft Ahab* expressed a sense of ambivalence about the pursuit of wealth, seeing it both as a distraction from higher spiritual purposes, but also as a necessity to sustain life. This ambivalence was encapsulated in the opening anecdote of the book, in which Sheikh Hamid al-Din Nagouri explained why he decided to compile the seven books. As he described it, the idea occurred to him when he came upon Guru Gyan, the Nath Jogi who went on to write *Sapt Sagar*, who had spent a lifetime learning alchemy. As a result of this lifetime of learning, Guru Gyan had discovered how to make an alchemical elixir (*iksir*) so valuable that, he claimed, even if he ruled the East and the West for forty years, he would not need to collect one

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<sup>329</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin Ahmad, *Aglimia, A Commentary on Al-Kimiya* (Jaunpur, 1905), 10-11.

grain of revenue.<sup>330</sup> Upon hearing this, Sheikh Nagouri and his five other friends expressed pity for the misguided Guru Gyan who they believed had wasted his life in pursuit of wealth when it could have been spent in pursuit of God, and they turned down his offer to give them the elixir. Guru Gyan was so overcome by their rejection of material wealth and so impressed by their commitment to their spiritual calling that he immediately converted to Islam, and styled himself as Sheikh Sa‘adat mand.<sup>331</sup>

However, despite convincing Guru Gyan, Sheikh Nagouri himself began to ponder the importance of wealth. He realized that, as important as prayer and spiritual pursuits were, no person was exempt from having to fulfill life’s necessities (*zaruriat-e-zindagi*).<sup>332</sup> In fact, he concluded, it was the pursuit of daily needs that prevented people from devoting more time to prayer and worship. He explained, “Life is short, but needs are multifarious,” and a great portion of one’s life was wasted in the search for wealth to satisfy those needs.<sup>333</sup> There was, thus, a tension between the worldly pursuit of wealth and the other-worldly quest for God, and it was the former which kept the latter from happening. Sheikh Nagouri summed up this tension in the following Persian verse:

*Shab chu ‘aqd namaz bar bandam  
Che khord bāmdad farzand-am*

*When I engage the night in prayer  
What in the morning is my child to eat.*<sup>334</sup>

To resolve this dilemma, he suggested that if all seven of them were to combine their knowledge and each write a book on proven alchemical recipes, it would allow people to acquire

<sup>330</sup> “Agar mein chalīs bars tak mashriq aur maghrib kī bādshāhī karoon tau bhī mujh ko aik hib khiraj vusul karne ki parwah nahin.” Maulvi Husain-uddin, *Al-Kimiya, an Urdu translation of Haft Ahbab*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Lahore, 1913), 8.

<sup>331</sup> “...Bil akhir Islam qabul kia, or Islami naam us ka Sa‘adat man qarar paya.”

<sup>332</sup> “Main ne khiyal kiya ke koi shaks zaruriat-e-zindagi se mustaghni nahin hai.” .” Maulvi Husain-uddin, *Al-Kimiya*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 9.

<sup>333</sup> “Umr admi ki qalil aur zaruriatein kasir”. “Bara hissa umr ka talash kimiya mein zaya ho jata hai.” Maulvi Husain-uddin, *Al-Kimiya*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 9.

<sup>334</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin, *Al-Kimiya*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 9. Translation from Persian is mine.

wealth quickly and easily so that they could devote more time to prayer and spiritual pursuits. Sheikh Nagouri argued that alchemy would enable “*istigna*” (independence in relation to fortune, ability to dispense with something, or contentment).<sup>335</sup> In other words, for him, *kimiya* offered means to achieve independence from need and scarcity. It was a way to produce enough wealth so that people could fulfill their daily needs, giving them the time and state of contentment that was required for the remembrance of God (“*yaad-e-ilahi*”).<sup>336</sup> *Kimiya*, he argued, was therefore a way to mediate and resolve the perpetual conflict between the needs of this life and those of the afterlife. The other Sufis concurred with Sheikh Nagouri, and each agreed to write a book based on his knowledge of and experiences with the practice of *kimiya*.

Each of the seven books was organized in a similar format, with each having four sections that were a combination of descriptions of natural substances and recipes and experiments. For instance, the first book, Sheikh Nagouri’s *Haft Ahbab* began with a description and classification of natural substances, followed by instructions on how to make gold and silver, and finally a discussion of mercury and its healing properties. According to Sheikh Nagouri, natural substances that were required for *kimiya* could be classified into three categories: *dihat* (metals, minerals, or ore), *masaleh* (materials or ingredients), and *opdihat* (manufactured substances). There were eight of each category. The eight *dihat* were gold, silver, iron, zinc, tin, copper, lead, and mercury. Each of these were associated with a particular heavenly body: gold was associated with the sun (*aftab*); silver with the moon (*mehtab*); iron with Mars (*marrikh*); zinc with Mercury (*attarad*); tin with Jupiter (*mushtari*); copper with Venus (*zehra*); lead with Saturn (*zehl*); and, finally, mercury, which had a special status in alchemy and was associated

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<sup>335</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin, *Al-Kimiya*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 9. The definition of “*Istigna*” is from John T. Platt’s, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (London: W.H. Allen and Co, 1884), 49. Accessed online. <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/platts/>

<sup>336</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin, *Al-Kimiya*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 10.

simultaneously with Saturn, Mercury, and Jupiter. Next, the eight *masaleh* were sulphur (*gandhak*), yellow arsenic (*hartal*), red arsenic (*meensal*), arsenic (*sankhia*), sal-ammoniac (*naushadar*), borax (*sohaga*), marcasite (*son makhi*), and mica (*abrak*). Finally, the eight *opdihat* were minium (*shangarf*), azure (*lajaward*), saffron (*za 'faran*), lead oxide (*sindoor*), green sulphate (*tutiya-e-sabz*), white zinc (*sang-e-basri*), protoxide of lead (*murdar-e-sang*), and graphite (*sang-e-rasikh*).<sup>337</sup>

According to Sheikh Nagouri, all alchemical recipes consisted of manipulating some combination of the above materials and metals to produce a substance of higher value. Thus, for example, the recipe for preparing gold was a lengthy five-step process that involved taking a particular combination of *masaleh*, *dihat*, and *opdihat*, mixing them in particular ways, and in a given sequence, and then heating the mixture up to a particular level of heat.<sup>338</sup> The recipe had to be followed in extremely precise ways. The types of utensils used, the configuration of the stove or furnace, and the size and strength of the flame, along with many other minute factors, were all crucial to the success of an alchemical experiment, and therefore, the book contained various illustrations which showed how to set up the recipe correctly (Fig. 4 shows an illustration of an alchemical experiment).

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<sup>337</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin, *Al-Kimiya*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 10.

<sup>338</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin, *Al-Kimiya*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 25-9.

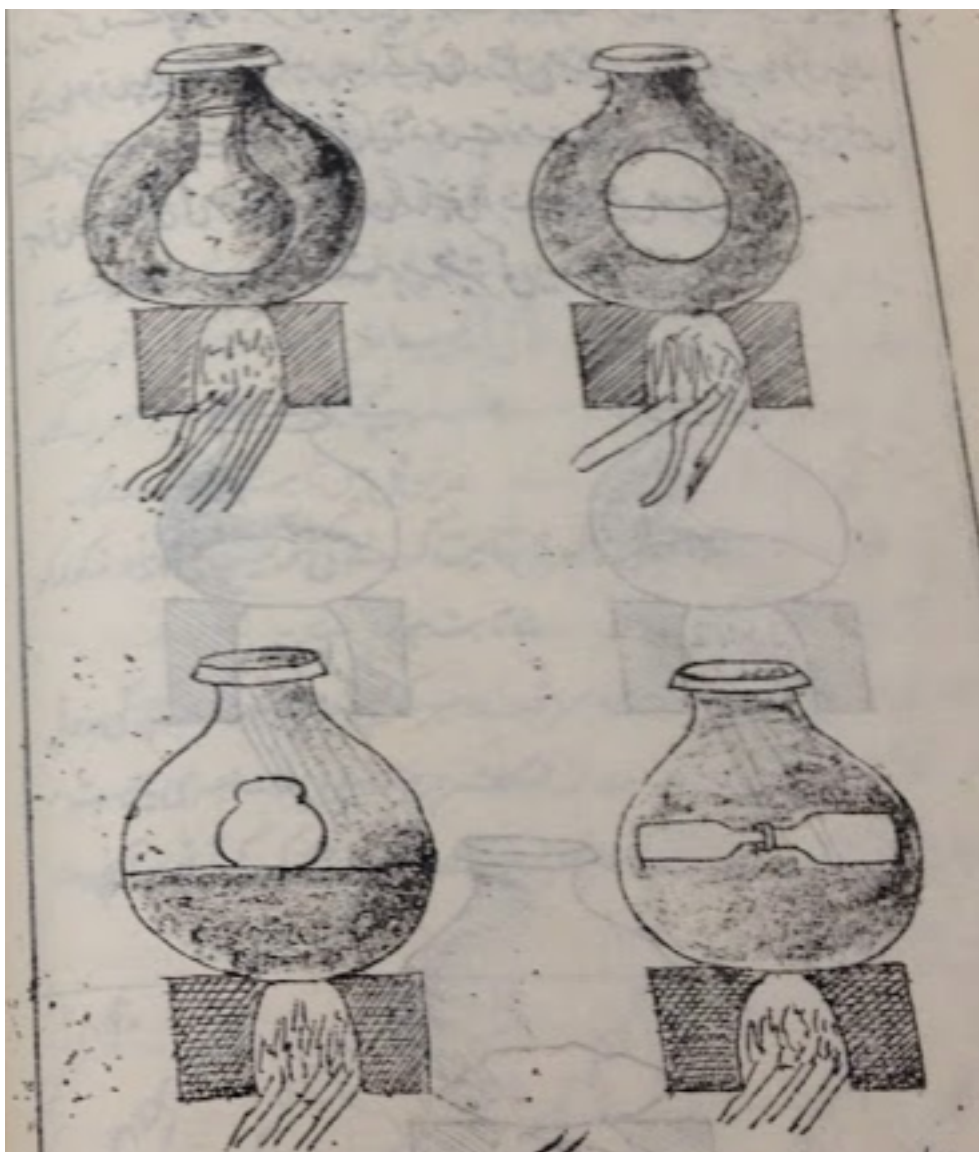


Figure 4: Illustration from Maulvi Husain-uddin Ahmad's *Al-Kimiya* (1902), showing how to set up a particular alchemical experiment.

Maulvi Husain-uddin, too, was deeply concerned with the accuracy and replicability of alchemical recipes in *Haft Ahab*. In his commentary on the translation, he explained that he had cross-referenced the recipes contained in the collection with those in other alchemical treatises.<sup>339</sup> The work spoke to his own interests in the experimental sciences, and in 1904 he helped to establish an Alchemical Society (*Anjuman al-Kimiya*) in Jaunpur. The manifesto of the

<sup>339</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin, *Al-Kimiya*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 10.



society consisted of a number of objectives that combined research and education with healing and wealth production. The objectives included advancing alchemical knowledge through experimentation, educating people about alchemy, creating new tonics and elixirs to treat illnesses, conducting alchemical research on Indian herbs (“*hindi jari bootian*”), and learning from new alchemical discoveries in Europe and other places. Importantly, one of the objectives was also to reduce poverty, and “to help the poor of India be rid of poverty through the work of alchemy.”<sup>340</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin, who served as the secretary of the *Anjuman al-Kimiya*, also envisioned that it would be involved in extensive translational work, and would not only translate older Arabic and Persian alchemical texts but also recent English ones into Urdu. These translated texts could, he suggested, form the basis of a lively experimental agenda, with members in different cities conducting experiments and sharing results at annual meetings.<sup>341</sup>

Although not much is known about the *Anjuman al-Kimiya*, the picture that emerges from Maulvi Husain-uddin’s writings provides some insight into the readership and circulation of alchemical texts during this period. For instance, writing in 1907, he revealed that the organization had 1,272 honorary members.<sup>342</sup> He also described an active correspondence network, with members frequently writing to him and to each other with details of alchemical experiments. The *Anjuman al-Kimiya* saw itself as connected to the wider world of scientific practice: it subscribed to newsletters and journals belonging to scientific societies in London and Paris, and in 1905, launched its own journal titled *Akhbar-al-Kimiya* to provide a space for members to share news and experiments.<sup>343</sup> In addition to newsletters and journals, the *Anjuman al-Kimiya* was perhaps also a network for the sale and circulation of alchemical books. The

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<sup>340</sup> “*Ghurba-e ahl-e-Hind ke Aflas dur karne ke tadabir bezarya-e san’at a’mal Kimiya karna.*” Maulvi Husain-uddin Ahmad, *Aqlimia, A Commentary on Al-Kimiya* (Jaunpur, 1905), 11.

<sup>341</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin Ahmad, *Aqlimia, A Commentary on Al-Kimiya* (Jaunpur, 1905), 12.

<sup>342</sup> Maulvi Husain-uddin Ahmad, *Qadimia, Sharh-e Risala Sapt Sagar* (Lahore, 1913), 4.

<sup>343</sup> I have not been able to find copies of this, and have only seen it mentioned in other texts.

books that Maulvi Husain-uddin wrote and translated show that prices were lower for members than they were for the general public, suggesting that members were seen as the primary target audience for those books.

The activities of the *Anjuman al-Kimiya*, as well as the kinds of works that Maulvi Husain-uddin wrote and translated, represented alchemical practice at an elite and academic level. As we have seen, these works tended to approach alchemy in scholarly terms, seeing it not only as a science of wealth, but also as a way to study natural substances and elements. Moreover, these works seemed to be targeted primarily at other scholars, experts, or educated amateurs such as members of scientific societies. In sharp contrast to this academic register of alchemical knowledge, there also existed a wide range of popular works of alchemy, which contained simplified formulas, recipes, and spells for creating gold or silver instantaneously. Often in pamphlet or small booklet form, and published by commercial presses like the *Naval Kishore* in Lucknow, these books were unconcerned with scholarly exercises like classifying materials or analyzing the properties of metals.<sup>344</sup> Instead, they aimed to present alchemical knowledge to the general public in an easy and accessible way. Described by Maulvi Husain-uddin, with more than a hint of derision, as “*bazaari*” books (that is, books that are common, vulgar, or belonging to the bazaar), these texts offer a glimpse into the circulation of alchemical ideas in the popular public sphere.<sup>345</sup>

One of many such books was an 1875 Urdu work by Munshi Swami Dyal titled *Indra jal* (a term which means magic, stratagem, or trickery).<sup>346</sup> *Indra jal* was, in fact, a popular Sanskrit and Hindi genre of magic. Although historically associated with, and named after, the Vedic deity *Indra*, many *Indra jal* books brought together diverse religious traditions, blending

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<sup>344</sup> On the Naval Kishore press, see Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 2007.

