Two Centuries of Indian Print workshop: Islam and Print in South Asia Part I

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Dickens Room, Knowledge Centre
British Library
9.15-17.30

Organisers: Layli Uddin, Priyanka Basu, Nur Sobers-Khan

Concept note:

The emergence of print in South Asia has been understood as a transformative moment for Islam in the Subcontinent, heralding a period of revival and reform from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. According to historians such as Francis Robinson, Barbara Metcalfe, Brannon Ingram and others, the introduction of print in the early eighteenth century enlarged and popularised the discursive space of religious authority and and encouraged a more local and spatial understanding of religious identity. However, the discussions on Islam and print in South Asia to date have focused predominantly on Urdu printed texts, on matters of Islamic jurisprudence, *'ulama* or elite individuals and groups, and Islam's relationship to Hinduism, colonialism and nationalism.

This workshop will widen the scope of earlier scholarship to focus on texts written by Muslims, on a range of matters, in different vernaculars, not limited to, but including: Urdu, Arabic, Persian, Dobhashi (Bangla Musulmani), Muslim Mapilla, Sindhi and Pashto. The articles will focus on issues such as distribution and the circulation of texts, as well as questions of reception and knowledge production. Rather than treating the introduction of print as a rupture resulting from the 'colonial encounter', we will examine continuities with earlier genres of text and ways of reading. Some of the questions asked will be: What connections, if any, existed between these texts and the manuscript tradition, in terms of copying, adaption, translation and circulation? What can we tell about the changing space, temporality and technologies in which these texts were created, how did they shape and were shaped by the spaces in which they circulated as they created communities of readers? How did print change discussions around gender, caste, class and space in Islam? What traces of earlier forms of writing and cultures can be found in printed texts? What new audiences and ways of reading came into being and which ones, if any, disappeared from public visibility? We propose to bring together new and innovative scholarship on materials in South Asian languages to advance a more comprehensive understanding of the historical change and continuity in Islamic knowledge production across two centuries of print in South Asia.

Panel 1: Arabic printing in India, translation, and the transregional reach of print between the Middle East and South Asia

Roy Bar Sadeh (Columbia University) "Writing Islamic Reform in Nastaʿliq-Arabic: The summary of Rashid Rida's 1912 visit to British India"

The Indian subcontinent was a major Arabic print center during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But what were the logistics and aesthetics of Arabic print in the subcontinent? How did Arabic texts become subcontinental in an age dominated by crystalized political identities that equated belonging with various unstable categories, such as "ethnicity" and "territoriality"? As a case in point, this paper puts the spotlight on the 1912 journey of Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935), the founder of the Cairo-based transregional journal of *al-Manar* (The Lighthouse; published

in Arabic-Naskh form between 1898 and 1935), to British India in 1912. During his nearly one month of travels, Rida visited numerous cities and towns across the subcontinent. There, he promoted to various Muslim scholars and their institutions his vision of transregional Islamic unity that was founded upon the mastering of Arabic, glorification of the age of al-Salaf al-Salih (the pious ancestors; the three first generations of Muslims) and fusion between natural and Islamic sciences. Rida's travelogue (*rihla*) was published in serials in al-Manar during 1913 and is known to historians of both modern South Asia and the Middle East. Yet, Rida's Indian travels were not restricted to his travelogue in *al-Manar*. His visit to India was summarized by his Iraqi-born Urdu translator, Sayyid ʿAbd al-Haq Haqi al-Aʿzami al-Baghdadi al-Azhari (1873-1924), the vice-head of the Arabic department in the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College. Printed in a *nastaʿliq* lithograph in one of the M.A.O. College's affiliated printing presses, Matbaʿ-i Ahmadi, the summary documented Rida's day-to-day life and activities in the Indian subcontinent. Reading al-Azhari's summary alongside Rida's travelogue, this paper suggests that the aesthetics of both these texts were more than a question of logistics, such as printing costs; rather, while Rida sought to convey to *al-Manar*'s readership his experiences in British India by showing their similarities to the realities of the Ottoman Arabic provinces and Egypt, al-Azhari had a different purpose in mind. The latter sought to integrate al-Manar's enterprise of Islamic reform into North India's competing and booming environment of Islamic thought and praxis, while bringing such Arabic *nastaʿliq* text into a conversation with what Nile Green calls the 'Urdusphere—i.e. the Urdu linguistic sphere that connected Muslim intellectuals across Asia and Africa.

