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ARTICLE

Maulana Azad and his memory of the Islamic past: a study of his early writings

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Abstract

The article is concerned primarily with Maulana Azad's early political and theological writings with a view to understanding his positions on Islam and the non-Islamic religions. It opens with a brief description of his discussion of Mughal history and religious culture, and then notes his portrayal of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) as an exemplary political figure, who raised his voice against Akbar's heresy. This portrayal has had a significant historiographical afterlife. Several modern scholars followed Azad's reading. The article asks whether Azad was truly the first to have such a view of the saint, and thereby influenced the modern writings on Mughal India. We will notice that Sirhindi was already portrayed as a political figure in the Mughal-era historical accounts devoted to him. Azad only chose to work within a certain memory of Sirhindi—but why did he choose to use an earlier tradition and not a purely religious interpretive framework of his own for analysing and presenting the saint's position? The article examines Azad's rationale for such a portrayal in light of his political concerns. It then discusses in some depth the theological discourses in his *Tazkira* and the early issues of *Al-Hilāl*.

Keywords: Urdu and Arabic; *jihād*; Islam; *kufr*; *'azīmat*; *Shahīd*

Maulana Azad is among the most important Islamic political figures of twentieth-century India. Given the complexity and volume of his output, it is no surprise that he has sometimes been seen to contradict himself on his key themes. One of these is a commitment to a general accommodationist stance on the issue of inter-community relations. This is seen to conflict with his championing of figures of 'Islamic orthodoxy', such as Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) in his *Tazkira*. In this article, by looking closely at the employment of his concepts of *'azīmat* (determination) and *jihād*, I explore the meaning of and rationale behind Azad's championing of Sirhindi. The article investigates whether this championing constitutes a violation or contradiction to his lifelong commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity and the politics that he espoused. Through these investigations, we also get a sense of his interpretation of Islam and how he used the Islamic past for his particular political aims and purposes.

Reading Mughal India

In the early twentieth century, Indian thinkers were developing a critique of British rule in India. However, their preoccupation with colonialism and modernity should not

obscure the fact that they were equally concerned with the pre-colonial past. In Azad's writings, which covered a vast array of topics, ranging from religion and politics to art and historiography, a search to construct an understanding of a longer tradition of Islam and Muslims is discernible. His first encounter with India's Islamic past took place in 1907, when he published an introductory note on an article by one Muhammad Yusuf Khan, which had come up for publication in a Calcutta Urdu journal called *Shams-i Bangāla* (the Sun of Bengal). The article itself was a translation of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's (d. 1707) views on education and pedagogy (*ta'līm aur atālīqī*), recorded, as the author wrote, in Niccolao Manucci's *Storia do Mogor*, a modified version of which, according to the author, is also available in Francois Bernier's *Travels*.[1] The editor of the journal had asked Maulana Azad to review the article. The article was brief, only six pages long, the first two of which were a commentary on Aurangzeb's text to which Azad added an introductory editorial note.[2] Here he appears to be very sensitive to the ways in which the Islamic past and the Mughals—in this case Aurangzeb in particular—were portrayed in British colonial historiography as harsh tyrants.

Azad's second important piece on Mughal India was an essay on the seventeenth-century mystical wanderer, Hakim Sarmad, which was published in 1910 in a special issue *Shahīd number* of *Nizām al-Mashā'ikh*, an Urdu monthly edited by the noted twentieth-century Chishti Shaikh of Delhi, Khwaja Hasan Nizami (d. 1955). Azad portrayed Sarmad as a spokesman for 'Truth', in confrontation with Aurangzeb and some of his close courtiers. But while commenting on Aurangzeb's role in the execution of Sarmad, Azad made a most telling remark. He wrote:

> Most people think that:
> *Blood spilled by love is never wiped out.*
>
> It was by the magic of Sarmad's blood that throughout this period Alamgir did not enjoy a day of peace and tranquility. Even the call to leave this world reached him in a state of poverty [sic] and distress. His biography, of course, could not state such facts. As far as we are concerned it will be definitely better to hold Alamgir, so far as possible, excused in this matter. History is another name for guesswork, personal views, and opinions. Even today two journalists will hardly agree when writing on an event occurring at the distance of only a few miles. Who knows what were the true circumstances of that time and what constellation of circumstances surrounded Alamgir? And since the martyrs of love themselves do not accuse their killers of injustice, what right have we to stain our pen in complaining about them?[3]

In 1919 Azad published his famous book *Tazkira* wherein he projected the seventeenth-century Naqshbandi saint, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1624), as a political figure who fought against the Mughal emperor Akbar's heresy. This is of greater significance for our purpose, for it is projected as having had a long historiographic afterlife. In the modern historiography of Mughal India, Sirhindi has occupied a high place. In various works,

[1] Niccolao Manucci, *Mogul India, or Storio do Mogor*, (trans.) William Irvine, 4 vols (London, 1907–1908). Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, 1656–1668*. Revised edition based on Irving Brock's translation, by Archibald Constable (London, 1916; reprint Delhi, 1972).

[2] Cf. Abid Raza Bedar, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad* (Rampur, 1968), pp. 285 and 289–290.

[3] Christian W. Troll, 'Abul Kalam Azad's *Sarmad the Martyr*', in Christopher Shackle, *Urdu and Muslim South Asia: Studies in Honour of Ralph Russell* (London, 1989), pp. 113–128, pp. 126–127. The translation of '*ghurbat*' in the phrase '*alam-i ghurbt-o-pareshānī*' should be 'exile' (in alien land). Troll translates it as 'poverty'. Troll's view that Azad 'openly expressed his dislike of Aurangzeb's outlook and "violent suppression of truth"' earlier in this article (on p. 114) also needs reconsideration.