<sup>345</sup> Maulvi Hasn-uddin, *Al-Kimiya, an Urdu translation of Haft Ahabab*, second edition, (Lahore, 1913), 11.

<sup>346</sup> Munshi Swami Dyal, *Indra jal* (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1875).

“Muslim spells” (“*Musulmani mantar*”) with Hindu magic.<sup>347</sup> Swami Dyal stated that his volume was a translation (although it is unclear whether the translation was from a specific book, or from a variety of *Indra jal* books generally). The book was intended for hobbyists of magic (“*Ahl shauq va sahiban mushtāq sho ‘bada*”), and as such, it could be considered as part of what Francesca Orsini has called “entertainment publishing” in late-nineteenth century North India. *Indra jal* fits several of Orsini’s criteria for commercial entertainment publishing in this period. The book included both Hindi and Urdu text, reflecting movement of ideas across the script divide, which Orsini sees as a key characteristic of commercial publishing. It also brought oral traditions (in this case, spells and incantations) into print, showing the expansion of a “neo- or non-literate audience” into the print market.<sup>348</sup> But, as much as the book was part of entertainment publishing, what is of greater interest to the present discussion is the way in which it revealed popular ideas of wealth and alchemy.

The book was organized as a series of magic spells to produce favorable results in a number of everyday situations. The situations were related to concerns about wealth and livelihood, but also to issues of health, wellness, family matters, and interpersonal relationships. For instance, the book included spells to find gold (“*sona milne ka mantar*”); to increase the production of milk in a dairy cow (“*Ga ‘ai bhains ke doodh ziyadah hone ka mantar*”); to find employment (“*rozi rozgaar hasil hone ka mantar*”); to have success in commerce (“*tijarat mein rafah dene wala mantar*”), and so on.<sup>349</sup> There were also spells to heal a wound (“*zakhm bharne ka mantar*”); to avoid forgetting something learned (“*parha hua na bhoolne ka mantar*”); and, to prevent fatigue on a journey (“*rah chale aur thaakey nahin*”).<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Munshi Swami Dyal, *Indra jal*, 1.

<sup>348</sup> Orsini, *Print and Pleasure*, 3, 5.

<sup>349</sup> Munshi Swami Dyal, *Indra jal*, 52, 53, 61,

<sup>350</sup> Munshi Swami Dyal, *Indra jal*, 76, 78, 89, 60.

The book also included an alchemical recipe for making gold, which it titled “*kimiya banane ki tarkeeb*” (method for making *kimiya*).<sup>351</sup> The way in which the word “*kimiya*” appeared here suggests that it was used as a synonym for making gold. Thus, unlike the more expansive definitions of *kimiya* that we have seen earlier, in which *kimiya* referred to the science of wealth or the science of natural substances and their composition, here *kimiya* referred specifically to the process of making gold. To “make *kimiya*” implied the making of gold. The given recipe was also much shorter compared to recipes in other texts. It was as follows:

Take one *tola* each of yellow arsenic, turmeric, and purified mercury and grind together repeatedly using the sap of the *ghikwar* plant (*aloe perfoliata*). Then, make a paste of it and place in two crucibles and close from every side using the slaked dust of mother-of-pearl. Then wrap it in a new cloth and coat it with mud and let it dry. Then place it in bowls of size 2.5 *seers* and burn. When the fire dies out, take it out and leave it and melt some copper. When the copper starts forming globules, add a pinch of the prepared mud (from the crucibles). Gold of good quality will be prepared.<sup>352</sup>

This highly simplified recipe further hinted at the target audience for the book: this was not a controlled alchemical experiment for scholars, but rather a general recipe for the amateur.

Works like *Indra jal*, and alchemical works in general, have tended to be treated by historians either as part of the pre-history of natural science or as representing pre-modern belief in magic and mysticism. However, what these two readings obscure is the way in which these works are also part of the history of economic thought. In particular, the circulation of alchemical ideas reveals popular ideas about wealth. The notion that gold could be produced by mixing certain natural substances, or that ordinary matter could be transformed into precious metals, suggests that wealth creation was seen as being linked to the transformation of nature.

<sup>351</sup> Munshi Swami Dyal, *Indra jal*, 161.

<sup>352</sup> “*Hartal tibbqi haldi ka zehr sodha hua para, in teenon ko aik aik tola le kar ghikwar ke ‘arq mein phir bhar kharal karay, phir uski lubdi bana kar do gharyon main rakh kar sep ke chunay se sab taraf se band karke nai kapre main lapaitkar mitti ka lep kar ke khusk kar rakhe. Phir dhai seer kundon main rakh kar jala de jab aag az khu thandi jo jaye tab nikal kar rakh choray. Phir suddha tambay ko galaday, jab tamba charkh khaye tab us khaak kiaik chutki (jo gharya ke andar se nikli hai) daal de. Sona bohat accha ban jaye ga.*” Munshi Swami Dyal, *Indra jal*, 161.

The logic of alchemy stated that knowledge of natural substances could be used to manipulate those substances, and in doing so, they would be made more valuable. Alchemy, therefore, combined knowledge of nature with the human agency and action of transforming it. As Betty Jo Dobbs, a historian of Newtonian alchemy, has argued, virtually all alchemical traditions are built on two fundamental premises, which are: “1) a secret knowledge or understanding and 2) the labor at the furnace.”<sup>353</sup> In other words, alchemy promised that if labor were to be performed on a natural substance – that is, the labor of measuring, mixing, cooking, heating, or any other action required in an alchemical experiment – the substance would increase in value. The works of *kimiya* examined here reflect this logic. *‘Ilm Kimiya-i-Mashraqi*, *Haft Ahbab*, and *Indra jal* all focus on the ways in which natural substances and elements are transformed and improved if they are labored upon using alchemical knowledge.

Indeed, the concept of laboring on something to increase its value was so central to the *kimiya* tradition that the term “*kimiya*” itself became as a metaphor for describing processes of work, change, and improvement. A number of texts in the late-nineteenth century used the metaphor of *kimiya* to describe the process of improving something by working on it. The use of this metaphor is evident, for instance, in Urdu works like *Kimiya Hikmat* (The Alchemy of Wisdom), published in Lucknow in 1872, or *Kimiya-i Sa‘adat* (The Alchemy of Happiness), a twelfth-century work of *akhlaq* (ethics), translated into Urdu in 1897, as well as a range of other works in the fields of ethics, poetry, and medicine.<sup>354</sup> Works like these used the concept of *kimiya* to describe how something valuable and desirable – in this case, happiness or wisdom –

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<sup>353</sup> Betty J. Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton’s Alchemy, or the Hunting of the Greene Lyon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 27.

<sup>354</sup> *Kimiya-e-Sa‘adat* is the work of the medieval Islamic philosopher Mohamad Al-Ghazali. For more on al-Ghazali’s life and work, see Watt, W. Montgomery., “al-Ghazali,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*, edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Accessed online. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com>. On the translational and publication history of *The Alchemy of Happiness*, see Gerhard Bowering, “Review of Alchemy of Happiness by Claud Field,” in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 54, no. 3 (1995): 227-8

could be obtained through human actions. Specifically, they compared the acquisition of wisdom or happiness to the alchemical process of improving a metal through labor. As the introduction to *Kimiya-i Sa'adat* explained, “just like that *kimiya* which purifies copper and brass to make them gold... this *kimiya* [in this book] purifies man’s soul from being animalistic to being angelic.”<sup>355</sup> *Kimiya*, in other words, functioned as a metaphor for self-improvement. Just like a metal could be improved and made valuable through alchemical operations, so could man’s soul be improved through ethical actions.

The picture that emerges from the above discussion is that *kimiya* was a broad, widely prevalent concept in late-nineteenth century India. It referred primarily to a long tradition of writings on how to create wealth by transforming natural elements into valuable metals and healthful substances. At the same time, it also found usage as a metaphor to describe processes of self-improvement. *Kimiya* was, in short, a conceptual node which connected ideas of transforming nature, creating wealth, and improving things. With this background in mind, the chapter now turns to the next section which looks at how the language of *kimiya* was used to explain political economy when it began to be translated and read in India. For, as it turns out, a science of improving natural substances to produce wealth was a useful way to understand political economy.

### **Political Economy and the Alchemies of Wealth**

In 1890, Maulvi Abu al-Hasan, an Awadh-based scholar tasked with translating John Stuart Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) into Urdu, exasperatedly declared, “To translate a book on the art of politics from English to Urdu is like trying to chew beans made

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<sup>355</sup> “Jis tarah woh *kimiya* jo tambe peetal ko pak saaf kar ke sona kar deta hai...usi tarah yeh *kimiya* bhi jo aadmi ki asl ko charpayigi ki kisafat se malaika ki safai or nifasat ko pahuanchati hai.” Mohamad Al-Ghazali, *Kimiya-e-Sa'adat*, trans. Haji Islam (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1897), 3.

of metal.”<sup>356</sup> The source of the Maulvi’s frustration lay in his view that the “art of politics” was a “modern” (*jadid*) field of knowledge, and as such, it contained many new words that did not have exact equivalents in Urdu. He explained, “Because this art of politics is not even in our country, whence would its terminology be in our language?”<sup>357</sup> In asking this question, Maulvi Abu al-Hasan highlighted a difficulty that Urdu translators (or, indeed, translators of any language) often experienced, particularly when translating texts belonging to a seemingly new body of knowledge. Faced with the challenge of translating words that did not have exact equivalents, they had several choices: they could find words that were close in meaning to the original words; they could transliterate the original words; or, they could coin new words. The choices they made reflected not only their own understanding and interpretation of the text, but it also shaped how the text circulated and how readers perceived it. In this section, I examine some of the alchemy-focused translations of political economy, and I consider the translational choices that were made to draw the comparison between alchemy and political economy. Ultimately, I argue that, in their quest to find linguistic analogs for political economic theory of wealth creation, some Urdu translators turned to the language of *kimiya* (alchemy).

One of the first and most crucial translational choices that a scholar faced when translating a work of political economy was the decision of how the term “political economy” itself should be translated into Urdu. The answer depended in large part on what the translator understood the purpose and subject matter of political economy to be. As discussed in previous chapters, there are at least three different readings of political economy that can be deduced from

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<sup>356</sup> “...is fun ki kitab ko angrezi se urdu mein tarjuma karna goya lohay ke channay chabana hai,” Maulvi Abu al-Hasan, “Translator’s Note,” in John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, translated as *Mua ‘alim al-Siyāsāt, Kitāb Siyāsāt Madan be Tarz Jadid* by Maulvi Abu al-Hasan (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1890), 4.

<sup>357</sup> “Kyon ke yeh fun siyāsāt hee hamare mulk mein nahin hai, tau iske mustalahat hamari zuban main kahan se ayein”

these translational choices. An example of the first is Pundit Dharam Narayan's 1846 translation of Francis Wayland's *Elements of Political Economy*, which he titled "Usul 'ilm intizam al-Madan" (or Rules of the Administration of Cities).<sup>358</sup> A number of other translators followed his lead. In 1865, the Aligarh Scientific Society translated William Nassau Senior's *Political Economy* as "Risala intizam al-Madan" (or Treatise on the Administration of Cities). These choices indicated that the translator saw political economy as something akin to the art of government. It also suggested that the translator took political economy to be in the same conceptual and intellectual terrain as older Arabic and Indo-Persian works in the category of "intizam al-Madan" (governance or administration). As Maulvi Abu al-Hasan explained later in his Mill translation, works on politics existed in "our ancient 'uloom and in Sanskrit it was called *rajneet* and in Arabic it was called *siyasat al-madan*."<sup>359</sup> Political economy, in this reading, was not a new discipline, but similar to ancient Indian 'uloom about governance.

A second way to translate political economy was simply to transliterate the term "political economy" into Urdu. For instance, as discussed in chapter two, Munshi Wazeer Ali's 1844 translation of James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* appeared as "Usul political economy" (The Rules of Political Economy, with "political economy" transliterated into Urdu script). The translational choice here of deferring to the English word suggested that Munshi Wazeer Ali saw political economy as an entirely new science with no comparable antecedents in Indian intellectual traditions. As he explained in his preface to the work, "political economy is for the people of India a modern science" and as such it contained "certain phrases or

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<sup>358</sup> Following Platt's *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English*, I have translated "madan" as "cities", but it could also appear in some contexts as "polity".

<sup>359</sup> "...hamare qadimi 'uloom main maujud hai. Aur Sanskrit main isko rajneet aur arbi mein siysat madan kehte hain." Maulvi Abu al-Hasan, "Translator's Note," in John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, translated as *Mua'alim al-Siyāsāt, Kitāb Siyāsāt Madan be Tarz Jadid* (Lucknow: Naval Kishor Press, 1890), 3.



terminology that they will not have heard before or of which they will not be aware.”<sup>360</sup> Munshi Wazeer Ali’s translational strategy was to adopt these unfamiliar phrases or terminology into the Urdu script.

Finally, and what is most relevant to this chapter, some translators turned to the language of alchemy, translating “political economy” as the “alchemy” or the “elixir” of wealth. For example, in 1900, Maulvi Mohamad Zaka-ullah published a text which he claimed was mostly a translation of William Stanley Jevons’s political economy. He titled it *Risala Kimiya-i-Daulat* (Treatise on the Alchemy of Wealth). In the same year, he published an adaptation of Henry and Millicent Fawcett’s political economy, which he named *Risala Iksir-i-Daulat* (Treatise on the Elixir of Wealth). In addition to these translations, a number of original school books and texts also appeared in the late-nineteenth century which used the language of alchemy to describe political economy.

There were, in other words, a number of different conceptual and rhetorical models available in the world of nineteenth century Urdu and Indo-Persian writing that could accommodate and explain political economy (though these models were not always as distinct as I have described them and often overlapped with one another). Here, my focus is only on *kimiya* and the specific ways in which it supplied the language for political economic ideas in translation. Specifically, I ask here: Why would an Urdu translator describe political economy as *Kimiya*? What was it about political economy that lent itself to being read or described in this way? And, consequently, how did this reading influence the reception of political economic ideas in India?

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<sup>360</sup> “...political economy ‘ahl hind ke vastey aik ilm jadid hai’; “...ba‘az mahavarat ya istilahaat aisey avein keh jo unhon ne pehtar kabhi nahin sunay ya jinse voh waqif nahin hain.” James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, trans. by Munshi Wazeer Ali as *Usul Political Economy* (Delhi, 1844), 1.

