

Emotions and Temporalities. Saiyid Ahmad Khan's Concept of Modernity (Margrit Pernau, MPIB, Berlin)¹

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Saiyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) is hailed as the avant-garde of modernity, who provided the intellectual foundation to reconcile Indian Muslims to modern education, which he saw as the pre-condition to their social reform and their catching up with European modernity.² The scion of a Delhi family with links to the Mughal court and to both of the prominent Sufi renewal movements, centered on the Madrasa Rahimiya of Shah Wali Ullah and the Khanqah of Mirza Jan-e Janan, Saiyid Ahmad entered the colonial administration. In 1857 he sided with the British, saving the lives of a number of them; this however was not enough to convince the colonial administration that not all Muslims were rebels, out to wage war against the British crown and not to be trusted. The rest of his life was devoted to bridging this gap: proving Muslim loyalty to the British, and showing the Muslims that their community could only escape ruin by closely allying with the British and opening up to contemporary European culture and knowledge, which were in no way contradicting the foundations of Islam. The foundation of the Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh was to provide the community with leaders schooled who embodied this new outlook.

This can be described in the categories of modernity and modernization, depending on the way these analytical concepts are defined. More interesting is the second claim, which addresses Saiyid Ahmad not only as modern, but as a modernist, i.e. someone who subscribes to modernism, the ideology of modernity.³ How can we trace these ideas in the writings of Saiyid Ahmad Khan? How did he imagine the relationship between the past, the present and the future? What was the language he developed to address these problems? What were the concepts he used to reflect about modernity, a word which did not appear in his writings either in Urdu or in English? How did this language and these concepts change in the course of his life time? The present article will follow up these questions in three sections, focusing on three phases of Saiyid Ahmad Khan's life, first his early years as a colonial officer and scholar (1840s -1860s), second the period when the comparative gaze became foundational, leading to the establishment of a Scientific Society and to a voyage to London (1860-1871), and finally the time when the Aligarh College occupied the center stage of his life (1871-1898).

This investigation of concepts is meant to contribute to the debate around temporalization, politicization, democratization, and ideologization, which according to Reinhart Koselleck are at the

¹ I owe a big debt of gratitude to David Lelyveld, SherAli Tareen and Shahzad Bashir, who patiently dealt with my many emails on Saiyid Ahmad Khan and the intellectual roots of his thoughts on temporality, and who provided me with more food for thought than I could use in a single article.

² Hafeez Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. An Avantgarde of Modernity, in *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Muslim Renaissance Man of India. A Bicentenary Commemorative Volume*, ed. Abdur Raheem Kidwai (Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited: 2017), 165-209; Arshad Islam, "Syed Ahmad Khan and Muslim Shift to Modern Education," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, 55.1/2 (2007): 27-63.

³ Bashir Ahmad Dar, "Sayyid Ahmad and Modernism," in *Herold of Nineteenth Century Muslim Thought. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Lahore : Sang-e Meel: 2005), 125-131 (first published in 1953); Shafey Kidwai, *Cementing ethics with modernism. An appraisal of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's writings* (Delhi: Gyan Publication House: 2010); Iftikhar H. Malik, "Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Reconstructing the Discourse of a Pioneering Muslim Modernist," in Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, 210-236; Syed Ahmad Khan, *A Voyage to Modernism*, trans. and ed. Nishat Zaidi and Mushirul Hasan (Delhi: Primus Books: 2011). On ideology and isms see Jani Marjanen, "Ism concepts in science and politics," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 13.1 (2018), forthcoming.

core of the conceptual transformation of the *Sattelzeit*.⁴ Recently it has been suggested to replace the idea of unidirectional developments with an analytical framework in which “movements are potentially reversible and repeatable.”⁵ I suggest taking this idea further and looking no longer at isolated processes, but at fields created by potentially conflicting sets of processes. Two such fields are of particular relevance to our questions. The first encompasses the tension between the temporalization and the historical embedding of concepts – brought to the forefront not only by new ways of history writing, but also by anchoring cultural specificities in the past of a society – and their globalization and universalization – involving the assumption that the stages of historical development are the same everywhere, but also a new negotiation of the universality of values. The second field involves the pull between the processes of discipline, often seen as the core of colonial modernity, and the simultaneous emotionalization not only of the private, but also of public and political language, which I would argue can be interpreted as the result of the reconfiguring of the relation between past, present and future.