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he is portrayed as providing the turning point in the religious politics of Mughal India, while in others he is dismissed as a conservative and reactionary figure who had little impact on the actual politics of the time.[4] Sirhindi's prominence in the South Asian Muslim imagination and history, however, remains almost unparalleled, comparable only to that of Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (d. 1762). In some circles, he is also considered the origin of the ideology of an independent homeland for the Muslims in the subcontinent. New editions and translations of Sirhindi's work as well as new scholarship on him continue to be steadily published.[5]

Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi

In this historiographical stream, Azad's portrayal of Sirhindi has been particularly impactful. Shaikh Muhammad Ikram notes that Azad was the first to project him as a political figure,[6] a reading that Yohanan Friedmann echoed in greater detail, noting that there is nothing in the scholarship about Sirhindi's political role before Azad.[7] Friedmann cites here Azad's *Tazkira*, but while his view regarding the nature of Azad's portrayal of Sirhindi is correct, his assessment that Azad was the first to cast Sirhindi as a radical reformer, and that later such evaluations of Sirhindi were all inspired by Azad's account in *Tazkira*, needs reconsideration. A close reading of *Tazkira* demonstrates that Azad was not the first to cast Sirhindi in this light—in fact, Sirhindi himself carefully and deliberately constructed this image of himself as a renewer of the faith and an uncompromising rebel against tyranny.[8]

Indeed, one may speculate if Azad himself may not have been familiar with this view of Sirhindi since it prevailed among his closest followers and disciples from the Mughal era onwards. Sirhindi's persona, as he constructed it, continued after his death and was even elaborated on in exaggerated terms in a hagiography, *Rauzat al-Qaiyūmiya* (The Garden of *Qaiyūmiyat*), compiled in the eighteenth century, by a member of his own family, Khwaja Kamal al-Din Muhammad Ihsan Mujaddidi Sirhindi.[9] In other words, the propagation of a tradition of seeing Sirhindi as the *mujaddid* of the second millennium, which originated with Sirhindi himself, had long roots.[10] The *Rauzat al-Qaiyumiya*, although similar in the extent to which it paints Sirhindi as a political rebel in the name of religion, is decidedly more hagiographic in its flavour than Azad's account. As a point of comparison and contrast with Azad's work and as an illustration of the tradition of the reception of Sirhindi, a brief description of the *Rauzat* may be instructive. This text, in four parts, is a *tazkira* of four generations of Sirhindi's family who are described as the *qaiyums* (one

[4] Compare, for instance, K. A. Nizami, 'Naqshbandi influence on Mughal rulers and politics', *Islamic Culture* 39 (1965); S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, vol. 2 (Delhi, 2002), pp. 193–223.

[5] See Arthur Buehler, 'Ahmad Sirhindi: nationalist hero, good Sufi, or bad Sufi', in *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, Destiny*, (eds) Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey (New York, 2012), pp. 141–162.

[6] Shaikh Muhammad Ikram, *Rūd-e Kausar* (Delhi, 1967), pp. 277–278.

[7] Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity*, reprint (Delhi, 2000), pp. 106–107

[8] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tazkira*, (ed.) Malik Ram (New Delhi, 1968), pp. 263–267. I have skipped the Arabic phrases and Persian verse in the translation.

[9] Kamal al-Din Muhammad Ihsan Mujaddidi Sirhindi, *Rauzat al-Qaiyūmiya*, original Persian, compiled in 1786, Ms. Asiatic Society, Kolkata, still unpublished; Urdu translation, 4 vols (Lahore, 2002): vol. 1 on Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, the first *qaiyūm;* vol. 2 on Shaikh Muhammad Masum, the second *qaiyūm;* vol. 3 on Shaikh Muhammad Naqshband, the third *qaiyūm*; and vol. 4 on Shaikh Muhammad Zubair, the fourth *qaiyūm*. The author was the son of Shaikh Masum's great grandson Shaikh Hasan Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1736).

[10] It is interesting to note that one of the better-known publicly available copies of *Rauzat al-Qaiyūmiya* was preserved at the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. While there are no explicit references to this text in Azad's *Tazkira*, given that he had prepared another long text on Sirhindi, which is now unfortunately lost, one may well surmise that he may have read it.

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who upholds the world) of their respective times, beginning with Sirhindi himself. Indeed, the text begins with an elaborate *longue durée* reconstruction of Islamic history in order to contextualise Sirhindi's position. The author first discusses the significance of the concept of *tajdīd*, transitioning into a discourse on the role of Umar, the second Pious Caliph and the great-grandfather of Sirhindi. In doing so, he drew upon several hadiths, the most important of which is the following: 'If Prophethood had continued after me (Muhammad), it would have been assigned to Umar (*lau kān ba'di nabīyan lakāna 'Umar*)'. According to the author, this hadith, where the Prophet had spoken about Umar, was proved to be virtually true a thousand years later about one of his descendants, that is, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, because whatever Sirhindi did, had already been done in earlier times by the prophets who brought a new religion. The hagiographer then discusses how one of his ancestors was sent by the Caliph of Baghdad to conquer Kabul, where he became the ruler after its conquest. In other words, he gave Sirhindi not only a theologically significant genealogy but also one that spoke of political power.[11]

The author of *Rauzat* then describes several visions concerning Sirhindi's birth. One concerned how visionaries had even seen the Ka'ba in his birthplace in Sirhind. The author also recounted several visions from the other Sufi orders, including some notable Chishti figures such as Shaikh Salim Chishti (d. 1572) and Shaikh Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537), heralding the birth of Sirhindi and his spiritual pre-eminence. Another vision involved the founders/progenitors of the schools of jurisprudence, Imam Abu Hanifa (d. 767) and Imam Shafi'i (d. 820), appearing to give Sirhindi full authority to interpret their jurisprudence and even reverse their rulings.[12] Perhaps the most significant vision that the author mentions relates to the Mughal emperor Akbar himself. After discussing Sirhindi's immediate ancestors, he describes, at imaginative length, the corruptions and decadence of Islam during Akbar's time, attributing to the emperor the grossest blasphemies in the order of those attributed to the pharaoh, or King Herod in the biblical tradition, which prefigured the coming of a great religious person. Finally, coming to the actual birth of Sirhindi, the text avers that it was accompanied by an astrological event that occurs only once in a thousand years, and which had last occurred before the birth of the Prophet. Akbar himself was visited by the following nightmare just before Sirhindi's birth: a strong wind coming from the north, from Sirhind, carried away his throne as he sat upon it; it was turned upside down, thus tumbling him from his seat. The fear of this dream rendered the king tongue-tied, and the nobles began to speculate among themselves about the illness that had rendered him silent. After a week, the king declared that he was not ill and he described his dream, explaining that he feared that not only would he lose the throne but all the corruptions he had instituted would be shattered. This vision led seamlessly into the narrative of Sirhindi's life, which was at pains to show just how he battled the corruptions and tyranny of Akbar's reign. In particular, the author recounts how, after his political emergence, Sirhindi invited the people to present themselves either in the court of Akbar (*bārgāh-i Akbarī*) or the court of Muhammad (*bārgāh-i Muhammadī*).[13]

Azad was thus not the first to portray Sirhindi as a political figure. Further, the view, as given in Ikram's *Rūd-i Kausar*, that it was only Azad's reading of Sirhindi that brought this image of the saint out from the circle of his devotees and the followers of the Naqshbandi order shows a rather unfair assessment of the range of the order's influence and the role, good or bad, that the Naqshbandi Mujaddidis played in South Asian Islam.[14] We may note

[11] *Rauzat al-Qaiyūmiya*, vol. 1, pp. 69–76.