One possible explanation for describing political economy as *kimiya* is that the term *Kimiya* was a generalized metaphor denoting improvement and enrichment. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous section, a number of non-alchemical works used the term as well. For example, works about spiritual or moral improvement sometimes used terms such as the alchemy of happiness (*kimiya sa'adat*) or the alchemy of wisdom (*kimiya hikmat*) and so on. So, there already existed literary precedents of using the term *kimiya* in relation to non-alchemical ideas and, in particular, to describe the acquisition of desirable things or qualities. The same, perhaps, was the case with political economy. Since political economy addressed questions of wealth, it may have seemed relevant to describe it using a popular metaphor for enrichment. If this explanation is correct, it suggests that there was no unique conceptual relationship between political economy and *Kimiya*. Rather, *Kimiya* was a widely-available metaphor for all sorts of subjects related to wealth and improvement. This appears to be the case especially with works that used the term *kimiya* only in the title. An example of such a work was an Urdu political economy book titled *Kimiya*, published in Lahore in 1869. The writer, Munshi Shyam La'l, an extra-assistant commissioner in Ambala, intended for the book to be used in government schools, and it consisted of a series of eight simplified lessons on political economic concepts, such as labor, wages, rent, and trade.<sup>361</sup> As far as it is possible to tell, the book was not a translation, but was likely adapted from an introductory political economy work. Despite the title being *kimiya*, the work did not offer any specific engagement with or exploration of alchemical ideas. The connection between alchemy and political economy was drawn at a superficial level – by putting *kimiya* in the title, the writer merely implied that alchemy and political economy were connected through what might be described as a kind of transitive logic (that is, if  $a=b$  and  $b=c$ , then  $a=c$ . Or, in this case, if alchemy = wealth and political economy = wealth, then alchemy = political

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<sup>361</sup> Munshi Shyam La'l, *Kimiya* (Lahore, 1869).

economy). *Kimiya*, thus, acted as a convenient metaphor to indicate that the work dealt with questions of wealth.

But, beyond this general, metaphorical use of the term *kimiya*, I think it is also possible to read in certain texts an attempt to suggest a deeper connection between political economic theory and alchemical change. This connection stemmed, in particular, from the definition of political economy as a science of wealth. Although the exact definition of political economy was by no means uncontested,<sup>362</sup> many political economists of the nineteenth century defined it, following Say and Ricardo, as the science which explained the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth (some thinkers, like James Mill, also added exchange of wealth to this definition, while others like William Nassau Senior limited it to production and distribution). Of these different components, the production of wealth seemed to have the most direct parallels with alchemy. According to James Mill, in political economy the production of wealth referred to the “production of commodities useful and agreeable to man.”<sup>363</sup> Mill argued that commodities were produced when human labor acted on natural substances, thereby creating certain “effects”. These effects, he explained, were caused by, and intrinsic to, the “properties of matter.”<sup>364</sup> Mill suggested that there was an element of mystery and unknowability about how and why those effects took place – human beings only knew which kinds of effects would take place when they created certain kinds of motion. As he explained:

[Man] does nothing but produce motion. He can move things toward one another, and he can separate them from one another. The properties of matter perform the rest. He moves ignited iron to a portion of gunpowder, and an explosion takes place. He moves the seed to the ground, and vegetation commences. He separates the plant from the ground, and

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<sup>362</sup> See, for instance, John Stuart Mill’s 1844 text, *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, which took the “definition of political economy” to be one of the unsettled questions of the discipline. John Stuart Mill, *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* (London: John W. Parker, 1844), essay V.

<sup>363</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Henry G. Bohn, [1821], 1844), I.I. 10. Accessed online <http://www.econlib.org/library/MillJames/mljElm.html>. In the Urdu translation of Mill’s work, commodities in this sentence was translated as “*ajnas*”. See Mill, *Elements*, trans. Munshi Wazeer Ali, 6.

<sup>364</sup> Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, I.0.3.

vegetation ceases. Why, or how, these effects take place, he is ignorant. He has only ascertained, by experience, that if he perform such and such motions, such and such events are the consequence.<sup>365</sup>

In other words, human labor, in the abstract sense, simply consisted of causing motion to act on matter – such as by mixing iron and gunpowder or putting seeds in soil – which then created effects determined by the properties of that matter. To a reader of alchemy, these arguments might have sounded familiar in a number of ways. In both alchemy and political economy, wealth was produced by laboring on matter. Further, one might recall Ghalib's description of alchemy as a science of the "effects of things" – just as in alchemy, wealth in political economy was also premised on manipulating the "properties of matter" to create beneficial effects. In both sciences, it was the human agency of improving matter that produced wealth.

These connections are evident in the pair of works that Maulvi Mohamad Zaka-ullah published in 1900. The first was *Risala Kimiya-i Daulat* (Treatise on the Alchemy of Wealth), a translation of W.S. Jevons's *A Primer on Political Economy* (1878). Although the translation hewed closely to Jevons's text, Zaka-ullah added his own commentary in parts and included additional explanatory passages not in Jevons's text. Zaka-ullah's second, shorter book was *Risala Iksir-i Daulat* (Treatise on the Elixir of Wealth), which appears to be a translation of Millicent Fawcett's *Political Economy for Beginners* (1870), which itself was a simplified version of Henry Fawcett's earlier *Manual of Political Economy* (1863). Although there were important theoretical differences between Jevons and the Fawcetts, particularly on the question of value and utility,<sup>366</sup> Zaka-ullah did not present the texts as holding two different theoretical

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<sup>365</sup> Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, I.0.3.

<sup>366</sup> On some of the differences between Jevons and Fawcett, see Donald Winch, "The plain man's political economist: a discussion," in *The Blind Victorian: Henry Fawcett and British Liberalism*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 111-19.

positions, but rather intended for them to be complementary to each other with the second being an abridged version of the first and targeted at school-age students.

The notion that there was a connection between political economy and alchemy was, in fact, implied in the Jevons text. Jevons explained that the purpose of political economy was to show how to reduce poverty and create wealth. “Political economy,” he wrote, “aims at teaching what should be done in order that poor people may be as few as possible.”<sup>367</sup> He argued that political economy was not unique in this aim – in fact, there were a number of other sciences that also “assist us in reaching the same end.” According to him, one of these other sciences was chemistry, which “teaches how useful substances may be produced.” Jevons explained that by comparing political economy with chemistry, he did not mean that the two were similar, but rather that they had similar ends: both sciences had the same objective of creating wealth.<sup>368</sup> In his translation of this passage, which he included in his extended introduction, Zaka-ullah added a parenthetical aside, pointing out that what Jevons was calling “chemistry” actually originated from “*ilm Kimiya*” (alchemy).<sup>369</sup> Thus, in his view, alchemy and political economy were linked in purpose.

Following the structure of Jevons’s work, Zaka-ullah began his translation by describing the three components needed for the production of wealth in political economic theory. He explained that the first two components were labor (*mehnat*) and what he called “special natural substances” (*khas qudrati ashya*).<sup>370</sup> If one compares this to Jevons’s text, it becomes evident that Jevons had called these two components “labor” and “land”. By translating land as “special natural substances,” Zaka-ullah appeared to be making a comparison to alchemy. He explained

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<sup>367</sup> W.S. Jevons, *A Primer on Political Economy* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878), Introduction, Section I.

<sup>368</sup> Jevons, *Primer on Political Economy*, Section I.

<sup>369</sup> Mohammad Zaka-ullah, *Risala-i-Kimiya-i-Daulat* (Delhi, 1900), 6.

<sup>370</sup> Zaka-ullah, *Risala-i-Kimiya-i-Daulat* (Delhi, 1900), 40

that these natural substances were the “*masaleh*” that nature provides, such as plants, animals, minerals, metals, and so on.<sup>371</sup> As we might recall from the previous section, *masaleh* was a popular alchemical term meaning “ingredients” or “materials”. Alchemical texts used the term “*masaleh*” as a classification of natural substances, as well as to describe the ingredients in an alchemical recipe. The third component of wealth production in Jevons’s text was capital. Zaka-ullah translated this variously as “*sarmaya*” or “*asbab*”, using the terms interchangeably. *Sarmaya* is the conventional translation of “capital,” while *asbab* refers primarily to tools or implements. So, in a sense, the political economic trifecta of land, labour, and capital, was rendered as natural substances, labour, and tools/implements. These translational choices had the effect of making political economy less abstract, by linking it to a specific form of wealth production. The classic political economic equation, whereby wealth is produced when capital is applied to land by labor, was therefore analogized to the alchemical process of producing gold by using certain tools and utensils to mix natural ingredients.

The main thrust of alchemical transformation appeared in Zaka-ullah’s description of labor in a remarkable passage that is not in Jevons’s text and appears to be Zaka-ullah’s own writing. “It is human labor,” he wrote, “that can transform the faces of matter (*madda*)...and use it to produce such things that can fulfill our needs.”<sup>372</sup> Zaka-ullah saw labor as something which could re-shape matter in the manner of an alchemical transformation. Labor, he argued, can “raise matter from one state (*muqam*) and put it into a different state.”<sup>373</sup> As a result of this transformation of the states of matter, he continued, “labor introduces benefit (*afadat*) in

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<sup>371</sup> Zaka-ullah, *Risala-i-Kimiya-i-Daulat* (Delhi, 1900), 42

<sup>372</sup> “*Insaan ki mehnat hai ke voh maddeh ki sooratein badal kar isko baray sawaray aur is se aisey cheezein tayar karay ke voh hamari hajatein पूरी karein.*” *Risala-i-Kimiya-i-Daulat*, 47.

<sup>373</sup> “*Maddeh ko utha kar aik muqam se doosray muqam mein ley jaaen.*” *Risala-i-Kimiya-i-Daulat*, 47.

matter”.<sup>374</sup> The image of matter becoming more valuable and beneficial by changing states would not be out of place in an alchemy text, and it points to the analogy Zaka-ullah perhaps saw between alchemical transformation and political economic transformation. In both cases, labor transformed an ordinary thing of little value into one of greater value.

Thus, in this interpretation, the language of alchemy operated in two ways in relation to political economy. First, political economy was an “alchemy of wealth” because it provided an analysis of the constituent parts of wealth. Just as an alchemical experiment could reveal, by chemical separation, the different elements that formed a composite substance, so could the science of political economy show the ‘elements’ that combined together to create wealth (in this case, land, labor, and capital). In fact, in his second text, the *Risala Iksir-i Daulat*, Zaka-ullah included a flowchart-like diagram to show what wealth would look like conceptually, if its different constituent parts were to be separated (see illustration in Fig. 5 below).<sup>375</sup> Reading political economy as alchemy, therefore, implied a certain mode of analysis of separating different elements of a concept to understand the larger whole. Secondly, and more importantly, political economy was an “alchemy of wealth” because it showed how wealth could be produced by laboring on nature. In other words, just as alchemy specified how substances of lesser value could be transformed into those of higher value, so did political economy explain how wealth could be produced by performing labor on simple ingredients. Alchemy, therefore, operated as a metaphor for understanding both the method and theory of political economy. By showing how this metaphor was deployed, my purpose here is not to imply that alchemy and political economy were conceptually similar, or that political economy in translation became alchemy. Instead, I want to suggest that for nineteenth century Urdu readers, understanding and situating political

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<sup>374</sup> “*Maddeh mein afadat paida karta hai.*” *Risala-i-Kimiya-i-Daulat*, 47.

<sup>375</sup> Mohammad Zaka-ullah, *Risala-i-Iksir-i-Daulat* (Delhi, 1900), i.

economy within their own intellectual world required interpreting it as *Kimiya-i Daulat* or “the alchemy of wealth”. To put it another way, alchemy offered the tools needed to explain political economy in Urdu.

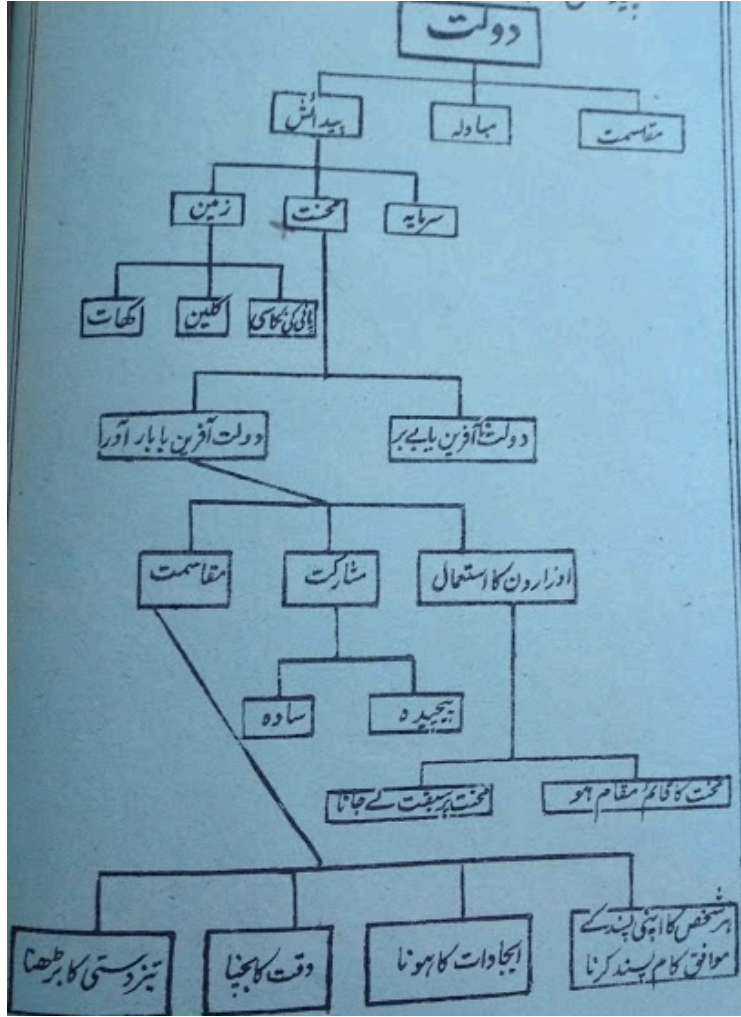


Figure 5: A graphical representation of Urdu political economy, from Munshi Zaka-ullah’s *Risala iksir-daulat* (1900), showing the various constituent parts of wealth

This enchanted interpretation of political economy as an alchemy of wealth influenced, to some degree, how political economy was received and circulated. The idea that political economy was metaphorically similar to alchemy suggested that political economy was a science of personal enrichment, and that it could be read in a prescriptive way to become wealthy. Many translators of political economy marketed their translations as recipes for acquiring wealth. The



Urdu translator of John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* noted in the introduction that political economy as a science was "essential to all who aspire not only to improve the Social and Political condition of their country, but also to those *who wish to see their efforts in the sphere of their domestic economy crowned with desired success.*"<sup>376</sup> Likewise, the 1891 Urdu school book, *Kimiya-i Daulat* (The Alchemy of Wealth), which I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, combined basic political economic theory with moral and ethical lessons on how to save money and become rich. Reading political economy as alchemy, in other words, opened the door to seeing it as a guide to personal enrichment.