Simon Leese (SOAS/University of Utrecht) "Printing the incomprehensible? Interlinear translations of Arabic texts in 19th century North India"

Arabic has always had a much wider cultural significance as a language of revelation and ritual practice beyond learned communities of scholars with formal knowledge of the language. Indian communities not literate in Arabic have accessed Arabic texts through oral performance and through multilingual mediation. A lack of knowledge of Arabic, furthermore, did not preclude participation in the culture of physical Arabic books themselves. It is clear from the huge Arabic manuscript archives of Qurʾāns, prayers, and poems from across India that individuals may have owned physical copies of a range of Arabic texts without necessarily fully understanding them on a linguistic level. This paper will examine the phenomenon of Arabic interlinear translations printed in North India, considering them both as a continuation of earlier practices, but also a key aspect of print culture in the late-19th century. Interlinear translations, which were poetic-creative acts as well as a hermeneutic practice, had a long history before the 19th century, and were related to other multilingual textual practices such as marginal notes and glosses that allowed for the mediation of Arabic texts on the page. Print entrepreneurs of the late 19th century recognised a public appetite for Arabic books. As such, there was a proliferation of books that incorporated interlinear translations in various languages all the while retaining the original Arabic text. Lithograph presses in cities such as Lucknow, Kanpur, and Lahore rarely printed (and re-printed) popular Arabic prayers and poems without other languages being present on the page. These multilingual books give us clues about how Arabic was mediated through other languages in North Indian book culture. They also suggest how audiences who did not necessarily fully understand Arabic derived knowledge, pleasure, and spiritual well-being from the visual and sonic dimensions of the language. These books must also be incorporated into the histories of Persian, Urdu, and other vernaculars that were used as languages of translation in Arabic books production.

Sohaib Beg (UCLA) "Printing a Transregional Tariqa: Hajji Imdadullah (d.1899) and Sufi Contestations in the Ottoman Hijaz"

This article analyzes the prominence of print in the Sufi *tariqa* of Hajji Imdadullah Makki (d. 1899), who settled in the Ottoman Hijaz after escaping North India in the aftermath of the 1857 mutiny. Hajji Imdadullah spent about four decades in Mecca, where he continued to initiate new disciples, correspond with an array of leading scholars in South Asia, and to actively intervene in the divisions that emerged between them. This article analyzes the transregional contexts and complex dynamics of publishing Hajji Imdadullah's treatises and manuals – in the long journey of the manuscript from Mecca to the production of lithographs in North India and their distribution as far as Istanbul. It follows three main lines of inquiry; first, the processes of printing, and the importance of postal communication in enabling Hajji Imdadullah to be intimately involved in the editing and printing of his texts. Second, the linguistic transformations as Hajji Imdadullah attempted to reach diverse readers and new disciples through the translation of his works from Persian into Urdu, Arabic, and Ottoman Turkish. Third, the intellectual contexts of Hajji Imdadullah's engagement with the Chishti-Sabri traditions, the function of Sufi manuals in lithograph or manuscript form within the praxis of his *tariqa*, and his attempts at reconciling legal-theological debates that rent apart the unity of his sprawling Sufi order. Ultimately, this article argues that print, only as supplemented by other forms of writing and socialization, enabled Hajji Imdadullah to both spread his Sufi order and produce a highly influential discourse on Sufism that continued to be fiercely contested in the twentieth century.