Delhi, past and present

In 1847, at the age of thirty, having recently returned to Delhi after spending a couple of years as a junior administrator in Agra, Saiyid Ahmad Khan published his first major work. The *Asar us Sanadid* is a detailed description of Delhi, extending over several hundred pages and beautifully illustrated.⁶ Written in flowery Urdu it takes the reader on a walk through the city and its environments. Saiyid Ahmad Khan starts at Tughluqabad some twenty kilometers to the south east of the city of Delhi, describing the ruins of the fortress and the tombs of the rulers. He then moves on to the two important Sufi shrines of Nizam ud Din and Qutb ud Din and their surroundings. From there he takes the reader towards the north, ending in the gardens just outside the northern gates. The second part of the book is devoted to walking through the royal fort, while the third one explores Shahjahanabad, today's old Delhi.

The work derives its title from a verse of the Indo-Persian poet Urfi, which also figures as motto for the introduction:

“The ornamentations still left on the ruined walls and gates
Are the remnants signs (*asar*) of Persia's ancient heroes (*sanadid*)”⁷

From the start the topographical organization of the book, which groups the buildings by their geographical proximity, not by their date of construction, is closely intertwined with a narrative

⁴ Reinhart Koselleck, “Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Translated by Michaela Richter)”, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6. 1 (2011): 1-37.

⁵ Willibald Steinmetz, “Multiple Transformations. Temporal Frameworks for a European Conceptual History,” in *Conceptual history in the European Space*, edited by Willibald Steinmetz, Michael Freeden, Javier Fernández-Sebastián, New York (Berghahn: 2017), 63-95, quote 82f.

⁶ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Asar us Sanadid* (Delhi: Matba'-e Saiyid Akhbar: 1847); Christian Troll, “A note on an early topographical work of Sayyid Ahmad Khan: *Asar us Sanadid*,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2 (1972): 135-146; C.M. Naim, “Syed Ahmad and his two Books called *Asar-al-Sanadid*,” *Modern Asian Studies* 45.3 (2011): 669-708; David Lelyveld, “Sauda Sulaf. Urdu in the two Versions of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Asaru's Sanadid*,” *Annual of Urdu Studies* 26 (2011), 21-38; David Lelyveld, “Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Mughal Past,” in Kidwai, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, 153-164.

⁷ Translation C.M. Naim, “Syed Ahmad,” fn 8.

which brings together the past and the present, blurring their boundaries. The *asar*, the signs left by the past, can be read as a warning (*ibrat*) about the revolution of the times (*inqilab-e zamana*) and the transience of worldly glory,⁸ but they also link the past to the present and belong to both. Within the description of a particular building, temporal distinctions are fuzzy (but not absent). Very often Saiyid Ahmad starts with the emotions that a certain architectural structure is evoking – in the present tense, as if they were available to him and the reader at this very moment. The Garden of Hayat Bakhsh, in the royal fort, for instance, is described as a sign of God’s grandeur, conveying peace (*farhat*), sparkle (*tazah*), and unimaginable joy (*nishat*) to the heart. It places before the viewer’s eye the image of paradise, while the beauty of the trees surpasses the body of the beloved, metaphors which allow for the transfer of emotions from the rich archive of poetry onto the experience of a concrete space. It is only after the reader has been introduced into this emotional universe that the rupture occurs: the heart ravishing play of the water on the stones does not happen any longer, as all the pipes have been blocked by mud, and the fountains have not been in use for ages.⁹ It is this neglect, this forgetfulness (the morally and religiously loaded concept of *ghaflat* seems to lurk in the background) which causes the break between the past and the present. Such a blockage of the pipes through which the emotions and the blessings of the past can flow towards the present can happen, but it is a reprehensible departure from the way things should be – and in most of the cases still are shown to be.