Finally, it is also worth pointing out that there were limits to this metaphor too. As with any translational exchange, the match between the original concept and the translated concept would remain imperfect. Alchemy could only go so far in capturing the theory of political economy. To take just one example of this mis-match, in political economic theory, categories like labor and capital were abstract categories, not referring to any specific form of labor or any specific type of wealth, but to those concepts in the abstract sense. It was the abstraction of political economic categories that allowed them to explain many different kinds of commercial activity. In contrast, the labor and wealth of alchemy referred to very specific forms of labor (what Betty Jo Dobbs called "the labor at the furnace") and to specific forms of wealth (gold and precious metals). Ultimately, then, alchemy would remain bound to its own particular categories and reasoning, which were gradually being challenged by the rise of other sciences. The final section now turns to these challenges, showing how alchemy eventually fell out of favor as a science of wealth.

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<sup>376</sup> Pundit Dhurm Narayan, preface, *Rudiments of Political Economy, compiled from the well-known work of John Stuart Mill* (Aligarh, 1869), 5. Italics are mine.

## The Rise of Chemistry and the Disenchantment of Alchemy

So far this chapter has made two interrelated arguments: first, it has argued that alchemy was a widely circulating science of wealth in the world of nineteenth-century Urdu writing, and second, it has suggested that this science of wealth was sometimes used to read political economy in translation. But, any discussion of alchemy in the nineteenth century would be incomplete without thinking about how its status and perception changed over the course of the century. In particular, alchemical knowledge increasingly began to be challenged by the rise of professional chemistry, a specialized discipline which eventually displaced alchemy as the only legitimate science of matter and natural substances. By calling into question alchemical understandings of matter and nature, chemistry texts fuelled growing skepticism about claims of producing wealth through the transformation and transmutation of metals. In this section, I briefly explore this parallel narrative of the rise of chemistry in colonial India, showing how alchemy gradually lost its status as a science of wealth and what implications this loss has for understanding political economy.

Although alchemy and chemistry now appear to be distinct bodies of knowledge, they have historically been deeply intertwined. Early modern natural philosophers did not always make a distinction between the two, and carried out practices that would now cut across both chemistry and alchemy.<sup>377</sup> The intertwining of alchemy and chemistry is also evident in early modern Urdu translations of the terms. The earliest Hindustani (Urdu) dictionaries in the eighteenth century translated both “chymistry” and alchemy as *kimiya*, and for a long time, the same word was used to describe both.<sup>378</sup> In the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

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<sup>377</sup> Bruce Moran, *Distilling Knowledge: Alchemy, Chemistry, and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>378</sup> John Borthwick Gilchrist, *A Dictionary, English and Hindoostanee*, Volume I (Calcutta: Stuart and Cooper, 1787), 26, 143.

however, the rise of professional scientific societies, circulation of scientific journals, and the growth of universities and colleges marked increasing distance between alchemy and chemistry. Practitioners and scholars of chemistry drew upon alchemical ideas and methods, but sought to disenchant alchemy of its magical and mystical associations. They argued, for instance, that all elements were fundamentally made up of indivisible atoms (rather than being made up of different humours or states), and therefore, it would not be possible for a metal to transform into another metal.<sup>379</sup> Or, they argued, if such a thing were ever possible, it would require altering the chemical and atomic structure of the metal, rather than achieving the transformation through spells, incantations, or recipes that called for simply mixing different substances together. Although alchemy and chemistry existed concurrently for some time, chemistry grew out of alchemy: alchemy, evacuated of its magical content, became chemistry.

One of the earliest books of chemistry in Urdu was an 1839 work titled *Conversations on Chemistry in English and Urdu*, published by the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta. As the title suggests, it was a bilingual work, with Urdu text on one side of the page and its English translation on the other. The book appears to be adapted from (though not a direct translation of) Jane Marcet's hugely popular work *Conversations on Chemistry*, which was published in London in 1806 and subsequently went through many editions both in Britain and globally.<sup>380</sup> Like Marcet's work, the Urdu chemistry book was organized as a series of conversations between two people, presumably a teacher and a student, in which the student asked questions

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<sup>379</sup> Mark Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy: Occultism and the Emergence of Atomic Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-2.

<sup>380</sup> Jane Marcet, *Conversations on Chemistry* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1806). For more on this work, see Susan Lindee, "The American Career of Jane Marcet's *Conversations on Chemistry*, 1806-1853," in *ISIS* 82, no. 1 (1991): 8-23. Incidentally, Marcet also wrote an equally popular series of books on political economy titled, *Conversations on Political Economy* (1817).

about basic concepts in chemistry, such as heat, light, composition of air, descriptions of the properties of different substances, and so on, and the teacher explained the answers at length.

In many ways, *Conversations on Chemistry* was a refutation of alchemical knowledge. The teacher explained that “in former ages, Alchemists were continually engaged in endeavoring to make gold,” but had failed in their attempts. The attempts to make gold were not in vain, however, because they had inadvertently helped in “discovering the principles of the science of chemistry”.<sup>381</sup> These principles of chemistry challenged many key aspects of alchemy. For instance, the teacher argued that a popular alchemical idea that all natural substances were composed of four fundamental elements – air, water, fire, and earth – was now proven to be incorrect. Chemistry had shown that each of those four elements could be further broken down into simpler and simpler substances, until the remaining particles were no longer capable of decomposition. According to the book, every item or substance was capable of being decomposed into one of these “simple substances.” Thus, air, which ancient alchemists saw as a fundamental element was, in fact, “not an element, but is composed of two substances, viz. oxygen and nitrogen.”<sup>382</sup> Altogether, the teacher explained, there were “50 or 60” of these simple substances and they were the building blocks of all matter. In other words, alchemy’s understanding of nature itself was flawed to begin with, an error which was compounded when alchemists used that understanding to try and transmute metals.

Introductory books like *Conversations on Chemistry* became standard texts for teaching chemistry in Indian schools and colleges in the 1830s and 1840s. Delhi College ordered multiple copies of *Conversations on Chemistry*, along with Samuel Parkes’s *Rudiments of Chemistry* (1809), from the Calcutta School Book Society for use by students in natural philosophy

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<sup>381</sup> Anon., *Conversations in Chemistry, in English and Urdu* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1839), 3.

<sup>382</sup> Anon., *Conversations in Chemistry, in English and Urdu*, 9.

classes.<sup>383</sup> The widening circulation of these books also sparked greater interest in experimental chemistry. In 1844-45, the Delhi and Agra Colleges purchased various sets of “philosophical apparatus,” including steam boilers, metallic vessels, barometer gauges, differential thermometers, and a pyrometer (“to show the expansion of different metals at equal temperatures”).<sup>384</sup> Despite this growing interest in chemistry, however, the subject was still seen as part of “natural philosophy,” rather than as an independent discipline in itself. The gradual professionalization of chemistry in India followed its professionalization in Britain, where the Chemical Society of London was formed in 1841, the Royal College of Chemistry was formed in 1845, and a number of new professorships and courses in chemistry were established in the subsequent decades.<sup>385</sup> These developments helped to produce new textbooks on specialized facets of chemistry, such as organic and inorganic chemistry, that allowed the subject to be taught as a distinct discipline in Indian universities in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>386</sup>

At Government College in Lahore, established in 1864 (and initially affiliated with the University of Calcutta), chemistry teaching was part of the curriculum in medicine, and a professor of physical sciences was named in 1877 who taught both chemistry and physics. At Punjab University, founded in 1882, chemistry and physics were also jointly offered as part of physical sciences. Physical sciences was a fixed subject in the university’s science faculty, required by all students who read science courses, while those in the arts faculty had the option

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<sup>383</sup> *General Report on Public Instruction in the Northwestern Provinces of the Bengal Presidency*, 1843-44 (Agra: Agra Ukhbar Press, 1845), Appendix R, p. cxvii. Part of the British Library, IOR/V/24/905 series.

<sup>384</sup> *General Report on Public Instruction in the Northwestern Provinces of the Bengal Presidency*, 1844-45 (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1846), Appendix M, p. cv.

<sup>385</sup> T.E. Thorpe, *History of Chemistry*, vol. II: 1850-1910 (London: Watts and Co, 1910), 3-5.

<sup>386</sup> On chemistry textbooks generally in the nineteenth century, see the various essays in Anders Lundgren and Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent, eds. *Communicating Chemistry: Textbooks and their Audiences, 1789-1939* (Canton: Science History Publications, 2000).

of taking one of physics and chemistry, geology, botany, biology, and zoology.<sup>387</sup> By the turn of the century, universities were conferring advanced degrees in science, and newly-established laboratories at Calcutta and Punjab universities could claim to be carrying out original research in chemistry.<sup>388</sup>

Advances in chemistry during this period gradually chipped away at alchemical ideas, even as they helped to heighten interest in and fascination with alchemy. The landmark discovery of radioactivity in France in 1896, in particular, showed that certain elements transformed from one state to another as they emitted energy in the form of sub-atomic particles (or, what is known as radioactive decay). The observation that an element could transform into another state invited widespread comparisons to alchemy. However, instead of using alchemy to explain this transformation, scientists developed explanations rooted in the emerging fields of radioactivity and atomic theory.<sup>389</sup> In a sense, a new scientific consensus was produced that the transformation of an element was due to radioactivity, rather than due to spells, charms, incantations, elixirs, or ancient recipes. To put it another way, the professionalization of chemistry allowed for consensus to be built around a new explanation for the transformation of elements, which had previously been explained through alchemical ideas and methods.

As alchemical theories of matter and transformation gradually fell out of favour, so too did alchemy's status as a science of wealth. An 1897 article in the *Times of India* referred to alchemy as the "barbaric ancestor of the science of chemistry," noting that "all that is now

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<sup>387</sup> "Statutes, Rules, and Regulations of the Punjab University," April 1884, Punjab Archives, Home (Education) Proceedings.

<sup>388</sup> For more on the history of chemistry in India, see the essays in Uma Das Gupta, ed., *Science and Modern India: An Institutional History, c. 1784-1947* (Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2011), particularly the essays by Kamlesh Mohan and Madhumita Mazumdar, which look at the development of chemistry in the Punjab and Calcutta universities, respectively.

<sup>389</sup> Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy*, 4-5.

discredited.”<sup>390</sup> Another article in the same paper reported a story about a British scientist who argued that even if the “absurd dream” of producing gold were possible, it would likely be realized through radioactivity and radiation technology, rather than through alchemical recipes. He explained that in his own work, he had managed to use the radioactive energy of the newly-discovered element radium (discovered in 1898) to transform higher-order elements into lower ones, but it was yet to be known whether this process could happen in reverse (that is, whether a lower-order element could be transformed into a higher one like gold). But, the scientist cautioned that even if such a thing were possible, it “would not be a lucrative or remunerative way of making gold.”<sup>391</sup> In other words, the transmutation of metals into gold, if possible, would be the work of professional scientists using advanced technology, rather than that of a hobbyist working from an ancient recipe using an ordinary furnace. Finally, others doubted altogether that gold could be produced even with the help of radiation and radioactivity. One scientist, quoted in the *Times of India* in 1908, concluded that even with radiation technology, “we have not succeeded in converting baser metals into gold, but we have succeeded in turning one element to another.”<sup>392</sup>

The way in which the legitimacy of alchemy gradually diminished, both as a practice of making wealth and as an explanation for the transformation of nature, points to an argument that has often been made about disenchantment and science, namely that it was the growth of science and reason that led to a decline of magical and mystical practices. A famous version of this argument is articulated in Keith Thomas’s ground-breaking work, *Religion and the Decline of*

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<sup>390</sup> “Gold and Blood,” *The Times of India*, 5 November 1897, 7. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com>

<sup>391</sup> “Modern Alchemy,” *The Times of India*, 21 September 1908, 8. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com>

<sup>392</sup> “Modern Science,” in *The Times of India*, 2 June 1908, 10. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com>

*Magic* (1971), in which he argued that magic declined in early modern England due to the rise of scientific rationality, technology, urbanization, and ideologies of self-help and individuality.<sup>393</sup> The triumph of chemistry over alchemy could be read in much the same way: in this story, too, the growth of professional science and technological advances challenged the validity of alchemical ideas. But, I would venture there is another way to interpret this narrative, which is to suggest that the disenchantment of alchemy was not so much a decline of magical thinking as much as it was a reinvestment of magical thinking in other intellectual projects. In fact, Keith Thomas appeared to hint in this direction in his conclusion when he wrote that in a disenchanted society, “science itself retained some magical overtones, manifested in a preoccupation with the achievement of marvellous effects and a desire to outdo the magicians at their own game.”<sup>394</sup> To put it another way, magic did not disappear from society, but relocated to other sites such as science.

The enchantment of science can be read in the Urdu chemistry books of the nineteenth century. In *Conversations on Chemistry*, discussed above, the writer noted that the principles of chemistry were far more valuable than any alchemist’s gold because they led to important industrial and commercial innovations such as the steam engine. The book illustrated this point by narrating a parable about an old man who told his children that he had buried some treasure on a piece of land. The children dug up the entire piece of land and still could not locate the treasure, only to realize that the actual treasure was the land itself. As a result, they learned that it was the “soil which is the true source of riches” and it was the soil which could “produce more of the necessities of life.”<sup>395</sup> In other words, the book argued, the path to wealth was not through

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<sup>393</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 [1971]), 641-68.

<sup>394</sup> Thomas, 662.

<sup>395</sup> *Conversations in Chemistry, in English and Urdu* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1839), 5.



alchemy, but through commerce, industry, and labour. So, the alchemical fantasy of conjuring gold and summoning treasure did not decline with the disenchantment of alchemy. Instead, these fantasies were transferred over to the sciences of modern society, among which political economy was central. This enchantment of political economy was evident in the way that it came to be re-packaged as “the alchemy of wealth” or “the elixir of wealth”. But, more broadly, it was also evident in the way commercial activity began to be described in the same magical and mystical terms as alchemy. As one observer noted in 1924, describing India’s role in global trade, “by the modern alchemy of commerce, India is turning jute, tea, cotton, oilseeds, and other agricultural products, into gold and silver.”<sup>396</sup> Conjuring gold and silver, in other words, was still possible, but only through commerce.