Panel 2: Print and Multilingual religious expression in Islam

Epsita Halder (Jadavpur University) "The Garden and the Fire: Hereafter in the Bengal Muslim religious imagination (late 19th-early 20th century)"

Hell (*al-nar*, the Fire) and Paradise (*al-janna*, the Garden), as punishment and reward for Muslims for failing in performing obligatory principles (*farz, adab*) or perfecting them, started appearing in popular print in late 19th century Bengal, often to an audience-readership that had started to identify itself as belonging to the *ummah*. In a reformist attempt to offer Islamic eschatology to the masses, references were based on Qur'anic and *hadith*-based traditions, now available in Urdu and Bangla and borrowed freely from several other sources. Such attempts configured the notion of faith (*iman*), sense of sin and salvation attainable through personal deed (*farz*) and the intercessory status of the Prophet (*shafa'ah*). The fear of torment in Hell and the sensory indulgence in Paradise, articulated by the *ulama* as part of reformist Islam in Bengal, created awe towards God and piety towards Muhammad the Prophet as the saviour who travelled through Hell and Paradise (ascension narratives, *miraj*). With the Qur'an and Hadith repertoire in Bangla, Sharia-based knowledge was standardized, but *ulama* who were writing doctrinal treatises (*maslah*) for the masses created multiple layers of negotiation between high and more popular forms of eschatology by exploring the creative potential of the hereafter. There, with the notion of an afterlife resulting from the outcome of one's action on the Day of Judgment (*keyamat*), the hereafter was simultaneously invoked for being narrated referentially. In this effort, the rhetoric of senses overwrote the scriptural and textual imagination of Bengal through dynamic processes in reception, including multiple readings of al-Ghazzali, Rumi and Persian narratives. My paper tries to understand how the popular imagination of Paradise and Hell as themes can be studied to understand religiosity, textual representation and multilingual experience of the Muslim public sphere in late 19th-early 20th centuries in Bengal. To accomplish that the paper tries to engage with the following questions. How did different forms of textual imaginations, spread across genres, treat sin and redemption and promise Paradise over the absoluteness of Hell? What is the significance of such coexistence of sensuality and the austerity of *adab*? How to locate these themes vis-à-vis the aesthetics of Muslim *jatiya* literature? When the sensory was placed within the folds of religious rhetoric, could it be reclaimed by the literary?

Max Stille (Max Planck Institute for Human Development) "Islamic sermons between print and orality"

Islamic sermons are, on the one hand, delivered orally, and much of their success depends on the preacher's vocal and gestural performance as well as an intense audience interaction. Sermons have, on the other hand, been among the genres most extensively printed and widely circulated in Northern and Eastern India. For a history of print, they are particularly interesting as their dissemination is not commercially driven and hence differs from other instances of the spread of popular literature. With reference to collections from different genres of preaching in collections of Urdu, Bengali and Arabic sermons, I discuss the interrelation between communication in print and in person as well as print causing innovation and conservation.

Panel 3: Interactions between the Persianate and the vernacular in print

Thibaut D'Hubert (University of Chicago) "Refashioning vernacular Islamic books in late Mughal and early colonial Bengal"

Within the fast changing social landscape of the late Mughal period, we observe the formation of new trends of Bengali Islamic(ate) literature. The spread of Persianate literacy outside courtly milieus throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries occasioned the appearance of a new kind of vernacular poet: the Dobhashi śāẏer. The readership/audience of Dobhashi literature – which combined Middle Bengali language and prosody with Persian and Hindustani – was mostly urban. This situation constituted a major contrast from the previous periods, during which vernacular literature was mostly produced and consumed in rural and semi-rural areas. In the growing urban centers of the time, especially in Calcutta, but also in Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong, vernacular presses flourished from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Dobhashi literature was widely represented in this emerging vernacular book market. We thus had a relatively new literary idiom that quickly became identified with the new medium of print. The physicality of the book was central in the way these texts were perceived and Dobhashi literature came to be designated with the term *puthi sāhitya* (lit. "book literature"). In my presentation, I propose to survey the changes that took place both in the format of the written vernacular text, and in the discourses that surrounded the production of the book. I want to relocate the formation of Islamic print culture in the wider context of the book history in Bengal in the early colonial period. Print was but one factor of change amongst a variety of attempts to create new communal forms of literacy, which involved new formats, scripts, and scribal conventions. I will thus look at early printed texts along with the manuscripts that were produced during this same period and pay special attention to the shift from manuscript to print and vice versa, because for about half a century both mediums were used simultaneously in Bengal.