The strongest link between the past and the present, however, is provided by the inhabitants of Delhi, whose descriptions form the fourth and last part of the *Asar us Sanadid*. If the city is constituted by its buildings and gardens, by its climate and atmosphere (*ab o hawa*),¹⁰ it is the community of its inhabitants, which makes Delhi what it is. This works at the worldly level of sociability. As the Indo-Persian ethical literature never tired to point out, men take over the emotions as well as the moral qualities of the people they interact with on a continuous basis. It is only by moving in the company of virtuous friends that a man can become virtuous himself. Describing the leading citizens of Delhi, their lives and their qualities and characteristic traits, therefore was not only an exercise in panegyrics, but depicted the ethical and cultured atmosphere by which everyone living in Delhi was profoundly marked.

This sociability and its effects were not restricted to the intercourse with the living. Especially holy men (and some women) transcend the boundary between the past and the present, between the dead and the living. Sufis are not dead, but continue to share the same space with the living, permeating the ground around their graves with their blessing and communicating with those living in the present.¹¹ Saiyid Ahmad Khan acknowledges their presence in his writing – while he uses the third person singular or plural when talking about learned men or artists (depending on their prestige), he consistently refers to the saints and mystics in the second person plural, as if he was sitting in front of them.¹² The porous self, which is permeable to outside influences,¹³ and the present which remains open to the past, belong to the same conceptual universe. The presentation of the

⁸ *Asar us Sanadid*, 1st edition, Part I, 167.

⁹ *Ibid*, Part II, 34.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Part IV, 10-11.

¹¹ Shahzad Bashir, *Journeys among the living dead of Tabriz*, unpublished paper.

¹² Compare the description of Maulana Muhammad Fakhr ud Din, consistently addressed in the second person (*Asar us Sanadid*, Part IV, 30-33) with the depiction of Shah Abdul Aziz, where it changes according to the context (*Ibid*, 69-74), and the Unani doctors, which are referred to in the third person (*Ibid*, 58-68).

¹³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 35–41.

past does not work through memory practices remembering a past that is gone, but through *zīkr*, in analogy to the religious practices recalling to mind the continuous presence of God or of his saints.

Asar us Sanadid was not Saiyid Ahmad Khan's first publication,¹⁴ but it was the one which brought him recognition by the intellectual elite of Delhi and patronage by the British. It was his entry ticket to the Archeological Society of Delhi, whose monthly meetings brought together the most influential scholars, administrators and ruling officers of Delhi.¹⁵ One of them, A.A. Roberts, the Collector and Magistrate, brought the book to the attention of the Royal Asiatic Society in London. While the suggested translation into English did not materialized, a profound reworking of the text did, which resulted in a second edition.¹⁶ The changes introduced between the first and the second edition have been carefully analyzed, they are usually taken as the indication of a new phase in Saiyid Ahmad Khan's life, which was no longer marked by the late-Mughal frame of thinking, but by his exposure to British knowledge.¹⁷

The changes are first related to the verbal and visual language of the book: gone are the introductory Persian encomiums, gone are the illustrations, gone are the poetic invocation of emotions. The verses have not completely eliminated, but their number has been greatly reduced. Most importantly they are supplemented with the kind of factual information the British were most interested in. Thus the description of the royal fort still begins with a single line singing the beauty of the palace and its gardens, which surpasses the bounties of spring, but then immediately moves on to a factual level, giving the date of the foundation, the names of the architects involved, and explaining that it took five months and two days to lay the foundations. After this Allahwardi Khan directed the works for two years, one month and eleven days, his successor Mukaramat Khan saw the finishing of the project after nine months. Saiyid Ahmad Khan then proceeds to give the measurements of the walls and the moat and the costs involved in the construction of the fort.¹⁸

The most notable changes, however, are related to temporalities. Instead of the topographical organization of the first edition, which walked the reader through the streets and lanes, and established an almost bodily relation to the monuments, now chronology is the guiding principle. Dates matter, and it matters to get them exactly right. Between the first and the second edition Saiyid Ahmad Khan therefore published chronological tables listing all the rulers of Delhi from its foundation. The aim of the *Silsilah ul muluk*, he explained, was to provide useful (*mufid*) knowledge for correctly dating the buildings of Delhi in view of the forthcoming English translation of the *Asar us*

¹⁴ For an overview of the earlier texts see David Lelyveld, "Sir Sayyid's public sphere. Urdu print and oratory in nineteenth century India," in *Islamicate traditions in South Asia. Themes from culture and history*, ed. Agnieszka Kuczkiewicz-Fras (Delhi: Manohar: 2013), 127-158, and Christian Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan. A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (Karachi: Oxford University Press: 1978).