### **Conclusion: The Magic of Commercial Society**

In this chapter, I have attempted reflect on the question of how to read Urdu translations of political economy in nineteenth century colonial India. I began with an assumption, borrowed from translation theorists, that no work of translation is transparently equivalent to what it seeks to make equivalent. Thus, to approach translated texts, one has to consider the languages and traditions that the translators drew upon, and take seriously the particular choices they made to create the appearance of commensurability. In the case presented here, I argued that some translators used the language and imagery of alchemy to render political economy into an Urdu science of wealth. In itself, this is not necessarily a surprising argument to make. After all, one can take it as given that texts look and become different when they travel to different translational contexts (though, I would still maintain that understanding the specific ways in which they become different is important to unpack). But, I want to suggest that this is not just a

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<sup>396</sup> *The Far-Eastern Review*, issue 4, April 1924, 151.

narrative about the diffusion of English texts and their transformation and appropriation in India. By reading political economy through alchemy, Indian translators were not simply indigenizing political economy, or draping it in the garb of Indian tradition. Instead, they were getting at something fundamental and important about political economy and its reliance on the language of magic and mysticism.

The role of alchemy and magic in early modern European economic thought is well-known. Carl Wennerlind has shown, for instance, that the early-seventeenth century Hartlib Circle drew upon alchemical knowledge to explore the idea of a widely-circulating credit currency. The Hartlibians, according to Wennerlind, saw the magical transmutation of metals not only as a “moneymaking project” but also as a way to increase the amount of currency in circulation.<sup>397</sup> But, what has not been explored as frequently is the way this language of magic and mystical transformation carried over to modern economic thought as well. Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” perhaps the central metaphor of modern economic thought, described the wondrous and mysterious ways in which the interests of the merchant became aligned with the good of society. Historians of economic thought have suggested that the image of the invisible hand reflects the theological and metaphysical aspects of Smith’s thought.<sup>398</sup> The theological aspects of political economy are more pronounced in T.R. Malthus’s work. For Malthus, the surplus produce of land in the form of rent, which allowed wealth to grow and accumulate, represented the “bountiful gift of Providence.”<sup>399</sup> Even a utilitarian like John Stuart Mill had

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<sup>397</sup> Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution, 1620-1720* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 17-81.

<sup>398</sup> See John Kells Ingram, *A History of Political Economy* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), 91. Emma Rothschild has disputed this interpretation, arguing instead that Smith used the image of the “invisible hand” in an ironically-amused way. See Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 116-156.

<sup>399</sup> For a discussion of how Malthus’s ideas melded political economy and natural theology, see Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, 349-88. For the influence of religion and theology on economic thought generally, see A.M.C. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798-1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

moments when he turned to this language – for instance, when he approvingly quoted Arthur Young’s comment that it was the “magic of property” which allowed peasant proprietors to make improvements in land, thereby “turning sand to gold.”<sup>400</sup> These are only metaphors, to be sure, and I do not want to over-egg the pudding by claiming that magic is somehow crucial to Mill’s thought or that theology is central to Smith. But, language is revealing and the use of these metaphors, even in a casual, throwaway sense, shows that at key moments in the argument political economists could not help but revert to a language of magic and mysticism to explain something important about modern commercial society. The presence of this language also shows the persistence of early modern forms of thinking about wealth, and suggests perhaps an inadequacy in political economic language to capture all the dynamics of commercial society. In other words, Mill needed the image of magic to explain how property-holding brought about psychological changes that led a peasant-proprietor to improve land. Or, Malthus needed the image of a providential gift to explain how surplus produce from land created wealth. And, in the case presented in this chapter, one might argue that Urdu translators needed the language of alchemy to explain how labor applied to natural substances created wealth.

Theoretical interventions in the history of economic ideas suggest, however, that these are more than just throwaway metaphors and that the logic of magic and mystical thinking is, in fact, intrinsic to commercial society. Derrida’s work on Marxian political economy argued, for instance, that in *A Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx repeatedly described money and commodities in commercial society as having a ghostly presence, and the production of money

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Press, 1991) and Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

<sup>400</sup> J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (London: Longmans and Green, 1848). II.6.33.

<http://www.econlib.org/library/Mill/mlP.html>

as “the production of ghosts, illusions, simulacra, appearances, or apparitions.”<sup>401</sup> Derrida explained that for Marx the state’s role in printing money was akin to the alchemical magic of producing gold. “When the state emits paper money at a fixed rate, its interventions are compared to ‘magic’ (*magie*) that transmutes paper into gold,” he explained.<sup>402</sup> Derrida’s exploration of these ‘spectres’ of Marx, published in 1993, was part of a political project to think through the demise of communism. But, for the purpose of this chapter, and for historians of economic ideas generally, Derrida’s intervention calls for thinking about the role of magic and mysticism in the ideas and theory of modern commercial society (or what Charly Coleman has recently called, “capitalism’s unpaid debt to sacramental logic.”)<sup>403</sup> Seen in this way, the ‘enchantment of political economy’ appears not just to be a particular, quirky episode in the history of nineteenth-century Urdu writing, but a part of the global intellectual history of political economy.

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<sup>401</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 55-6.

<sup>402</sup> Derrida, 56.

<sup>403</sup> Charly Coleman, “Vagaries of Disenchantment: God, Matter, and Mammon in the Eighteenth Century,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 14, no. 3 (2017): 869-881.

## Chapter 5

### ‘The Ordinary Business of Life’:

#### Muhammad Iqbal and the Ends of Urdu Political Economy

...Ethical forces are among those of which the economist has to take account. Attempts have indeed been made to construct an economic science with regard to the actions of an “economic man” who is under no ethical influences and who pursues pecuniary gain warily and energetically, but mechanically and selfishly. But they have not been successful.

--- Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (1890)<sup>404</sup>

Although political economy has a necessary relationship to many sciences, its relationship to *‘Ilm-ul akhlaq* (ethics) is particularly deep. Like *akhlaq*, political economy is concerned with the acquisition of things necessary for human purposes.

--- Muhammad Iqbal, *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad* (1903)<sup>405</sup>

### Introduction

Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) began his 1890 work *Principles of Economics* by arguing that the science of economics was concerned with the “ordinary business of life,” which consisted of earning and spending money.<sup>406</sup> Marshall contrasted this with the “higher” purposes of life, such as those dictated by religion or art which he argued were outside the scope of economics. In a similar fashion, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) began his 1903 work, *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad* (The Science of Economics), which was drawn substantially, but not entirely, from Marshall’s work, by distinguishing between life’s ordinary business (*ma ‘muli karobar*) and its highest purposes (*afzal tareen maqasid*). The former, he argued, were the subject of political economy, while the

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<sup>404</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Macmillan and Co, 1895), x.

<sup>405</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel Publications, 2004), 36.

<sup>406</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 1.

latter were the subject of ethical sciences (*'ilm-ul akhlaq*).<sup>407</sup> As such, political economists, Iqbal argued, were incapable of addressing ethical questions. In making a distinction between the higher and lower purposes of life, both Marshall and Iqbal were articulating a critique of political economy that had become increasingly prevalent in the late-nineteenth century, which was its inability to address ethical questions. However, both Marshall and Iqbal responded to this critique in very different ways. For Marshall, the solution to political economy's ethical deficit was to re-define its scope and transform it into a less abstract 'economic science' that was rooted in the empirical realities of industrial society. Iqbal, in contrast, believed that political economic questions ought to be reformulated in light of other ethical systems, which for him were drawn primarily from Islamic texts and traditions. This chapter traces these two parallel but connected intellectual projects. I read the economic writings of Marshall and Iqbal to show how their critiques signalled the concurrent decline of political economy in both Britain and India and what forms of thinking took its place. This chapter is, therefore, about the late-nineteenth century ends of political economy, both in the sense of its decline as a discipline and a further refining of its aims and objectives.

Even before Marshall and Iqbal, however, classical political economy had come under sharp critiques from a number of different intellectual currents in the late-nineteenth century. First, there was a technical critique of political economy from Marginalist or neoclassical economists, such as William Stanley Jevons, Léon Walras, Carl Menger, and Alfred Marshall, who challenged political economy's theory of value. Neoclassical economists argued, in a nutshell, that the value of a commodity was determined not by its labor inputs, as classical

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<sup>407</sup> Iqbal, *'Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 21, 36.

political economists had argued, but rather by its marginal utility to the consumer.<sup>408</sup> This was, in effect, an analytical shift from a production-focused to a distribution-focused understanding of value. Second, there was an epistemological and methodological critique of political economy from Marxian theory. In his *Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx argued that the method of classical political economy was flawed and unscientific because it took for its starting point abstract concepts like population or the state and then tried to deduce political economic categories like value or labor from them, when in fact these categories had produced the abstractions in the first place.<sup>409</sup> Marx argued, in essence, that classical political economists mistook as natural such things that were themselves the effect of capitalist social relations. Finally, there was an ethical and aesthetic critique of political economy, most potently reflected in the work of thinkers like John Ruskin. Ruskin argued that political economy had an incomplete and distorted view of human nature because it overlooked the moral, ethical, and sentimental qualities of human beings. Using satire, humor, and other literary techniques uncommon to political economic writing, Ruskin argued that a science of wealth which ignored ethics and morality was akin to “a science of gymnastics which assumed that men had no skeletons.”<sup>410</sup> Together these critiques represented a significant challenge to the theoretical, methodological, and generic assumptions of political economy.

Marshall’s and Iqbal’s critiques of political economy were, to varying degrees, influenced by all three of these lines of thinking, though their critiques took them in very different directions. Marshall forcefully advocated for Marginalist economic theory, but also

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<sup>408</sup> For a general overview, see John F. Henry, *The Making of Neoclassical Economics* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

<sup>409</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone (New York: International Library Publishing Co., 1904). See, in particular, Appendix 3, “The Method of Political Economy.”

<sup>410</sup> John Ruskin, *Unto the last: Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1881), 18-19.

took seriously the ethical critique of political economy (and, at least earlier in his career, expressed sympathy for socialist ideas).<sup>411</sup> In fact, his attempts to re-define the scope of political economy to create an ‘economic science’ were, in part, a response to this critique. Iqbal followed Marshall’s lead on the technical aspects of economic theory, but continued to make an ethical critique of the discipline. Later in his political career, and especially through his poetry, he also articulated Marxist ideas, and his impassioned attacks on poverty and inequality directly referenced Marx. But, ultimately, instead of fully adopting Marxism, Iqbal turned to Islamic economic thought, arguing that an economic system inspired by Islamic principles would address the problem of poverty and inequality more effectively. In his advocacy for Islamic economic principles, it is possible to see the early foundations of Islamic economics, a field which would become more fully developed in the twentieth century in the works of the conservative Muslim jurist Maulana Maududi (1903-1979). Indeed, in some ways, we might see Iqbal as the last thinker of Urdu political economy and the first thinker of Islamic economics. In this sense, both Marshall and Iqbal were transitional figures in the history of political economy. If Marshall’s work signalled the transition from political economy to economics, then Iqbal’s work signalled the transition from Urdu political economy to Islamic economics.

The decline of political economy, in many ways, also marked a decline of the ‘social’ as an organizing category of economic thought. As I argued in previous chapters, political economy and its Urdu translations were centrally concerned with conceptualizing society as an abstract network of mutual interdependence between people mediated by relations of production. In Marshallian economics, however, society or the social were not central categories. Instead Marshall was more concerned with “economic organization,” that is, forms of association

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<sup>411</sup> Donald Winch, *Wealth and Life: Essays on the Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 238.



particular to the modes of production prevalent in industrial society, such as the firm, the business enterprise, or the trade union. Likewise, Iqbal too was less interested in the ‘social’ as an abstract category and more interested in other conceptions of collectivity, such as *mulk* (nation) and *qaum* (community). Unlike, for instance, Syed Ahmed Khan’s notion of *mua‘sharat* (society), which did not have any particular national or communal referents, Iqbal’s notion of *mulk* or *qaum* referred specifically to India or, at times, to an idealized ethical community of piety and Muslim virtue. In this sense, Iqbal’s thought reflects what Manu Goswami called the spatialization of political economy in the late-nineteenth century in the works of Indian nationalist economic thinkers. According to Goswami, classical political economists saw society as an “abstract configuration with no specific spatial extension,” while nationalist economic thinkers increasingly took the “self-enclosed nation” as their central category.<sup>412</sup> Thus, one of the ways in which Marshall and Iqbal challenged the assumptions of political economic thought was by grounding their analysis of economic activity within more concretely-circumscribed spheres (or what Goswami called “concrete abstractions”).

In tracing these critiques, one of the main objectives of this chapter is to offer a connected account of the late career of political economy in both Britain and India. But, I also hope that it sheds new light on Iqbal as a thinker. Due to Iqbal’s influential role in colonial Muslim politics, historians have tended to view him primarily as a thinker of nationalism and Muslim separatism.<sup>413</sup> More recently, intellectual historians have focused on Iqbal as a philosopher, looking particularly at his writings on metaphysics, reason, and the self, and have explored his engagements with the philosophical thought of European thinkers like Nietzsche,

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<sup>412</sup> Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 216.

<sup>413</sup> See, for instance, Iqbal Singh Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Kierkegaard, and Bergson.<sup>414</sup> Others, particularly Javed Majeed, have fruitfully brought Iqbal's thought in conversation with postcolonial theory.<sup>415</sup> These interventions are important contributions to the study of Iqbal's thought, and to Indian intellectual history more broadly, especially as they have usefully illuminated the transnational connections and influences that informed Iqbal's writing. However, in many of these works, Iqbal's economic thought is either overlooked entirely or is only mentioned in passing. By bringing Iqbal's economics to the forefront of his thought, this chapter therefore also aims to make a new contribution to Iqbal studies.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part explores Alfred Marshall's critique of political economy and his project of creating an economic science, which became the foundational influence for Iqbal's economics. The second part then turns to Iqbal's *Ilm-ul Iqtisad* and examines how Iqbal drew upon Marshall, as well as on a number of other political economists. The third part examines some of Iqbal's Marx-inspired poetry and traces how Iqbal used Marxist ideas to attack capitalism, but ultimately rejected Marxism in favor of an economic system inspired by Islamic principles. In this section, I also read within Iqbal's poetry an aesthetic critique of political economy. By taking Iqbal's poems as economic texts, I argue that Iqbal, like Ruskin, challenged the idea of what the genres of political economy look like. Finally, the conclusion to the chapter reflects briefly on the end of Urdu political economy and the birth of Islamic economics.

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<sup>414</sup> Sevcian Ozturk, *Becoming a Genuine Muslim: Kierkegaard and Muhammad Iqbal* (New York: Routledge, 2018); H.C. Hillier and Basit Bilal Koshul, eds., *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); Javed Majeed, "Geographies of Subjectivity, Pan-Islam, and Muslim Separatism: Muhammad Iqbal and Self-Hood," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2007): 145-161.