[12] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 101–121

[13] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 107–108, 121 and 127–132.

[14] Ikram, *Rūd-i Kausar*, p. 278. For Mujaddidi Naqshbandis' relations with the Mughal courts and the society, see M. Alam, *The Mughals and the Sufis: Islam and Political Imagination in India, 1500–1750* (New York, 2021), pp. 48–93 and 331–388.

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here, by comparison, that the South Asian Muslim memory of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri (d. 1505) and his associates is not the same as that of Sirhindi, despite Azad's admiration for Jaunpuri and his circle. What is surprising is that even Shaikh Muhammad Ikram, whose assessment of Sirhindi itself is in such hyperbolic terms, also takes the same position regarding Azad's role in the promotion of Sirhindi's image in the South Asian Muslim imagination.[15]

Why Sirhindi?

Whether Azad brought the image of Sirhindi as an ideal Islamic political figure with widespread acceptability or he intended to 'set the tone for the treatment of Sirhindi in subsequent works' is a moot point.[16] The question that concerns us here is why Azad's portrayal of Sirhindi bore such a resemblance to the earlier Mughal Indian tradition of the reception of Sirhindi. We may remember here that Azad's father, Maulana Khairuddin, was primarily a Naqshbandi and Qadiri *pīr* and speculate that his own personal associations with the Naqshbandi order may have influenced his views.[17] Yet, Azad's treatment of Sirhindi was in any case a more political than hagiographic reading of the figure. Given the saint's preeminent position in the memory of South Asian Muslims, portraying him (Sirhindi) from a purely religious point of view would have been a self-defeating enterprise for Azad. This might have been one reason for choosing such a strongly political reading as he could have hardly ignored Sirhindi in a historical work such as *Tazkira*. For Azad's theological positions were markedly, and radically, different from those of Sirhindi—he was consistently accommodationist, both before and after the writing of *Tazkira*.

A notable illustration of this was Azad's evaluation, as we saw above, of Sarmad's position. In this essay Azad also admired Dara Shukoh—in particular, the prince's high spiritual stature, his non-sectarianism, his openness to the non-Islamic and Indic traditions, and his attempt to highlight the commonality between Islam and 'Hinduism'/the Brahminical tradition. He writes:

> The greatest proof of his [Dara Shukoh's] spiritual stature was the fact that in search of the spiritual goal, he made no distinction between the mosque and the temple. The same humility he had in bowing to the Muslim dervishes he showed in his supplication to Hindu mendicants. And who of genuine mystical experience can disagree with this principle? If in this state we assert the distinction between unbelief and Islam, then what difference is there between the blind and the seeing? The moth should seek the flame. If it is fond only of the lamp of the Ka'ba, then it is not perfectly accomplished in its burning desire for immolation.
>
> *'āshiq ham az islām kharābast-o-ham az kufr,*
> *parwāna chirāgh-i haram-o-dair nadānad*[18]

Given the fact that Dara Shukoh could be seen as the spiritual heir of the legacy of Sirhindi's nemesis, Akbar, Azad's position was clearly different from Sirhindi's at this

[15] Ikram, *Rūd-i Kausar*, pp. 280–284. Ikram's consideration of Azad's citations of the passages from Sirhindi's letters tries to show that Akbar's heresy had been eliminated before Sirhindi wrote these letters.

[16] Cf. Friedmann, *Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi*, pp. 107–111, for a brief review of writings which he suggests are all inspired by Azad's *Tazkira*.

[17] Cf. Khwaja Hasan Nizami's foreword to Azad's article on Sarmad, reprinted as Khwaja Muhammad Ahmad (ed.), *Sufī Sarmad Shahīd* (Hyderabad, 1986), p. 8. The article was first published in *Nizām al-Mashā'ikh* 2.3, Muharra al-Harām, 1328. Hasan Nizami was the editor of this journal.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 20; Troll, 'Abul Kalam Azad's *Sarmad the Martyr*', p. 121.

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very early stage. Moreover, if such were Azad's views before the writing of *Tazkira*, which contains his treatment of Sirhindi, his ideas regarding *wahdat-i adyān*, or the unity of religions, during his later career they are even more well-known as liberal and accommodationist between diverse religious traditions.[19] Did *Tazkira*, with its aggrandisement of Sirhindi, then represent a radical change in Azad's religious views after publishing his essay on Sarmad, a view which he then abandoned again in his later career?

Aijaz Ahmad, a noted Marxist scholar, suggests changes in the evolution of Maulana Azad's religious and political ideas. He writes that the 'insight in maturity' should not be 'read back into the youth' to have 'the impression of a seamless growth, unproblematic and always fully enlightened and secular, from the start'.[20] He adds:

> ... *Tazkira*, which Azad drafted in 1916 and was published in 1919, had the predominant purpose of associating Azad's entire family over many generations, hence by implication Azad himself, with precisely that tradition of pietistic *sharia*, descended from Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, to which Sarmad had been opposed and which had therefore taken his life.[21]

Ian Henderson Douglas also has nearly, if not exactly, similar views. He writes that in *Tazkira* 'Azad felt himself to be in spiritual succession of such men as Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taimiya, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri and Shah Waliullah'.[22]

Not only do such views seem unlikely, but Azad himself too would have countered them and claimed that he had held the same belief since 1912. We know that in a speech in 1921, he said that in the very first issue of *Al-Hilāl*, he had declared his belief that it was the religious duty (*farz-i shara'ī*) of the Muslims of India in all sincerity to tie the knot of loyalty and love with the Hindus.[23] Earlier, in 1913 and 1914, the positions he took in *Al-Hilāl*, we will see below, were opposed to the kind of *sharī'a*, *sunna*, and *bida'* that Sirhindi is generally known for. There are several other scholars who think the same way as Azad projects.[24] But, more importantly, the people who observed Azad closely also endorsed him as he projects his position. Abdur Razzaq Malihabadi, for instance, who lived with him for over a quarter of century, saw no change in his religious and political visions throughout his career. Even when he fought for the *khilāfat*, he advocated a position of Hindu-Muslim unity.[25] In Azad's view the Quran divides the non-Muslims into two categories, one *kuffār*, and the other allies of the Muslims. The Hindus of India belonged to the second category. 'The performance of the Indian Muslims will be the best only if they are one with the Hindus.'[26] Throughout his stay in Ranchi, where he wrote his *Tazkira*, Azad maintained this position. He welcomed Hindus as an audience in his Friday sermons; he accepted their donations in building the madrasa and *Anjuman-i Islāmiya* there.[27]

[19] Cf. Abid Raza Bedar, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad* (Rampur, 1968), pp. 244–250.