¹⁵ Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes. Muslims in nineteenth Century Delhi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press: 2013), 117.

¹⁶ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Asar us Sanadid*, 2nd edition (Delhi: Matba'-e Sultani: 1854).

¹⁷ Troll, "A Note"; Naim, "Sir Sayid"; Lelyveld, "Sauda Sulaf".

¹⁸ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Asar us Sanadid*, 2nd edition, 96-99 (quotation of pages according to Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Asar us Sanadid*, ed. Tanvir Ahmad Alavi (Delhi: Urdu Academy, 2000) Some of this information was available earlier in Mirza Sangin Beg (1820 (1236)) *Sair ul manazil*, online: http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN62731967X&PHYSID=PHYS_0001&DMDID=; the 1827 version of the same text has been published Sharif Husain Qasimi together with an Urdu translation: Mirza Sangin Beg, *Sairul manazil*, (Delhi, Ghalib Institute: 1982). For an English translation see Mirza Sangin Beg, *Sair-ul-Manazil*, trans. Nausheen Jaffery, ed. Swapna Liddle (New York: Tulika Books, 2018).

Sanadid.¹⁹ This involved the exact dating of the deluge with reference to the creation of the world and the birth of the Messiah, but also establishing a concordance between very disparate systems of chronology, using solar or lunar calendars or a mixture of both, and reducing them to a single time line.²⁰ The table on the rulers of Delhi starts with Raja Judhishtra of Indraprasta and ends with Queen Victoria in one continuously numbered chain (*silsilah*), without any further subdivisions. Before this chronology, all kings are equal. The format of the table standardizes the information and does not allow for a differentiation between the virtuous and the tyrant.²¹

This forms the basis for the first part of the revised *Asar us Sanadid*. The changes introduced reinforce the systematizing tendencies of the *Silsilah*. They pertain on the one hand to the consistent dating all events according to the Christian and the Hijri calendar, supplemented in some instances by the Hindu *Samit Bikramajit*; on the other hand the length of the rule of the ancient Hindu kings is reduced from a probably mythical 80 to 90 years to not more than 30 years.²² Before however rejoicing too much over the establishment of a clear development in the temporal thinking of Saiyid Ahmad Khan, from a still Mughal first edition of the *Asar us Sanadid* through the *Silsilah* to the British-influenced second edition, it would be important to consider the *Jam-e Jam* in some detail, the first chronological tables that Saiyid Ahmad Khan published in 1840, i.e. six years before the first edition.²³ While it is not yet concerned with the exact synchronization of the different chronological systems, it does organize the rulers according to a single temporal line, carefully giving not only the names of their father and mother and their ethnic origin, but also the date of their ascension to the throne, their age at that moment, the duration of their reign, the length of their life and the date of their death.²⁴

Nevertheless, by the time of the second edition, precisely dated buildings are now securely anchored in the past, a past which is no longer permitted to flow over into the present. Ideally, the only way this past can still be brought into relation to the present is as an object controlled by archeology and historical investigation. Detailed comparisons show that it does not quite work that way. The organization of the text certainly is chronological, but within the chronology, the narrative at time almost reverts to the walk through neighborhoods dating from the same time, and if the emotions of aesthetic pleasure or of trepidation at the transience the ruins indicate are downplayed, they are not absent either. Emotions continue to be an appropriate reaction to the sights of Delhi (or elsewhere). The respectable gentleman remained a man of feeling, but his feelings did not cross the appropriate boundaries not did they become burning passions.

¹⁹ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Silsilat ul muluk*, (Delhi: 1852), 3 [This is from the copy on the Sir Syed today page, which might not be the original first edition].

²⁰ Ibid, table 1-3 (page 6-9) and table 5 (page 15). The chronology of the reigns is given with reference to the flood (*zamana-e imtidad*). Thanks to SherAli Tareen for his help with the interpretation. For possible British models for these kind of chronological concordances see David Lelyveld, "The Qutb Minar in Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Asar us Sanadid*," in *Knowledge Production, Pedagogy and Institutions in Colonial India*, eds. Indra Sengupta and Daud Ali (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 147-168.