<sup>415</sup> Javed Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009) and Majeed, *Autobiography, travel, and postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru, Iqbal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

## Alfred Marshall and the Ethical Critique of Political Economy in Britain

Marshall's technical contributions to economic theory are well-documented.<sup>416</sup> As part of the Marginalist school of thought, Marshall was a proponent of the utility theory of value. However, unlike Jevons, who believed that utility was the only determinant of value, Marshall argued that the cost of production also played a role. He did so by using elaborate mathematical models of supply and demand to show that value was determined both by production-side factors and distribution-side factors (indeed, one of Marshall's major contributions to economic thought is the supply-demand curve itself, which became central to economic analysis in the twentieth century).<sup>417</sup> Marshall is also credited with taking into account the factor of time in economic analysis and distinguishing between short-run and long-run market periods. These innovations, along with his focus on the firm and the business organization, make him one of the forerunners of the twentieth century field of microeconomics. However, my focus here will be less on Marshall's technical contributions and more on his ethical critique of political economy, which remains under-explored in histories of economic thought. I will argue here that Marshall's ethical critique was crucial to his project of re-defining the scope of political economy into a less abstract 'economic science'.

Marshall began his *Principles of Economics* (1890) by arguing that the two main influences on human behaviour – what he called the “two great forming agencies of the world's history” – were the economic and the religious. Economic and religious motivations, he argued, shaped people's thoughts, feelings, and characters. Religious motivations were “more intense” and related to the “highest happiness” in life. It was through these motivations that people found fulfillment in life, and along with “family affections and friendships,” they gave meaning and

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<sup>416</sup> For an authoritative overview see David Reisman, *The Economics of Alfred Marshall* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986).

<sup>417</sup> Peter Groenewegen, *Alfred Marshall: Economist, 1842-1924* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2-5.

purpose to people's lives. On the other hand, economic motivations, which compelled people to seek and earn a livelihood, constituted the "ordinary business of life." Even though these economic motivations were not part of the 'highest' purposes of life, they had a significant influence on those higher purposes since they created the material conditions in which those purposes could be realized. In particular, money or a lack of it, influenced people's thoughts and characters and had an effect on whether the higher purposes of life could be cultivated. As Marshall wrote, "The conditions which surround extreme poverty, especially in densely crowded places, tend to deaden the higher faculties."<sup>418</sup> Poverty robbed people of the chance to experience "the fullness of life." As such, Marshall argued, one of the central questions of the industrial age, with its immense progress in technology and industry, was whether poverty could be eliminated to ensure that "all should start in the world with a fair chance of leading a cultured life." Was it possible, Marshall asked, to deliver people "free from the pains of poverty" or from the "stagnating influence of excessive mechanical toil" and help them to achieve the "material conditions for a complete life"?<sup>419</sup> On this crucial question, economic analysis alone could not provide a complete answer since the answer depended, in part, on "the moral and political capabilities of human nature."<sup>420</sup> Economics, he argued, could certainly provide "facts and inferences" which would contribute to an answer, but it would not be sufficient by itself. Economics, in other words, was not fully capable of addressing the deeply important question of how to live the good life.

Marshall argued that political economists of an earlier generation had, in fact, tried to take people's moral and ethical motivations into account, but had not succeeded in doing so or had done so in an incomplete way. Political economy, he argued, had built its theories on the

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<sup>418</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 1-2.

<sup>419</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 2

<sup>420</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 4.

premise of an “economic man who is under no ethical influences and who pursues pecuniary gain warily and energetically, but mechanically and selfishly.”<sup>421</sup> Such a premise, according to Marshall, was obviously flawed since a range of ethical influences did dictate people’s behaviour and choices. But, even in basing their theories on such a premise, political economists had not gone far enough to exclude all ethical influences. For instance, he pointed out, the desire to make provisions for one’s family, or the desire to save, had always been tacitly assumed by political economists as the driving motivations of economic man. But, if these motivations were taken into account, then why not include all other “altruistic motives” that might also influence people’s choices? By overlooking the variety of sources and factors that determined people’s ethical choices, and consequently their actions, political economy, according to Marshall, was unable to understand the reality of people’s lives.

Crucial to this critique was Marshall’s contention that political economy’s notion of ‘economic man’ was itself too abstract. Could one assume, he asked, that the motivation to save or make provisions was uniform across all classes of people in all times and places? Not so, for Marshall. He argued that the political economic assumptions about the ethical motivations of economic actors – such, as “the normal willingness to save, the normal willingness to undergo a certain exertion for a certain pecuniary reward, or the normal alertness to seek the best markets in which to buy and sell” and so on – in fact varied across class, place, and time. One could not assume, for instance, that “city men” with their “deliberate and far-reaching calculations” had the same motives or ability as “ordinary people who have neither the power nor the will to conduct their affairs in a business-like way.”<sup>422</sup> Likewise, the experience of pleasure, the calculation of benefit, and the perception of utility were not uniform human responses, but differed greatly

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<sup>421</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, x.

<sup>422</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, xi.

across class. “A clerk with £100 a year will walk to business in a much heavier rain than the clerk with £300 a year,” Marshall suggested by way of example, “for a sixpenny omnibus fare measures a greater pleasure to the poorer man than to the richer.”<sup>423</sup> The economist must, therefore, take into account a “continuous gradation” of motives, will, and ability, instead of assuming an abstract “economic man” whose motives were taken to be uniform across time and place.

In making this argument, Marshall was essentially calling for political economists to take into account the particular ways in which modern industrial society had influenced people’s ethical motivations and actions. He argued that the growth of industry, press, communications, and voluntary associations had “widened the scope of collective action for the public good,” such that there was a “growing earnestness of the age.”<sup>424</sup> As a result, it was no longer tenable to focus only on individual economic motives, as classical political economists had done, but to think about “various motives besides pecuniary gain.”<sup>425</sup> He chastised the “earlier English economists” for giving the impression that the “selfish desire for wealth” was the only motive that could be attributed to economic man.<sup>426</sup> Instead, he argued, motivations in industrial society might include a desire for approval from those in the same occupation or the same class, or the desire to act collectively towards some end.<sup>427</sup> Taking these collective motivations into account meant thinking about how “members of an industrial group” might act in a given set of circumstances, instead of focusing solely on the motives of the individual economic actor.<sup>428</sup> For Marshall, the

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<sup>423</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 80.

<sup>424</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 87-8.

<sup>425</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 88.

<sup>426</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 83.

<sup>427</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 86.

<sup>428</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, x.

objective of economics had to be to “deal with man as he is: not with an abstract or ‘economic’ man; but a man of flesh and blood.”<sup>429</sup>

Together these critiques led Marshall to re-define the scope of political economy into economics. Political economy, he argued, could not be all things to all people. Mill’s old, Comte-inspired project of making political economy into a complete, “all-embracing” social science was unfeasible.<sup>430</sup> Instead of trying to find some grand principle of unity in all social phenomena, Marshall suggested that economists must limit their focus instead on motivations that people might be expected to have in given circumstances. Giving up any “pretensions to the authority of an Art” or the abstractions of philosophy, economists must instead work like applied scientists and carefully choose their test subjects, such as a particular class or occupational group in a specific place and moment in time, and try to understand what motivations might influence their behaviours.<sup>431</sup> In doing so, the economist would necessarily need to ignore political or philosophical considerations. And, therefore, such work is “better described as Social Economics, or as Economics simply, than as Political Economy.”<sup>432</sup>

Marshall’s project of narrowing and refining the focus of political economy into economics was also linked to his critique of the ‘social’ as an abstract organizing category of economic thought. He argued that classical political economists, such as Adam Smith, had presented a view of society as being comprised of independent economic actors engaged in competition and free exchange. Marshall found this view to be abstract and ahistorical when applied to the late-nineteenth century, and sought instead to explore what he called the “special

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<sup>429</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 89.

<sup>430</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 73.

<sup>431</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 110.

<sup>432</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 118.

character of modern forms of industrial life.”<sup>433</sup> For Marshall, the fundamental characteristic of these modern forms of industrial life was not competition between free and independent economic actors, but instead forms of collaboration and cooperation. He argued that, whereas in previous ages, cooperation was a result of certain customary or kinship structures, modern cooperation was deliberate and voluntary. As he wrote, “It is deliberateness... that is the characteristic of the modern age.”<sup>434</sup> These deliberate forms of association involved people coming together, not because of familial or communal obligation, but because of a desire to pursue some common economic end. Marshall termed such cooperation “economic organization,” an umbrella term that described forms of association relevant to industrial society, such as the business firm or the trade union. Marshall’s interest in the specific workings of such organizations, rather than in a broader abstraction like ‘society’, marked a significant departure from classical political economy. It represented a challenge not only to the political economic ideal of the independent economic actor engaged in free exchange, but also to the ways in which political economy conceptualized economic space.

Marshall’s intellectual critique of political economy also coincided with the institutional decline of political economy. At British universities, the rising tide of neoclassical economics meant that professorships in political economy were replaced with those in economics, and schools of political economy gradually re-christened themselves. Marshall, who was himself the Professor of Political Economy at Cambridge, led the creation of the ‘Economics Tripos’ in 1903. These changes rippled into the Empire as well. Political economy, which had long been a required subject for East India Company officials and later for officers in the Indian Civil Service, was made an optional subject in 1892, an indication of its downgraded status as a

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<sup>433</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 5.

<sup>434</sup> Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 6.



discipline.<sup>435</sup> But, the decline of political economy was not just a British development. In India, Urdu political economy was facing its own, similar critiques, most prominently in the work of the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal. The next two sections of this chapter turn to his critiques, first in his prose and then in his poetry.

### **Muhammad Iqbal and the Ethical Critique of Political Economy in India**

During the time Iqbal was writing *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, he was a lecturer of philosophy at Government College Lahore, where he had also been a student. As a student in Lahore, Iqbal would have had ample opportunity to be exposed to many works of political economy. By the late-nineteenth century, political economy was a subject of study at both Government College and Punjab University. Students studying for the Bachelors or the Masters in Oriental Studies, as Iqbal did, could take papers in political economy, for which the required works were those of John Stuart Mill and Henry Fawcett.<sup>436</sup> The Education Department of the Punjab Government had taken particular interest in ensuring that new works of political economy were available. Although translations from both Delhi College and Aligarh circulated in Lahore, some officials felt that these translations were either not up-to-date or that they were too abstruse and academic. The educationist and linguistic scholar G.W. Leitner, who played a crucial role in the establishment of both Government College and Punjab University, argued, for instance, that previous translations were not sufficiently well-adapted to the popular idiom in Urdu. Writing to the Punjab Government Secretary, Leitner forwarded a report by the University Senate which summarized his views on new translations. According to the report, “In Urdu we do not want translations; we want ‘adaptations.’ We do not, for instance, require Mill’s Political Economy

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<sup>435</sup> S. Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>436</sup> Government of the Punjab, Home Proceedings, Education Department, May 1884, 32.

translated, but the *subject* of Political Economy introduced into Urdu in a popular form.”<sup>437</sup> As a result of these efforts, as well as due to the expansion of Urdu print in the late-nineteenth century, a number of works on political economy written specifically for a popular audience were published in Lahore. These works were not direct translations of any particular work, but aimed to distill the main ideas of political economy for a popular audience.<sup>438</sup> And, so, along with his academic study of political economy, Iqbal may well have imbibed political economy through these popular works as well.

In many ways, Iqbal saw his own work as an adaptation as well. He noted in the preface that *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad* was not a direct translation of any single work, but was drawn from material from many famous (*mashoor*) and reliable (*mustanad*) works of political economy, interspersed with his own opinions on the subject.<sup>439</sup> Although he did not specify which texts he had chosen, a close reading of the text shows that the bulk of it was drawn from Marshall’s *Principles of Economics*, with some parts also taken from Fawcett’s *Manual of Economics* (1863) and Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy* (1848). Iqbal divided the work into five sections: an initial section explaining the aims and methods of political economy as a subject, followed by a section each on production (*paidaish-i daulat*), exchange (*tabadla*), distribution (*daulat ke hisse dar*), and, population (*abadi*). This division reflects the standard components that were to be found in almost all works of political economy, though the order in which Iqbal presented them signalled his own understanding of political economy. In Mill and Fawcett, for example, the topic of exchange came after the topic of distribution, reflecting the notion that concepts such as the prevailing system of property, land tenures, rent, and so on had to be explained first before one

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<sup>437</sup> G. W. Leitner to Secretary Government of Punjab, 11 January 1873, Punjab Archives, Government of the Punjab, Home Proceedings, Education Department.

<sup>438</sup> See, for instance, works such as Munshi Shyam La’l, *Kimiya* (Lahore, 1869), discussed briefly in chapter 4, or Mahboob Alam, *Karz aur us se mukhlisi ke tadabir* (Lahore: Talim Lahore, 1892).

<sup>439</sup> Iqbal, *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 22.

could understand the basis of exchange and value. In Marshall, however, the question of distribution and exchange was dealt with jointly, but only after topic of supply and demand had been settled, which reflected the neo-classical position that value was more dependent on consumption than on production. Although Iqbal did not always make a sharp distinction between classical and neo-classical economics (and liberally drew from both traditions), his decision to put exchange before distribution suggested his implicit endorsement of the neo-classical view on the technical aspects of political economy.

One of the first things to note about Iqbal's text is the title itself, *'Ilm-ul Iqtisad* (The Science of Economics). The title differed from earlier works of Urdu political economy, which as we saw in the previous chapters, were most frequently titled *'Ilm siyasat-ul madan, intizam-ul madan* (The Science of Administration or The Politics of Cities), or some such variation on that. Iqbal was clearly aware of these earlier works: in his subtitle, he noted that the well-known (*ma'ruf*) name of *'Ilm-ul iqtisad* was *siyasat-ul madan*.<sup>440</sup> It is plausible he was arguing that *iqtisad* differed from *siyasat-ul madan* in the same way that economics differed from political economy. His use of *iqtisad* was likely intended to convey a re-definition of the focus of *siyasat-ul madan*, in the same way that Marshall did for political economy. The term *iqtisad* itself, as mentioned in chapter one, was used in early modern *akhlaq* literature to denote "frugality." It appeared, for instance, in Tusi's *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* in the context of advising householders to manage their wealth and resources in a frugal manner.<sup>441</sup> A second possible and likely source for Iqbal's use of *iqtisad* may have been contemporary Arabic sources in which 'economics' was

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<sup>440</sup> Iqbal, *'Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, cover page.