[20] Aijaz Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present: Political Essays* (New Delhi, 1996), p. 136.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 137, 138 and 139.

[22] Ian Henderson Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography*, (eds) Gail Minault and Christian W. Troll (Delhi, 1993), p. 164. For some qualifications, see *ibid.*, pp. 30–37.

[23] *Khutbāt-i Āzād* (Delhi, 1962), pp. 32–34 and 38–40. See also citation from this speech in Malik Ram, *Kuchh Maulānā Abūl Kalām Āzād ke bāre men* (Delhi, 1989), p. 99. See also M. Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Delhi, 1988), p. 248 for instance.

[24] Cf. M. Mujeeb, *Indian Muslims*, reprint (Delhi, 1995); V. N. Datta, *Maulana Azad* (Delhi, 1990).

[25] Abdur Razzaq Malihabadi, *Zikr-e Āzād: Maulānā Āzād kī Refāqat men Artīs Sāl* (38 years in the company of Maulana Azad), reprint (Delhi, 2006), pp. 70–80 and 83–85.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 80–83.

[27] Jamshed Qamar (ed.), *Maulānā Āzād kā Qayām-e Ranchī: Ahwāl-o-Āsār* (Ranchi and Delhi, 1994), *passim*.

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There is a consistency in the accommodationist views Azad held throughout his career, and therefore it seems unfair to attribute his positive portrayal of Sirhindi to some mythical conservative moment in his theological evolution. A better solution may be to take seriously the fact that what attracted Azad to the figure of Sirhindi was not his theological views but rather what he represented as a political figure—that is, one who was not afraid to stand against what he perceived as tyranny in the name of principle. To take a comparable analogy, Azad's sympathetic portrayal of the Mahdavis, whom he includes in his discussion of India's Islamic past, was not because he shared their religious views but because of the steadfastness of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri and his disciples, Shaikh Alai and Shaikh Abd-Allah Niyazi, in the face of royal persecution.[28] Indeed, Sirhindi is only one of a cast of characters in *Tazkira* that formed a kind of political martyrology. Yet, this was not a random assortment of personal heroes. Azad clearly expressed the underlying principle by which he selected these figures from the past for his discussion in *Tazkira*.

Jihād and *'azīmat* in Azad's early writings

Azad begins his reconstruction of the Islamic past in *Tazkira* during the course of his account of one of his own ancestors. It is in this context that he provides a discussion of the theology of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri and his disciples and, more than that, of their brave resistance against and sufferings at the hands of the rulers of the time. Azad's ancestor, Shaikh Jamal al-Din, together with his *murshid* Shaikh Daud Jahniwal (d. 1574–75),[29] had stood firm against the tyrants of the time, despite the indifference and unjust stand of several major contemporary scholars like Makhdum al-Mulk Abd-Allah Sultanpuri.[30] Shaikh Jamal al-Din and Shaikh Daud even wrote a book predicting that the fruit of the injustices of these rulers would be the end of their reign.[31] After discussing the experiences of his ancestor, as well as those of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri and the Mahdavis in fighting against the rulers of the day, Azad defines their action as the best of *jihād*, invoking the famous hadith: 'the best of *jihād* is the word of truth in the face of the tyrannical ruler' (*Afzal al-jihād-i kalima-tu Haqqin 'inda sultānin jā'ir*). Azad is very particular in citing the authorities for this hadith, namely, Tirmizi, Abu Daud, and Ibn Maja (*rawāhu al-Tirmizī, wa Abū Dā'ud wa Ibn Māja*).[32] He then elaborates on the conditions of faith (*imān*) required to be capable of such *jihād* in an extensive theological excursus revolving around the Quranic verse '*innā zālika la min 'azm il-umūr*' (Indeed, all that is of the matters [requiring] determination. Quran: 31/16). Citing several Quranic verses and hadiths, Azad demonstrates that there are three stages of faith, the highest of which he characterised as '*azīmat* or determination.[33] Those who attain this stage were, in Azad's estimation, far

[28] For a discussion of Azad's treatment of the Mahdavis in *Tazkira*, see Scott Kugle, 'Maulana Azad resurrects a "mahdi" between ethical vision and historical revision', *Islamic Culture* 73.2 (April 1999), pp. 79–114. For Mahdavis, see S. A. A. Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements* (Agra, 1966); Derryl MacLean, 'Real men and false men at the Court of Akbar: the *Majalis* of Shaykh Mustafa Gujarati', in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, (eds) Bruce Lawrence and David Gilmartin (Gainesville, 2000), pp. 199–215, and D. MacLean, 'The sociology of political engagement: the Mahdaviyah and the state', in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, (ed.) Richard M. Eaton. Oxford in India Readings: Themes in Indian History (New Delhi, 2003), pp. 150–168.

[29] For Shaikh Jamal al-Din, see Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, vol. 2, pp. 19, 61–63 and 427.

[30] A Sunni orthodox scholar, he held a high position at the courts of Salim Shah Sur and also Akbar. S. A. A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign (1556–1605)* (Delhi, 1975) and K. A. Nizami, *Akbar and Religion* (Delhi, 2009).

[31] *Tazkira*, (ed.) Ram, p. 108.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 108–117.

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ahead of everyone else, including those who merely spent their days devoted to routine scholarly religious activities in madrasas or sublime spiritual practices in mystic retreats:

> *Dar madrasa kas rā na rasad da'wa'i tauhīd / Manzil gah-i mardān-i muwahhid sar-i dār ast* (Monotheism does not solicit one in a madrasa/The gallows are the resting place of the monotheists).

Azad shows how the men of *'azīmat* contrasted with the more routinely pious men who undoubtedly were engaged in service of the faith (through *da'wat*) but were not capable of the higher office of *'azīmat-i da'wat*, that is, the determined commitment to the practice and propagation of the faith. They thus remained at the stage of *rukhsat* (permission, relaxation).[34] 'This is the very difference between *'azīmat* and *rukhsat* [the secret of],' Azad writes, 'which a Sufi (master of soul/heart, *sāhib-i dil*) having abandoned the retreat of a *khānqāh* had divulged to the Shaikh of Shiraz: *Guft an galīm-i khwīsh badar mī burad ze mauj / Win sa'y mī kunad ki bar ārad gharīq ra* (That one claims that his prayer mat will be a raft upon the waves / While this one dives down to rescue the drowning).'