Arthur Dudney (University of Cambridge) "Late nineteenth-century Urdu teaching materials and the Persian pedagogical tradition"

The appearance of Urdu pedagogical materials written in Urdu was a relatively late development. Although Urdu language and social reformers in the second half of the nineteenth century such as Altaf Hussain Hali were keen to emphasise Urdu literature's decisive break from Persian, Urdu aesthetics were taught through Persian. It was only in the late nineteenth century that the first translations of classical Persian pedagogical texts appeared in Urdu. This article considers these translations in order to nuance the so-called "death of Persian" in the Subcontinent. It also seeks to better understand the relationship between colonial language ideology and that of Indian pedagogues.

Panel 4: Print and Performance: Theatre and Music in 19th century print culture

Layli Uddin (British Library) "Muslim migrants, music and print"

This paper looks at the migration of poor and landless Mymensinghia Muslim cultivators and sharecroppers to Assam in early 20th century, and how at a time of newly-burgeoning nationalist sentiment, they were perceived as 'outsiders' and described as 'colonial setters' by historians in later times. Their exclusion and erasure from histories has continued, the most recent manifestation of this to be found in the politics of National Register of Citizens in Assam. I use two rare early 20th Assamese-Bengali texts, written by a Muslim migrant, to explore the creative life- world of migrants. The text contains poetry and songs narrating the hopes, fears, happiness and tears experienced during the process of migration. The paper will discuss the intersections of religion, class and gender in this experience. Furthermore, it will trace the music of earlier generations to the flourishing 'Miyan' poetry of recent times, and show how music and print offers a more nuanced understanding of the experience of Muslim migration.

David Lunn (SOAS) "Printing (and performing?) the 'Mutiny': the Mātam-e Zafar, and glimpses of the world of Urdu publishing in nineteenth-century Madras"

What did it mean to write, publish, and perhaps perform an Urdu-language drama on the events of 1857 a mere 10 years after the fact? What does such a play have to tell us about the social and cultural context from which it emerged, perhaps especially given its publication in Madras (Chennai), a locale that is rarely the focus for Urdu literary scholarship? This paper hopes to answer these questions and more. It will begin with a close reading of the text itself: a (gently satirical?) Urdu-language lithographed play (with illustrations) on the 1857 "mutiny"—literally "The Lament of [Emperor Bahadur Shah] Zafar", published in 1867 in Madras. That year was particularly significant in a publishing context for the enactment of Act XXV of that year: "An Act for the regulation of Printing-presses and Newspapers, for the preservation of copies of books printed in British India, and for the registration of such books"—the act that resulted in the Quarterly Lists so beloved of historians and themselves digitised through the auspices of the "Two Centuries of Indian Print" project. The Madras context is also salient for any exploration of Islam and Print in South Asia, given the distinction in scholarship between "Tamil- and Urdu-speaking Muslims", or "Tamil and Urdu Muslims" in works on South Indian Islam (e.g. Kenneth McPherson, Chandra Mallampalli) but the general neglect of the region in Urdu literary scholarship. The Quarterly Lists themselves provide some insights into the world of Urdu/Hindustani publishing in the Presidency, as well as that of the particular publisher and his presses, and the predominately Islamic texts published from there. Ultimately, this paper will use the Mātam-e Zafar as a starting point from which to open up vistas onto the world of mid–late-nineteenth-century print cultures connected to Islam, however complicatedly, thinking through a lithographed, multi-generic, theatrical publication in order to complicate our understanding of the use of print technologies—and their uneven regulation—for multiple purposes in the context of colonial rule and incipient nationalisms.

Concluding discussion:

Themes that immediately present themselves: multilingual texts and translations, interactions between rhetorical styles and registers (Persian, Arabic – Urdu, Bengali), circulation of texts through performance and other forms of orality.