²¹ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Silsilat*, 17-45. The information given are the name, father's name, ascension to the throne (according to the different calendars), capital city, calculation according to continuous time (*imtidad-e zamana*), duration of the rule and comments. From Shihab ud Din Khilji (d. 1316) onward, the tables extend over two pages, reflecting the greater abundance of source material. Starting from 1803 both the Mughal ruler and the British monarch are entered into the table.

²² Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Asar us Sanadid*, 2nd edition, 27.

²³ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Jam-e Jam*, (Agra: 1840). [No publisher given].

²⁴ Tables, idem 14 ff.

The most radical change, at first sight, is the omission of the entire fourth part, on the inhabitants of Delhi, living and departed. In the place of a society in which emotions floated not only between porous selves, but also between the past and the present, a new self makes a first appearance. This self is cut off from the past, which is gone and can no longer be brought into the present – memories only refer to what is dead and over. At the same time and by the same movement, this self is also separated from the other selves, whose emotions it no longer catches involuntarily. Finally, the link between the self and the space it inhabits is broken. Company painting separates portraits, which no longer embed the person in the urban space, from depiction of architecture, which might include figurines, but no longer recognizable personalities.²⁵ Again: this rupture in the end turns out to be less radical than it seems at first sight. Starting during Saiyid Ahmad Khan's lifetime and continuing until today, the reprint of the second edition usually includes the section on the inhabitants of Delhi. Different conceptions of the self overlapped for a long time, and emotions continued to be perceived as contagious until the First World War and even beyond.²⁶ Nor should the impact of British knowledge on Saiyid Ahmad Khan's multilayered worldview be overestimated. No longer mentioning the presence of departed saints and mystics and the way their spiritual power could interact with the lives of the living, did not imply distancing himself from them. He never renounced his ties to the Sufis of the Shah Wali Ullahi tradition, notably to Shah Ismail and Shah Ahmad Barelwi, who lost their lives in jihad at the North Western mountain regions (though Saiyid Ahmad Khan tends to gloss over the fact that they fought not only against the Sikh but also against the British). He continued to venerate and interact with Shah Ghulam Ali, whose grave he visited when he finally returned to Delhi, and his successors. Moreover, he never dissociated himself from the Rasul Shahis, a branch of Sufis who had taken up yogic practices, and who marked their distance from the world by their sartorial choices, shaving their whole body and smearing it with ashes. For Saiyid Ahmad Khan, the dichotomy was never between rationalism and religion or even rationalism and Sufism, but between forms of theology and piety which integrated rationality and those which did not – the perception of the departed saints' agency as rational formed one of the many strands that continued to coexist in his mind and which could be brought to the forefront depending on the context of the debates.

The events of 1857 certainly were traumatic for Saiyid Ahmad Khan, and they have often been read as the origin of his struggle to reconcile the Muslims and the colonial power, through political loyalty, but also through the integration of their respective systems of knowledge. We have seen that this trajectory already had started before the Revolt in the different configuration of the past and the present in the second edition of the *Asar us Sanadid*. The text which is often read as the manifesto of the British-Muslim alliance, however, the *Asbab-e bhaghawat*, translated as the *Causes of the Indian Mutiny* in 1858, is surprisingly self-confident in its voice and conservative in its temporalities.²⁷ India may have been conquered by the British, but this situation is well within the space of experience of both the rulers and the ruled, and it is these experiences which continue to govern the expectations.²⁸ Conquering a country imposes certain duties on the rulers, and these duties are

²⁵ For a more detailed elaboration of the last point see Margrit Pernau, "Mapping emotions, constructing feelings: Delhi in the 1840s," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58 (2015): 634-667.

²⁶ Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity in colonial India. From Balance to Fervor* (book manuscript under review), especially chapters 2 and 7.

²⁷ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Asbab-e bhaghawat-e Hind* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel, 2009 [1903]); Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *The causes of the Indian revolt* (Oxford in Asia historical reprints), ed. Francis Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2000).