The men of *'azīmat* were also always ready for action. Significantly, Azad expressed all their qualities in a series of Quranic phrases such as '*as sabiqun*', '*asbaqun bil khairat*', '*munfiqun al-awwalun*', '*mujahiduna bil 'amali wal jawarih*'.[35] Moreover, the light of the knowledge and the actions of such people, Azad writes, were derived directly from the lamp of the Prophet (*mishkat-i nubuwwat se makhuz*). It is only they who actually inherit and represent the tradition of the Prophet.[36]

Azad sought to demonstrate the veracity of this theological discourse through an appeal to Islamic history. He located the point of origin of this genealogy of those blessed with the capacity for the office of *'azīmat-i da'wat* in the figure of Imam Husain. What made this such a natural starting point was the fact of the martyrdom of Husain. While in *Tazkira*, Azad's treatment of Husain is relatively limited, taken together, his various writings on the martyrdom of the imam in opposition to the tyranny of Yazid seem so effusive as to almost place in doubt their orthodoxy from the Sunni Muslim standpoint. In one essay, he goes so far as to reiterate the Sufi tradition regarding the claim that the martyrdom of Husain represented the completion of Prophethood. Some of the legends that he repeats in his essays on Husain were, in fact, proscribed by some prominent Sunni scholars, including by another of Azad's own martyr-heroes, Ibn-i Taimiya, who appears in *Tazkira* in such laudatory terms. Here Azad considered some theological aspects of the purist Ibn Taimiya because in India, he notes, the '*ulamā*' of his time knew little about him. Azad's principal aim was to highlight his significance as a fighter against injustice in the Islamic tradition.[37] Azad is at pains to show that his hero rose above a group of accomplished contemporaries, that he stood alone in his ability to both revive and renew the faith and in taking responsibility for the commitment to its propagation. In other words, he fitted the definition of one who had attained the highest stage of the faith, *'azīmat*. As with Sirhindi, Azad judges Ibn-i Taimiya's accomplishments to behove prophets.[38] An important element of Azad's construction of Ibn-i Taimiya involves a long excursus on extraordinary courage in the face of tyranny and the willingness to undergo imprisonment and even death in defence of his principles.[39]

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 117–131.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 114.
[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 159.
[38] *Tazkira* (Lahore, u.d.), p. 60, part 2.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 77, part 2.

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All these elements are also present in Azad's portrayal of another hero of the Islamic past, Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal, who went against no less than four consecutive Abbasid rulers, a fact that Azad specially highlights. Again, the notion of *tajdīd* and *'azimat-i da'wat* are key to the construction of Azad's hero. After describing Ibn-i Hambal's refusal to accept the tyrant's commands, even in the face of a threat of mortal punishment, without proof from the Quran, Azad writes, in yet another echo of his words on Sirhindi, 'if this lamp of *tajdīd* and the candle of the *'azīmat-i da'wat* were not derived from the lamp of Prophethood (*mishkāt-i nubuwwat*), then what else was it?'[40]

What, then, Azad sought in the figure of Sirhindi in his selective construction of the Islamic past was a homegrown example of a figure with the qualities of *'azīmat*. Thus, the repeated echoes of the language and rhetorical strategies Azad used to describe these other heroes also resounded in his portrayal of Sirhindi. As for Azad's view of Sirhindi's thoughts on Islam, we may note that he also sounds admiring of Akbar's liberal politics. He published Shibli Numani's poem in praise of Akbar in *Al-Hilāl* in November 1913, approvingly, without any editorial comment.[41]

'Azīmat, jihād, and the non-Muslims

Again, while *Tazkira* constructed a most particular reading of Islamic history by building a tradition of principled men capable of standing against tyranny, elsewhere it exceeded the bounds of Islamic history and even bracketed Ahmad ibn Hanbal with Galileo.[42] Indeed, his willingness to search for political martyrs and the people of *'azīmat* was not confined either to the Islamic past or to the Muslim community. Consider in this context his essay published in *Al-Hilāl* in March 1914 about a Hindu girl, Snehalata Mukhopadhyay, who committed suicide because her parents were unable to fulfil the prevailing customary demand for a dowry and thus find her an educated match from a good family. Besides the fact that Azad called her *shahīd-i rasm* (a martyr to custom) and uses the term '*ūlu al-'azm*' (a person who possesses *'azīmat*) to describe her, he begins his essay in the following telling manner:

> [When I look,] I notice that the injunction of *jihād* in Islam is such an orbit that nothing of all the sacred works which emanate from human sentiments and virtues in the world of humanity remains outside it. The true meaning (*haqīqat*) of *jihād* is to [be ready to] suffer from discomfort, harm, ordeal and travails for truth (*haqq, sadāqat*).

Azad projects Snehalata's death as a true illustration of the Quranic verse, *inna- Allāh fāliq al habb wa an nawā* (It is Allah who causeth the seed grain and the date stone to split and sprout. Quran: 6/95). He also identifies the martyred Snehalata as an angelic soul (*rūh-i malakūtī*).[43]

It is interesting to note here that the Bengali newspapers describing Snehalata's death used the word '*balidāna*', the term for Hindu religious sacrifice, and thus showed a nationalist secularisation of the term in the journalistic practice of the period.[44] Azad, in transposing this characterisation into Islamic martyrdom (*shahādat*) and sacrifice, displayed not only an understanding of the Hindu connotations of the term but also a

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 37, part 2.

[41] The poem '*Hamārā tarz-i hukūmat*' in *Al-Hilal* (5 November 1913). See also Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi (ed.), *Kulliyāt-i Shiblī Urdū* (Azamgarh, 1954), p. 41.

[42] *Khutba-i 'Īd al-Zuhā* in *Sadā'i Haqq*. A collection of Azad's writings and speeches (Delhi, 1963), pp. 82–90; *Qaul-i Faisal* (Layelpur, 1974), p. 34.

[43] *Al-Hilāl* (March 1914). See also Rochona Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* (Durham, 2009), pp. 70–77.

[44] Cf. Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity*, pp. 80–85.

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keen desire to think together across communal divides. He thus elevated Snehalata's death from an event that was solely relevant to the Hindu community to one that was of symbolic importance to all Indians. Moreover, in subsuming this into the notion of *jihād*, he specifically brought this event into the fold of Islamic history and ideology. In other words, for Azad, a non-Muslim could be considered a martyr in the Quranic sense, without raising the thorny question of *kufr* and Islam and conversion, a position that foreshadowed his later radical theology.