<sup>441</sup> Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* (Tehran: Intisharat 'Ilmiyah Islamiyah, [1993] 1413 hijri), 174 and Nasir al-Din Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd), 1964), 160.

frequently translated as *iqtisad*.<sup>442</sup> Iqbal noted in the preface that he read Arabic newspapers from Egypt and had borrowed some terms from them. He also mentioned that he had consulted with the renowned Islamic scholar Maulana Shibli Nomani (1857-1914) on the translation of certain terms, and Shibli perhaps also suggested *iqtisad*.<sup>443</sup> Whatever the source may have been, Iqbal's use of *iqtisad* as the title, and *siyasat al-madan* as the subtitle, was intended to convey that his work was part of the Urdu political economy tradition, but was also different from it. It gestured to those earlier works, while also setting itself apart from them.

Iqbal began by discussing the broad aims of *iqtisad*, a discussion which was taken almost entirely from Marshall's opening section, though Iqbal shortened it considerably. Like Marshall, he stated that *iqtisad* was about the ordinary (*ma'muli*) business of life and was, therefore, distinguished from other sciences that dealt with the higher purposes of life. Likewise, he replicated Marshall's question of whether it would ever be possible to get rid of poverty, and then argued that political economists were ill-suited to addressing ethical (*akhlaqi*) questions.<sup>444</sup> Even as he borrowed Marshall's ideas, however, Iqbal made a number of changes and additions that signalled his own project of relating political economy to ethics. In particular, he added a new section on the relationship between *iqtisad* and ethics (*'Ilm-ul akhlaq*) and another section on the relationship between *iqtisad* and the science of civilization (*'Ilm tamaddun*). In these sections, Iqbal argued that *iqtisad* and *akhlaq* were related because both were about the acquisition of those things (*ashya*) that were necessary for the fulfillment of human purposes (*insani maqasid*). The difference was only that *akhlaq* was related to the highest purposes (*afzal tareen maqasid*), while *iqtisad* was related to the ordinary purposes. Iqbal argued that a number

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<sup>442</sup> See, for instance, some of the early twentieth century journals mentioned in Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

<sup>443</sup> Iqbal, *'Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 23.

<sup>444</sup> Iqbal, *'Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 27. Compare this to Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 1-2.

of writers (whom he did not specify) failed to distinguish between these different types of purposes, which had the effect of making it seem that wealth was an end in itself (*daulat khud aik maqsad tasavvur ki gai*). As a result, in this age, love of money (*daulat ke pyar karne wale*) and greed (*hiras*) had increased compared to previous ages.<sup>445</sup> Iqbal's argument here was similar to the popular critiques of political economy by thinkers such as Ruskin, who had argued that political economy's singular focus on wealth assumed a view of human nature as being selfish and greedy. Like Ruskin, Iqbal was suggesting that political economy ought not to take the acquisition of wealth as its ultimate purpose and think instead about how wealth might facilitate the fulfillment of the highest purposes of life.

Iqbal continued further that *iqtisad* also had a close relationship to the science of civilization (*'Ilm tamaddun*). Following from the Marshallian view of economic theory, he argued that one of the central aims of *iqtisad* was to understand how value (*qadr*) was determined. These aims, he suggested, were closely linked to the science of civilization because the real worth (*asli wuqat*) of something was often determined by civilizational values (*tamaddun-i lihaz*).<sup>446</sup> Civilizations prioritized and placed different levels of importance on different things, which then determined the value of those things. Thus, to understand the topic of value, one necessarily had to inquire into civilization itself. In making this argument, Iqbal appeared to be making a case for the utility theory of value, suggesting that the value of things was determined more by how useful it was to consumers rather than by the amount or quantity of labor in it.

In other sections, too, Iqbal accepted the technical interventions of classical and neo-classical economists, while making subtle changes that introduced ethical considerations in their

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<sup>445</sup> Iqbal, *'Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 36.

<sup>446</sup> Iqbal, *'Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 37.

economic theories. For example, in his discussion of production and the definition of wealth, Iqbal directly took Marshall's broad definition of wealth as those desirable goods, both material and immaterial, that satisfy human desires.<sup>447</sup> However, Iqbal added that a crucial part of the definition of wealth was also that it had to be something that was permissible (*ja'iz*) and appropriate (*munassib*) to desire in the first place. He argued that ethical (*akhlaqi*) imperatives had to be considered when ascertaining wealth. For instance, he pointed out, desiring an enemy's head was not wealth, even if someone desired this, because such a thing was not ethically permissible.<sup>448</sup> He also argued that certain ethical qualities, like honesty or having an agreeable and pleasant disposition, were part of one's wealth too, even if political economists were not able to quantify them.<sup>449</sup> Similarly, in a passage on why wealth production varied across countries, Iqbal drew on Fawcett's discussion of how different customs, physical conditions, and rates of interest produced different incentives to accumulate capital. However, Iqbal added that different countries also had different systems of ethics (*mukhtalif mumalik ke dastkaron ke akhlaqi halaat mukhtalif hote hain*), which oriented them differently towards work, expenditure, and saving.<sup>450</sup> In this way, Iqbal continually sought to inject a language of ethics into political economic theory.

At a number of points, Iqbal appeared to take on the role of a moderator, drawing out the differences between classical and neo-classical economists, before ultimately landing on the side of the neo-classical view. For example, in the crucial chapter on value, he explained that a number of economists considered labor (*mehnat*) to be the real determinant of value (*qadr*). But, drawing on Marshall's (and Jevon's) idea of marginal utility and the law of diminishing returns (*qanoon-e taqleel*), Iqbal explained that a person who needs one *seer* of wheat to subsist may be

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<sup>447</sup> Iqbal, *Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 28. Compare to Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 124-5.

<sup>448</sup> Iqbal, *Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 30.

<sup>449</sup> Iqbal, *Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 31.

<sup>450</sup> Iqbal, *Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 70-3. Compare to Fawcett, *Manual of Political Economy* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876), Book I, chapter V.

willing to pay a certain price for one *seer* of wheat and a different price for the second and third *seer* of wheat because the latter would have less utility (*afadat*) for him than the first one.<sup>451</sup>

Likewise, he argued that certain economists considered scarcity (*diqat-i husool*) to be a determinant of value. As an example, he pointed out that if one were to find a manuscript of *Shahnameh* written in Ferdowsi's own hand, its value would clearly be more than the value of the labor involved in writing such a manuscript.<sup>452</sup> In giving these examples, Iqbal sought to explain to his readers the different theories of value using culturally-relevant references.

Although he appeared to favour neo-classical theories of value, it seems he saw his work as providing an overview rather than making a strong claim for one side or another.

Throughout these discussions, Iqbal remained invested in the economic condition of India. In this sense, he marked a sharp distinction from earlier works of Urdu political economy, which were more concerned with society (*mua'sharat*) as an abstract category. As we saw in chapter three, in the translation of John Stuart Mill's political economy that Syed Ahmed Khan had commissioned, the translator discussed *mua'sharat* or *jama'at* (society) in broad and abstract terms, with the implication being that 'society' was a modular, universal category that could be applied everywhere and filled in with the particular customs of that place. For Iqbal, in contrast, 'society' was not the main category; instead, the category in which he was interested and which he saw as the spatial adjunct to *iqtisad* was "*mulk*" (nation) or "*qoum*" (community or nation). Whereas Syed Ahmed Khan compared the customs of different societies, Iqbal was more interested in national differences. Throughout the work, he frequently described things in *mulki* (national) terms, such as national wealth (*mulk ki daulat*), national skills and competencies (*mulk ke logon ka hunar*), and even national ethics (*mulki akhlaq*), all of which he argued differed from

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<sup>451</sup> Iqbal, *Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 80.

<sup>452</sup> Iqbal, *Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 81.

country to country.<sup>453</sup> At numerous points, he also made digressions to comment on India's particular economic situation, arguing for instance that there should be tariffs on foreign goods coming into India to improve the country's economic condition (*mulk ke iqtisadi halaat*).<sup>454</sup> In increasingly taking *mulk* as his main category, Iqbal was part of a growing number of late-nineteenth century Indian thinkers and nationalist politicians, such as R.C. Dutt, Dadabhai Naoroji, and M.G. Ranade, who were conceptualizing political economy in national terms.<sup>455</sup> Iqbal does not mention their works, and it is unclear if he had read them. But, it is helpful to think of him as part of a conjunctural moment in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century when the conceptual category of the nation became a crucial node of the critique of classical political economy in India. Iqbal's participation in this moment thus shows that the critique of political economy that was happening in nationalist politics and in Indian English writing also had a vernacular Urdu-language dimension.

Ultimately, Iqbal did not see *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad* as one of his major works. He rarely referred to it in his later writings or in his political speeches (an absence which has replicated itself in Iqbal scholarship). This was possibly because he did not see the work as representing his mature political and economic views. He had written the work at a young age, before he went to Europe to study, and before he had had the opportunity to engage closely with European philosophy. Moreover, as I suggest here, the text itself was a compilation-of-sorts drawn from the work of a number of political economists, rather than being a sustained and original argument on economic theory. To the extent that it allowed Iqbal to develop an ethical critique of political economy, it is perhaps useful to see this text as a building block in Iqbal's later economic thought and in his philosophical poetry, where his critique of political economy became sharper, more focused, and

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<sup>453</sup> Iqbal, *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 31, 70.

<sup>454</sup> Iqbal, *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 49.

<sup>455</sup> See Goswami, *Producing India*, chapter 7.



more polemical, especially as he engaged with Marxist ideas. It is to these poems that the chapter turns to next.

### **The Poetry of Marxism**

In *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, Iqbal did not mention Marx directly, but there are stray passages where he made references to the injustice (*na-insafi*) of private property (*ja’edad-i shaksi*) that have been interpreted by some scholars as being inspired by Marxist ideas.<sup>456</sup> It is unclear, however, if Iqbal would have read Marx by that point in his life. His education at Government College Lahore would likely not have brought him in direct contact with Marx’s writings. Marx was not translated into Urdu until the 1930s and 1940s, and English copies of Marx’s work were not freely available in India in the late-nineteenth century, if at all. But, Iqbal would certainly have read about socialism through the writings of other economic thinkers, particularly Mill and Marshall, who both discussed socialism in their works. Thus, these comments about the injustice of private property are either second-hand references to Marx, or more likely, generalized critiques of property that Iqbal reached on his own.

In any case, Iqbal certainly read Marx when he travelled to Britain in 1905 to study law and philosophy at Cambridge (where he, incidentally, also attended lectures by Alfred Marshall).<sup>457</sup> During his time at Cambridge, Iqbal was also introduced to the work of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, which became formative influences in his philosophy.<sup>458</sup> His engagement with German philosophy deepened when he went to Germany in 1907 to complete a doctorate on the development of metaphysical thought in Persia. Iqbal returned to India in 1908,

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<sup>456</sup> See editors’s comments in Iqbal, *‘Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 13.

<sup>457</sup> Pervez Tahir, “Introducing Iqbal the Economist,” in *Pakistan Development Review* 40.4 (Winter 2001): 1167-1176.

<sup>458</sup> Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, 20.

and his writings from that period onwards referenced Marx and Marxism more directly. In particular, Iqbal sought to explore European political and philosophical ideas within the genres of Persian and Urdu poetry. His philosophical poems constitute a unique contribution to Urdu writing of the period, not only because of their critical engagement with continental European ideas but also because of the ways in which they blended religious, philosophical, and political argumentation with the traditional Urdu lyric form. Many of the poems dealing with themes such as Islam, imperialism, and the West, as well as the self and self-realization, are frequently discussed in relation to Iqbal's thought, but the poems with economic and, in particular, Marxist themes have not received much attention. This section focuses on some of these poems and argues that despite Iqbal's attraction to Marxism, he ultimately argued in favor of an Islamic economic system.

Iqbal's first published volume of Urdu poetry was *Baang-i Dara* (Call of the Marching Bell). It was published in 1924 and it consisted of poems that he had written over the previous two decades. The poems were organized according to Iqbal's major life phases, such as the ones he wrote before 1905, ones he wrote while in Europe, and ones he had written after returning to India in 1908. The poems explored a range of religious, political, and philosophical themes, including odes to God and nature and meditations on Quranic themes interspersed with verses on Indian literature, poetry, society, and politics. Notable for the purposes of this chapter is "Khizr-e Rah" (The Traveler's Guide), a lengthy poem written as a dialogue between Iqbal (the traveler) and an angelic guide (the *khizr*). This structure was an allusion to the dialogue between Moses and the angel in the Quran, and reflected the ways in which Iqbal drew upon Islamic texts and traditions.<sup>459</sup> In the poem, the traveler and the angel have a series of conversations about topics

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<sup>459</sup> M.A.K. Khalil, introduction to Iqbal, *Call of the Marching Bell* trans. M.A.K. Khalil (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 1997).

such as life (*zindagi*), empire (*saltanat*), capital and labor (*sarmaya-o-mehnat*), and Islam. In the exchange on capital and labor, the guide offers a sharp attack on capitalism. The guide asks the traveler to convey the universal message (*payam-e qa'inaat*) to all laborers (*mazdoor*) that the capitalist has devoured the laborer. The guide argues that those who create wealth with their hands (*dast-e daulat afrin*) have been defrauded by capitalists into being grateful for meagre wages, just as the poor are grateful for charity from the rich (*ahl-e sarwat jaise daite hain gharibon ko zakat*). In a reference perhaps to Marx's comment about religion being the opiate of the masses, the guide says that concepts like race (*nasl*), nationalism (*qaumiat*), church (*kalisa*), empire (*saltanat*), civilization (*tahzib*), and color (*rang*) were created as intoxicants (*muskirat*) to dupe laborers. The conversation ends on an optimistic note, with the guide asking the traveler to convey the message that the laborer should rise up as a new age was beginning in the East and the West (*mashriq aur maghrib mein teray daur ka aghaz hai*).<sup>460</sup>

The technique of using a dialogue between two characters to elaborate a philosophical argument was a common one in Iqbal's poetry. In his Persian volume, *Payam-e Mashriq* (Message of the East), published in 1923, Iqbal imagined dialogues between numerous historical figures and thinkers to articulate a Marxist critique of European philosophy. One poem, for example, depicts a dialogue between Auguste Comte and an unnamed laborer. In the poem, Comte condescendingly tells the laborer that all men must work together as if they were each other's limbs. Comte says that each man is unique and only suitable for a certain kind of work, and through this unity in difference, life becomes a garden (*sarapa chaman mi shavad khar-e zeest*). The laborer replies that Comte is in fact trying to defraud him by weaving elaborate philosophical threads (*faraibi be-hikmat mara ae hakim*), so that the laborer can become compliant and resigned to his fate (*maru khuwe taslim farmudeh ae*). The laborer ends the

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<sup>460</sup> Iqbal, *Khizr-e Rah* (Lucknow: Nasim Book Depot, 1973), 39-43.

dialogue by saying that the capitalist, who does nothing but eat and sleep all day, is a burden on the earth (*be doshe zameen dar, sarmaya dar / nadarad guzasht az khor o khawab o kar*), and accuses the philosopher of trying to excuse capitalism's exploitation of labor through specious philosophical reasoning.<sup>461</sup> The laborer (and by extension, Iqbal), thus, seems to be arguing that the tradition of European philosophy represented by a social theorist like Comte has only served to normalize and justify capitalist exploitation.