Snehalata was not the first Hindu Azad deemed a martyr in the cause of *jihād*. Earlier, in November 1913, he had reported passionately on the ordeal of Indians in South Africa and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's fight for them, in a piece entitled '*al-naba' al-alīm* (the sad news)', the same heading he used to describe the predicament of Muslims in Tripoli. He appealed to his Muslim readers to mobilise in support of their brethren in South Africa in the same way they did in protest against the demolition of the Kanpur Mosque. He reported that Gandhi—for his beloved country and mourning the fate of the Indians in South Africa—had decided to wear the clothing of ordinary workers and to eat only once a day. Azad not only described Gandhi's struggle as *jihād* in the path of Allah (*fī sabīl Allah*) but used the conventional Quranic *du'āiya* (prayer) phrases, '*sabbat Allāh aqdāmahu wa 'azzama ujūrahu wa razaqanā min amsālihi* (May God make his steps firm, may he get great rewards, may God bless us with [many] like him)'.[45] Indeed, Azad tries to convince his Muslim readers that Gandhi's fight was as much theirs, as faithful Muslims, as anyone else's:

> For the followers of humanity and reality and justice there is no distinction between this and that. ... If they mourn the suffering corpses of Macedonia and Tripoli, then they also shriek at the bloody wounds and those murdered in the name of righteousness in South Africa...
>
> *'Ārif ham az Islām kharābast wa ham az kufr / Parwāna chirāgh-i haram-o-dair nadānad* (The real gnostic is at unease both with Islam and with infidelity/The moth does not distinguish between the lamp of the mosque and that of the temple). If the world is our homeland and therefore if it is worthy of respect for us, then that land in whose airs and waters we have been nourished deserves our respectful love far more. If all sons of humanity are our brothers, then those humans who are also sons of this land and who drink its waters and who love its beloved climes deserve most to be considered our brothers....[W]herever on this earth there is need for love of the heart and tears of compassion it is the responsibility of the followers of Islam and it is part of their lineage's heritage, ... they have come only for this that they should protect all humanity.[46] Mr. Gandhi is the soldier of this silent battle. ... Every struggle which is undertaken for the eradication of inhumanity, oppression, and injustice in reality *jihād* in the path of Allah because God is not a human for whom we should sacrifice our lives and wealth but rather truth and justice is his work and the battle against injustice is his path. Those who are engaged in the fight for truth on the earth are certainly called in the heavens as one in the service of God. Mr. Gandhi has spent his life and wealth on this path and thus in the true sense he is a warrior in the fight in the path of Allah and has exceeded both these stages, sacrificing their lives and their wealth [*bi anfusihim wa bi*

[45] *Al-Hilāl* (November and December 1913).

[46] In support, here Azad cites the Quranic verse: *wa kazālika ja'alnā-kum ummatan wasatan li-takūnu shuhadā' 'alan-nās-i wa yakūn ar-rasūlu 'alaikum shāhida.* (Thus We have made you a justly balanced ummat, that you be witnesses over mankind and the Messenger be a witness over you. Quran: 2/143).

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> *amwālihim*[47]] of sacred *jihād*. He is a strange commander of truth and justice for when he is attacked by guns and whips, he has no armed army nor even a weapon of sharpened iron in his hand. Still, we believe that his army is innumerable and the weapons he uses are effective against the enemies. Though he is alone and unarmed, at his left and right are angels.[48]

Azad's brilliant characterisation of Gandhi's early experiments with non-violent protest *jihād* hinted at greater ambitions. Taken together, his essays and *Tazkira* suggest perhaps that Azad was attempting to lay the foundation for a new sort of Muslim theological practice in the context of South Asia, one which was attentive to present and local realities as much as to Islamic thought and tradition.

The *'ulamā* and the problems of the Muslims of the time

Azad's construction of the past is only one part of his discourse in *Tazkira*. Although it was ostensibly meant to be a memoir, throughout *Tazkira*, Azad was more concerned with the present and he invoked the past mainly as a means to strengthen the appeal of his message. Part of this message was directed quite pointedly at his brethren religious leaders. His own disappointment with the majority of this community was palpable. For instance, in connection with a section in *Tazkira* describing the books customarily used in the madrasas of medieval India, particularly in Mughal India, Azad mentions a text entitled *Usūl-i Bazdawī*, a book on the principles of jurisprudence. Azad notes that this text was considered fundamental and many Indian scholars in the past, including his ancestor Shaikh Jamal al-Din, had written commentaries upon it. Azad, however, took exception to the status of the work, implying that it was no longer enough for contemporary purposes.[49] Yet, it was not merely a faulty or incomplete grasp of past Islamic knowledge that beset the *'ulamā* of the day. It was rather a lack of understanding of the fundamental issues at stake in religious life. Azad explained, for instance, the opposition of the sixteenth-century *'ulamā* to Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri as driven by the trivialities and frivolities of religious life (*juz'iyāt, furū'iyāt*), which, he emphasised, unfortunately dominated the religious discourses of the *'ulamā* of his own time.[50] Such were the *'ulamā* and their false and misguided beliefs. The sad result was that their quarrels over petty matters, which they projected as '*dīn*', sapped the strength of their community:

> The worldly *'ulamā* can never be united. The band of dogs are generally silent but as soon as the butcher throws a piece of bone their claws are immediately sharpened, and their teeth become poisonous. The same is the case with these dogs of the world. They can unite in all matters, but where the bone of the world is rotting, they gather there, and they do not have control over their claws and teeth. Their capital is not that true knowledge which obliterates differences and which inspires treading on the correct path, but rather it is all in all the knowledge of conflict and dispute...[51]

[47] Azad sees in their struggle the qualities of ideal 'mu'mins' according to the Quran: *Al-lazīna āmanū wa hājarū wa jāhadū fī sabīl'illāhi bi-amwālihim wa anfusihim azā'mu darajātan 'inda' llāhi* (The ones who have belief, emigrate and strive in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives are greater in rank in the sight of Allah. Quran: 9/20).

[48] *Al-Hilāl* (26 November 1913). Here too he cites the Quran: *balā an tasbirū wa tattaqū wa ya'tukum min faurihim hāza yumdidkum rabbukum bi khamsati ālāf min al-malā'ikat-i musawwimīn a* (Yea—if ye remain firm, and act aright, even if the enemy should rush here on you in hot haste, your Lord would help you with five thousand angels making a terrific onslaught. Quran: 3/125).

[49] *Tazkira*, (ed.) Ram, pp. 305–306.

[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

[51] *Tazkira* (Lahore edition), Part 2, pp. 3–4.

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For as long as Islam's foundations lay in five fundamental pillars, Azad writes, there were no internal fights in the community. Dissension and disunity only began to take root in Islam because of the influence of non-Arabs (*'ajam*) on Islam and the importing of Greco-Hellenic thought into the tradition. At the same time, the evolution of jurisprudence and dogmatics (*al-kalām*) were mixed up with the banes of the cultures of the non-Arabs and the Greeks:

> Today all the sciences known as fundamental and which are identified as the base of *shara'ī* learning which are read and taught in our *madrasa*s, if the incisive eye of any wise man scans and analyses them, it will become apparent to what extent they partake of the combination of fundamental *sharī'a* and pure faith and how much they consist of that world-damaging *fitna*, *yūnānīyat* and *'ajamīyat*... if such is the state of the religious (*shara'ī)* sciences, nay even the so-called fundamental sciences, then what could be the situation of those fables of suppositions and tomes of blunders and false postulates which are given the noble title of *'ma'qūlāt'*.[52]

> ... It was one ramification of this mixture of non-Arabic and Greek innovations in Islamic thought that led to the incorporation in the books of jurisprudence of a chapter on false pretexts (*al-hiyal*). An illustration of this can be seen in sixteenth century India in the life of Makhdum al-Mulk (Abd Allah Sultanpuri). In these books, unfortunately, later scholars also began to attribute many perverse ideas and juristic formulations to the thought of the early Muslim luminaries, so that untruths began to filter into Islamic thought. Azad saw the legacies of these perversions in the pattern of the spiritual life in the Sufi hospices and in the textbooks of the *madrasa*s in his day, but wonders if the '*ulamā* of his time, engrossed in these very misleading tomes and denuded of the true Islamic learning, would appreciate it.[53]

Thus, Azad not only criticised a certain rationalist strand in the evolution of Islamic philosophy but, more importantly, although the ostensible thrust of his argument was historical, his primary concern remained rooted in the present as an attempt to diagnose and cure the religious ills of his day. In response to a complaint by the *'ulamā* about the heretical tendencies of English-educated people who displayed little interest in Islamic tradition, Azad pointed out that their divergence from the truth of the Quran in favour of the new-fangled sciences of Europe was not any different from the divergence of the '*ulamā* who were so wedded to Greco-Hellenic learning. In fact, in Azad's opinion, the latter were even more culpable because they still adhered to a long-dead philosophical tradition, whereas they (the English educated) were attempting to partake of the current system of European thought.

In this context, Azad also pointed out that projects like those suggested by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan were ultimately self-defeating, because they would not bring the community closer to the Quran and its truths. In Azad's understanding, in ancient times, when the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites attempted to protect Islam from the philosophical criticisms of outsiders, they in fact made the tradition more vulnerable by incorporating these philosophies. In the same way, the contemporaneous call to found a new *'ilm-i kalām* was wrong-headed, as such an enterprise would not ultimately protect the faith. 'Having said this, then it should be known that I am not one of those who have raised slogans to proclaim that the old rationalist traditions are completely useless and that

[52] *Tazkira*, (ed.) Ram, p. 213n.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 231.

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the reform of the madrasa syllabi means to drown all these books in the sea (*gharq-i mai-i nāb*). What I say is that in those works the good has been mixed with the false.'[54]

Azad's early political career

Tazkira represents a critical moment in both the evolution of Maulana Azad's anticolonial struggle as well as his struggle for reform of the Muslims and, more than that, their so-called religious guides and divines. He announced forcefully his fight against imperialism in 1912 with the launching of *Al-Hilāl*. Although Azad was committed to a united fight against the colonial government from the very beginning, in *Al-Hilāl* his primary objective was to stir the Muslim population to join this struggle, emphasising repeatedly that it was their Quranic obligation to throw themselves into this fight. Moreover, it was incumbent upon them, Azad believed, to distinguish themselves as an integral constituent of this fight. He launched the organisation *Hizb Allāh* to reiterate and establish this Quranic obligation for Muslims and also to build a core group of leaders of the community. Around the same time, he also sought to redefine and renovate the notion of religious learning, which found expression in the establishment of *Dār al-Irshād*. He also indicated that Maulana Mahmud Hasan of Deoband would be the organisation's leader.[55] To a certain, although by no means sufficient, extent, the Muslim community did respond to Azad's call. At around the same time, however, Mahmud Hasan left for Hajj, from where the British, suspecting him of working against the empire, took him to Malta as a prisoner.[56]

Moreover, within a few months, we know, *Al-Hilāl* was banned and Azad's subsequent publication, *Al-Balāgh*, was also quickly shut down. Azad himself was then summarily exiled from Calcutta.[57] This forced exile happened at a moment when Azad was at the height of his activities to reform the Muslims and to mobilise them for the anticolonial struggle, and when these activities were eliciting a response, however lukewarm. But while the dislocation to Ranchi was frustrating, his mission to encourage and promote the cosmopolitan milieu continued unabated. In his sermons and activities inside the mosque he welcomed local Hindus as well. Even in such foundational endeavours as the collection of donations for a madrasa and *Anjuman-i Islāmiya*, Hindu luminaries such as Kalipada Ghosh, Radha Gobindo Choudhury, Amrendranath Banerjee, Thakur Das, Bipin Chandra Pal, and others were invited. Azad did not abandon the principle of conviviality across communities that was a hallmark of his earlier and later career. It may be worth remembering here that at much the same time (in June 1919) Azad published an article in which he advocated and supported the entry of Hindus into mosques.[58]

Tazkira, written and published during Azad's stay in Ranchi, therefore, must be read as part and parcel of these larger efforts; even if the choice of heroes in this work might give an impression (rather a wrong one) of an exclusionary bent of mind and an affirmation of 'the supremacy of orthodoxy'.[59] We should, however, also consider the circumstances in which *Tazkira* was written, and Azad's response to those constraints. Indeed, the fact that *Tazkira* had been composed during his internment in Ranchi perhaps

[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 232–233.

[55] Abdul Qavi Dasnavi, *Hayāt-e Abūl Kalām* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 356–366.

[56] Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naqsh-i Hayāt*, reprint (Delhi, 2011), vol. 2, pp. 265–293 for Mahmud Hasan's arrival in Hejaz, his meetings with Turkish officials, political engagements, and over three years' internment in Malta.

[57] Datta, *Maulana Azad*, pp. 79–80.

[58] 'Jāmi'a al-Shawāhid fī Dukhūl-i Ghair Muslim fi al-Masājid', *Ma'arif* (May–June 1919).

[59] For such a view, see, for instance, M. Mujeeb, 'The Tadhkirah: a biography', in *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: A Memorial Volume*, (ed.) Humayun Kabir (New York, 1959), pp. 149–152.