In other poems, Iqbal used the dialogue format to express both a Marxist critique of capitalism as well as a rejoinder to that critique. One such poem in the *Payam-e Mashriq* volume depicts an exchange between Vladimir Lenin and Kaiser Wilhelm. Lenin says to Kaiser Wilhelm that throughout the history of the world, the poor have been ground like grain (*be-se guzasht ke adam dar in sara'i kehun / misal-e dana ta sang e asiya bud-ast*) and duped by rulers and religious men. He warns the Kaiser that, at last, the downtrodden of the world will rise to burn down all kings and churches (*sharar-e atish jamhur, kuhne saman sokht / radai pir kalisa, qabai sultan sokhat*). Kaiser Wilhelm replies that greed is actually part of man's nature, and even if all kings were deposed, oppression would still continue to exist (*agar taj kai jamhur poshad / haman hungame-ha dar anjuman hast*).<sup>462</sup> Though Iqbal's view was sympathetic with Lenin's here, the response he attributed to Kaiser Wilhelm suggests that he was perhaps sceptical himself about the transformative potential of a political revolution. As he argued in other places, more important than a political transformation was the need for human beings to transform themselves and have mastery over their own thoughts, feelings, and imaginations.

Finally, in a number of poems, Iqbal even adopted Marx's voice directly to critique political economy. One of the most notable of these poems was titled "Karl Marx's Voice" (*Karl*

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<sup>461</sup> Iqbal, "Mahavara Ma-bein Hakim Francavi Auguste Comte va Mard Mazdoor," in *Payam-e Mashriq* (Islamabad: Alhamra Publishing, 2000), 352-54.

<sup>462</sup> Iqbal, "Monsieur Lenin va Kaisar Wilhelm," in *Payam-e Mashriq* (Islamabad: Alhamra Publishing, 2000), 360-2.

*Marx ki Awaz*), published in 1936 in his volume *Zarb-e-Kaleem* (The Rod of Moses). The poem depicts Marx addressing an assembly of economists and telling them that all their tomes are nothing but empty speculation. Iqbal imagines Marx saying:

This chess-game of knowledge and erudition; this exhibition of argument and disputation,  
The world no longer wants your empty speculation,  
O doctor of economics, what after all is to be found in your publications?  
Nothing but twisted handwriting and skillful evasion,  
In the West's idolatrous shrines, pulpits, and centers of education,  
Greed and murderous crimes are masked under your cunning ratiocination.<sup>463</sup>

Setting aside the substantive critique of political economy in this poem, namely that the discipline has served as an alibi for the crimes of Western imperialism, there is also a critique of political economic writing itself. As with the laborer's response to Comte in the previously-mentioned poem, Iqbal (in Marx's voice) seems to be arguing that works of political economy were filled with equivocation and meaningless erudition. The charge recalls Engels's comment in his *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* that economists have tended to engage in "sophistry and hypocrisy" to paper over contradictions in their argument.<sup>464</sup> In this sense, Iqbal's poems themselves also constitute a rejection of the traditional genres of political economy. By using poems as forms of economic argument, Iqbal challenged the notion of what a genre of political economy could look like.

Importantly, however, there is an authorial distancing in Iqbal's poems that stands out: the critiques of capitalism expressed here are notably not in Iqbal's own voice, but always in

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<sup>463</sup> Ye 'Ilm-o-Hikmat ki Muhra-Bazi, Ye Behas-o-Takrar ki Numayish  
Nahin Hai Dunya ko Ab Gawara Purane Afkaar ki Numayish  
Teri Kitabon Mein ae Hakeem-e-Maash Rakha hi kya Hai Akhir  
Khatoot-e-Khamdar ki Numayish, Maraiz-o-Kajdar ki Numayish  
Jahan-e-Maghrib ke Butkudon Mein Kaleesaon Mein, Madrason Mein  
Hawas ki Khoon Raiziyan Chupati hai Aqal-e-Ayyar ki Numayish.  
From Muhammad Iqbal, *Zarb-e Kalim*, second edition, (Lahore: Kapoor Art Printing, 1941), 139. The translation is mine.

<sup>464</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," in Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Translated and Edited by Martin Miligan. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007.

someone else's voice (for example, the voice of the *khizr*, or the laborer, or the imagined voices of Lenin and Marx, and so on). This might have been, in part, a strategy of having a literary alibi in case any censorious readers found the poems to be objectionable (as did happen on a number of occasions in Iqbal's career). But, I think it also reflects Iqbal's own ambivalence towards Marxism. Although he frequently explored and was attracted to Marxist ideas, he ultimately believed that an economic system based on Islamic principles was more desirable. One of his clearest articulations of this view came in 1923, when in response to his poems, a critic accused him of being a communist (*ishtiraki*).<sup>465</sup> Writing a response in the *Zamindar* newspaper, Iqbal firmly denied the accusation, and clarified his economic views. He argued that for him being called a Bolshevik would be tantamount to being considered no longer Muslim. He declared that he was a devout Muslim, and that he believed that the solution (*'ilaj*) to the world's economic problems (*iqtisadi imraz*) was to be found in the teachings of the Quran. He admitted that he believed unbridled capitalism (*sarmaya dari ki quwat jab hadd se tajawiz kar jae*) was a plague on the earth. However, he did not think that the solution to this plague was to eliminate capitalism entirely, as the Bolsheviks had done. Instead, he believed that Quranic teachings showed how to regulate capitalism within reasonable limits (*munasib hudood*) and restrict its harmful effects. Iqbal continued that he believed Bolshevism was a spectacular (*zabardast*) reaction to the selfish (*khud gharz*) and short-sighted (*aqibat na-andesh*) capitalist class in Russia, but he argued that both Russian Bolshevism and European capitalism represented forms of excess and extremism (*ifrat o tafrit*). Instead, he believed that a more balanced (*'itidal*) approach would be to follow the economic principles of Islamic tradition (*islam ke iqtisadi pehlu*). In his view, Islamic tradition could point to a third way between the excesses of

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<sup>465</sup> Quoted in Salim Akhtar, "Introduction," *Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 14.

capitalism and communism. He ended by hoping that people around the world would work towards creating such a system.<sup>466</sup>

Iqbal's vision of an economic system based on Islamic principles, though forcefully articulated in his *Zamindar* response, remained vague and undefined. He did not sketch out in any meaningful detail what an Islamic economic theory might actually look like. In his political career in the 1920s and 1930s, as a member of the All-India Muslim League and as an elected representative in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, he often spoke in broad terms in favor of a range of economic policies including rural development, revival of the village economy, and protectionist support for Punjab's indigenous crafts and industries. He also frequently spoke in exalting and glorified terms about the virtue and nobility of manual labour.<sup>467</sup> But, he was not able to combine these policies and rhetoric in any coherent vision of an 'Islamic' economic system. Likewise, in his political speeches, he frequently denounced the West's economic exploitation of Asia and argued in favor of a pan-Asian and pan-Islamic rejection of Western capitalism and consumerism.<sup>468</sup> But, again, these statements did not cohere in any unified or well-developed anti-imperial economic philosophy. In these ways, then, it is apparent that Iqbal turned to Marxism to develop a critique of capitalism, and to Islam for a remedy to the problems he had identified in that critique. But, in doing so, his engagements with both Marxism and Islamic economic thought remained incomplete and fragmentary.

### **Conclusion: The Decline of Urdu Political Economy and the Birth of Islamic Economics**

Iqbal's economic thought had an ambivalent relationship to Urdu political economy. Although he saw himself as writing within that tradition (as evidenced by his reference to *siyasat al-*

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<sup>466</sup> Quoted in Salim Akhtar, "Introduction," *Ilm-ul Iqtisad*, 14-5.

<sup>467</sup> Khawaja Ahmad Saeed, "Economic Philosophy of Allama Iqbal," *Pakistan Development Review* 41, 4 (2002): 973-982.

<sup>468</sup> Saeed, 976-77.

*madan*) and shared many features with it, his work was also a sharp departure from it. His use of Marshall not only marked a technical difference between his intervention and that of Urdu political economy, but his interest in *mulk* (nation) over *mua‘sharat* (society), and his appeal to a purported Islamic economics, marked an ethical difference as well. In many ways, his economic and social thought represents a waning of the more cosmopolitan ethical vision of someone like Syed Ahmed Khan, who envisioned *mua‘sharat* (society) or *madan* (city) as broad categories without any communal or national associations. In that sense, it is possible to read Iqbal both within the tradition of Urdu political economy and outside of it.

In his study of late-nineteenth century North Indian Muslim thought, Faisal Devji used the term “apologetic modernity” to describe an outlook that, he argued, was forged in conversation with modern European thought, but that remained incomplete, unsystematic, and anachronistic.<sup>469</sup> Iqbal’s economic thought appears to be such an example of an ‘apologetic’ modernity. Iqbal’s flirtation with Marxism, and use of Marxist themes and critiques in his poetry, without a comprehensive Marxist analysis or politics, represents the incomplete and unsystematic nature of his economic thought. Similarly, his view that Quranic teachings offered the best guide on how to regulate modern capitalism reveals a sense of ahistoricism in his worldview, one that was always looking back at an idealized Islamic past even as it grappled with modern ideologies. Within Iqbal’s lifetime, however, a more complete Islamic economic thought would be developed, most prominently in the work of Maulana Maududi. Maududi’s *Economic System of Islam* (1936), in many ways, represented the development of the vision that Iqbal had only begun to articulate. Maududi’s thorough critiques of both capitalism and socialism, and his positioning of Islamic economics as the “golden mean” between those two

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<sup>469</sup> Faisal Deviji, “Apologetic Modernity,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no 1 (2007): 61-76.



poles had its roots in Iqbal's intellectual project.<sup>470</sup> Maududi's vision was certainly more reactionary than Iqbal's, and also envisioned a broader and more radical re-ordering of state and society than Iqbal had ever imagined. In that sense, the apologetic modernity of Iqbal gave way to the unapologetic modernity of Maulana Maududi.

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<sup>470</sup> Syed Abu A'ala Maududi, *Economic System of Islam*, trans. Riaz Husain and edited by Khurshid Ahmad (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1936), 5.

## Conclusion

During the early-1950s, the *Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab* (Society for the Advancement of Knowledge) in postcolonial Lahore was tasked by the newly-established Pakistan state to publish books that would promote national unity, foster civic consciousness, and advance public knowledge. One of the first works they chose to commission towards this end was a massive three-volume Urdu translation of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which was eventually published in 1957.<sup>471</sup> What was it about Smith's *Wealth of Nations* that suggested it would be a useful instrument of nation-building and knowledge dissemination? Although I do not know for certain why the Society chose Smith in particular, I would venture that their motivations for selecting a work of political economy may have been similar to why nineteenth century Urdu scholars often turned to political economy: they saw it as a fundamental science of society. In the translation projects that I examined in this dissertation, there was a sense that knowledge of political economy was crucial for everyone who wanted to understand how society functioned: What were the mechanisms that made possible this arrangement of an aggregate of people living together? What was wealth and how was it created? Why did some societies become wealthier than others? Political economy in the nineteenth century was called upon to answer such questions, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that a new postcolonial society grappling with existential questions turned to political economy. Even though political economy had declined as a discipline by the late-nineteenth century, its reputation as civic science and public knowledge endured.

This dissertation has argued that Urdu political economy emerged in India in the 1830s and 1840s out of a restructuring of the colonial education system and resulting debates about language, translation, and the dissemination of European sciences in India. A new generation of

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<sup>471</sup> Shaikh Ataulla H.A. Fakhri, *Daulat-i Aqvam* (Lahore: Majlis Tariqqi Adab, 1957).

Indian scholars and translators, working closely with colonial officials, set about on the task of translating the major works of classical political economy into Urdu. In their translational attempts, they drew upon a rich tradition of social and economic thought in Indo-Persian writing, and in doing so, re-made political economy into an indigenous Indian discourse. In particular, Indian translators zeroed in on one of the central claims of political economy, namely the notion that society was a network of abstract interdependence mediated by relations of production. To make sense of this claim, they excavated earlier theoretical models of social and civic interdependence. These included early modern Indo-Persian concepts of the household as a sphere of production; the city as a space of civic cooperation and ethical obligation; and alchemy as a science of wealth and improvement. By recasting these early modern concepts and mapping them on to modern political economy, Indian translators sought to transform political economy into an ethical science. Thus, a modern language of economics in India came to be suffused with early modern notions of ethical and society.

But, by the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some of the fundamental assumptions of political economy had come under attack, both in Britain and in India. In particular, the political economic ideal of an abstract ‘social’ composed of individual and rational economic actors engaged in free exchange no longer seemed tenable when subjected to the blistering critiques of Marxism, neoclassical economics, and anticolonial critique. The technical, epistemological, and ethical critique of political economy in Britain, and in Europe more broadly, coincided with a growing chorus of attacks on the colonial economic system as being exploitative and responsible for ‘draining’ wealth from the colonies to the metropole. A search for alternatives to the prevailing economic orthodoxy, that is, an alternative to classical political economy, produced a number of different imaginaries. In Britain, thinkers like Alfred Marshall

responded to these critiques by re-defining and, in some ways, narrowing the focus of political economy into a less abstract ‘economic science.’ This was, in a sense, an attempt to take political economy out of the business of ethics altogether, and transform it into a technical discipline. In contrast, in India, thinkers like Mohammed Iqbal found themselves more drawn to ideas of national economics or of Islamic economics, thus finding in the ‘nation’ or in an imagined religious community the promise of prosperity and an end to poverty, something which they felt the abstract universalisms of classical political economy had failed to deliver. The decline of Urdu political economic thinking, therefore, also represented the lost promise of a certain cosmopolitan vision of society, which was replaced by more radical and parochial conceptions of how to organize social and economic life.

And yet, although it declined as a discipline, the legacies of Urdu political economy continued to live on. In postcolonial South Asia, its influences are evident not just in translation projects like that of the *Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab*, but also in the continued importance of vernacular social scientific disciplines (*mua‘sharati uloom*) that grew out of it. Even today, despite the ascendancy of English-language scientific education, economics as a subject continues to be offered in Urdu, alongside English, in many universities and colleges across Pakistan, producing students trained to work in the state civil service and in vernacular banking, business, and administrative worlds. In that sense, Urdu political economy can be credited with having created a vernacular language for making claims about social, political, and economic life, a legacy which continues to resonate in South Asia even today.

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