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also contributed to the focus in Azad's historical enquiries on figures in the Islamic past who had suffered at the hands of official persecutors. Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi, who visited Azad during his internment in Ranchi, noted that Azad had developed a new-found interest in the writings of Ibn Taymiya and Ibn Qayyim.[60] It appears that this interest derived in no small measure from the commonality Azad felt between his own condition and that of his predecessors. Indeed, all his heroes during this period, as evidenced by both *Tazkira* and the correspondence of his friends, were figures who had been imprisoned for the vocal expression of their views by tyrannical rulers.

Azad's imprisonment also prevented him from polishing *Tazkira* into a more finished form, as he had hoped. The published work was thus the (unrevised) result of the effort of his friend, Mirza Fazluddin Ahmad, who had encouraged Azad to write his autobiography. Azad acquiesced, as he writes to Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, somewhat unhappily.[61] And the terms that he used to describe his decision to allow the publication of this incomplete version are worth noting:

> The book's shortcomings are a result of my own defective way of working, and the weakness of my pen, because of which I am embarrassed, and beg [the reader's] pardon. Since a substantial part of the book has already been printed, my mood was disinclined to go through the remaining parts of it again and revise them. [Indeed, plenty of] people have left behind memorials of their contentment and satisfaction; I thought it better to leave a testament to my vexed spirit and anxious mind:
>
> *be-guzarīd ki in nuskha-i mujazzā mānad*
> (Leave it be, that it might remain a fragmented record)[62]

Clearly, Azad's confinement was having a frustrating effect on his own sense of determination, and he sometimes channelled this demoralisation into verse. At one point he describes *Tazkira* as a 'book of frustrated melancholy' (*gham-nāma-i hasrat*), adding, a few lines later, the following couplet:

> *Begāna-e jahān hamen 'uzlat ne kardiyā / Kuchh kuchh kisī kisī se mulāqāt rahgayī*
>
> (Solitude has made me a stranger to the world / there were so many encounters still to be had)

Azad sensed, too, that his confinement was not only thwarting his ability to engage in regular activities, but was also transforming his relationship to time itself, haunting him with a sense of lost time and missed opportunities. One of the most moving couplets

[60] *Maktūbāt-i Sulaimānī* (Lakhnau, 1963), letter to Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, vol. 1, pp. 115–116.

[61] Cf. Malik Ram (ed.), *Khutūt-i Āzād* (Delhi, 1991), p. 102. *Tazkira ko'ī aisī chīz na thī jo khusūsīyat ke sāth shā'i' kī jātī. Ek sāhib ne bataur khud shā'i' kardiyā. Bā-wujūd iskī ishā'at mere liye khush-ā'ind na huyī.*

[62] *Tazkira*, (ed.) Ram, p. 5. *Logon ne apnī dil-jam'ī wa farāgh-e khātir kī yādgārēn chhorī hain, apnī parēshān-khātirī aur parāgandagī-ye tab'a kī bhī ēk yādgār hai to behtar hai: 'be-guzarīd ki in nuskha-i mujazzā mānad'.* Later in his address in *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* he further illustrates the *gham* as he says: 'In 1914 I planned to bring to the 'ulama and the sufis the principal objectives of the time... I struggled for it, but all thought that my mission was a "*fitna*". The sole exception was the personality of Maulana Mahmud Hasan of Deoband.' *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (Lahore, 1962), vol. II, p. 95

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in *Tazkira*, in fact, plays precisely on this theme, in which moments of joy can seem so fleeting, whereas moments of grief and frustration can seem to last forever:

> *Shab-e wisāl bahut kam hai, āsman se kaho / Ki jorde ko'ī tukrā shab-e judā'ī kā*
>
> (A night of rendezvous is too short—go beg the heavens / that they might extend it by even one instant of my *shab-i judā'ī*.)[63]

The sense on Maulana Azad's part that the project remained unfinished is a theme that runs throughout *Tazkira*. Thus, as a crucial element of his perspective, we would be remiss if we were to forget it ourselves.

Summing up

From 1912 onwards, Azad had tried to show that justifiable struggle for truth and against tyranny was part of Islamic history and tradition. Through *Tazkira*, Azad sought to convince his Muslim brothers that—even if they themselves were not able to abide by the principles of *'azīmat*—they should recognise it in others and support them. In this case, the implication was that Azad and his brothers-in-arms in the anticolonial struggle, such as Gandhi or even Snehalata, bore the standard of *'azīmat*. *Tazkira* was thus an attempt to rouse his Muslim readers to fight against the colonial enemy, whereas later, in his Quranic commentary, he clearly formulates the theological foundations for his vision of the new nation. This does not mean that there is some fundamental change in his religious thinking, particularly regarding inter-communal harmony, from *Tazkira* to the Quranic commentary; rather, the two texts, insofar as they may appear to diverge, are actually complementary parts of Azad's thought and political evolution, from anticolonial freedom fighter to the architect of a new nation.

Of course, this laser-sharp focus on the immediate present of Azad's historical writings was somewhat problematic. His selection and interpretations of figures from India's Islamic past in *Tazkira* were undoubtedly suited to the purpose of rousing the spirit of self-sacrifice and brave struggle against tyranny during the anticolonial movement. Yet, this text proved to be self-defeating in the post-colonial nation-building moment when those same historical figures symbolised the struggle for Islamic orthodoxy and purity against Azad's vision of national integration and communal accord. Still, it is important to emphasise that these seeming contradictions in his oeuvre are the result of the different national problems he tackled during his long career as a religious and political thinker, not an index of some fundamental change in his attitudes or belief.

Azad saw himself far ahead of his own time in his command of Islamic learning and history. He was not satisfied with his image as merely a superb rhetorician, a master of the magic of words [*alfāz kā tilism*]; rather saw himself as one who understood every stage of the evolution of Islamic sciences, and not just the Quran and its commentarial tradition, better than his contemporaries. In this context, one may also consider his intention to bring out two monthly Arabic journals, *al-Basā'ir* and *al-Bayān*, as attested by repeated announcements in *Al-Hilāl*. The linguistic choice of these proposed journals implies that he wished to reach the *'ulamā* through these organs and convince them of his own mastery as an Islamic scholar. It was for the same audience that he often wrote the first pages, *fātihat al-Kitāb*, of *Al-Hilāl* in Arabic. The change in *Tazkira* from the writings that preceded it was thus more in the order of a gradual evolution rather than any kind of radical break. Azad's primary concern, as is evident especially in a seemingly

[63] *Tazkira*, (ed.) Ram, pp. 315–318 and 333–334.

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historical work such as *Tazkira*, was with his contemporary political present and the struggles of his day. *Tazkira* reflected the pressures of the early anticolonial movement, while his later writings reflected those of a promising independent and diverse nation. Thus, what appear as contradictions in Azad are not fundamental breaks or ruptures in his political or religious commitments, but only varying emphases in his response to varying political situations.

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