²⁸ For a comparison to the other early Muslim Indian interpretations of the Revolt see Soofia Siddiqui, "Remembering the revolt of 1857 : Contrapuntal Formations in Indian Literature and History," PhD Thesis,

universal. “The primary causes of rebellion are, I fancy, everywhere the same. It invariably results from the existence of a policy obnoxious to the dispositions, aims, habits and views of those by whom the rebellion is brought about.”²⁹ It was the fact that the British did not bother to enquire into these dispositions and that they did not include those Indians who could have told them in their councils which in the end led to the Revolt. Saiyid Ahmad Khan then proceeds to elaborate this claim in detail. Differences between the Indians and the British are acknowledged, but nowhere are they temporalized. The only history that matters is the history of misunderstandings and offences of approximately the last two decades – it is neither at the root of the differences nor does it explain them.

Looking back at the period between 1840 and 1860, we find a consistent emotional ideal, which shows the respectable inhabitant of Delhi as a man of heart, who is profoundly moved by beauty, who is pained in the face of the revolutions of the time (*inqilab-e zaman*), but who also heeds the warning they convey. His personal relations are marked by love for his friends, reverence for his elders and compassion towards those in need. These emotions are strong, but they do not exceed the boundaries – the dominant figure of thought, however, is neither discipline nor control, but balance and harmony (*‘adl*). There is no indication in any of the texts that these emotions need to be historicized. If they are more available to certain people than to others, these distinctions are based on the inborn qualities of the respectable families, and on the education they provide to their offspring.

The temporalities are less clearly demarcated. The blurred boundaries between the past and the present are beginning to harden under the impact of chronological time, but this transition is far from completed in 1860. At the same time, for Saiyid Ahmad Khan the empty time of chronology seems the only possibility of introducing history. This is all the more astonishing, as within the intellectual traditions that he identifies with, Shah Wali Ullah had already in the mid- eighteenth century proposed a well-elaborated scheme of historical stages in his famous *Hujjat Allah al baligha*.³⁰ Saiyid Ahmad Khan knew this text, but he did not use its intellectual resources to think about temporalities under colonialism.

Decline and the temporalization of difference

In less than ten years, between the early 1860s and the early 1870s, Saiyid Ahmad Khan’s conception of temporality and the language he used to discuss it, underwent a profound change. It was in at Calcutta in 1863, at a lecture that he had been invited to give at the house of Abdul Latif Khan, that he first systematically reflected on the contemporary situation of the Indian Muslims. He could be assured of a sympathetic audience, as Abdul Latif Khan had just founded the Mohammadan Literary Society, which was to pursue a program of reform and reconciliation in many aspects similar to Saiyid Ahmad’s own. Though Urdu was known among the Muslim elite of Calcutta, Saiyid Ahmad Khan

SOAS, University of London, 2012. Margrit Pernau, “Nostalgia: Tears of blood for a lost world,” *South Asia Graduate Research Journal (SAGAR)*, XXIII (2015), 74-109.

²⁹ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *The causes*, 3.

³⁰ Marcia Hermansen (ed.), *The Conclusive Argument from God. Shah Wali Allah of Delhi’s Hujjat Allah al-Baligha* (Leiden: Brill 1996).

chose to address his audience in a learned Persian idiom, which he seems to have deemed appropriate to the occasion.³¹

Saiyid Ahmad Khan starts his lecture in a highly emotional register, crying out his pain at the misery and misfortune which has befallen the Muslims. He continues to paint the picture of the desolation that has befallen the ancient seats of culture and learning, leaving nothing but ruins. Until here the linguistic register could still be seen as drawn from the *shahr-e ashob*, the poetic genre depicting the destruction of the city.³² However, unlike in the *Asar us Sanadid*, buildings and their ruins no longer hold the attention of Saiyid Ahmad Khan. Muslims have fallen into a sleep of negligence (*khwab-e ghaflet*, 56), from where it is the duty of their loving well-wisher to awaken them. The Muslims can only be saved from ruin and contempt by education, and notably by an education in the new and useful arts and sciences (*ulum o fanun-e jadida o mufida*, 57). In the same way as the Abbasid empire patronized the translation of Greek philosophy and sciences and simultaneously developed the theological foundations of the *ilm-e kalam* to reconcile them to Islamic belief and revelation, European philosophy and scientific knowledge has to be engaged with. This will either show their concordance with Islam, or help to discard them.

In this lecture, education, both in the sense of intellectual learning (*ta'lim*) and of moral training (*tarbiyat*), moves to the center of the Saiyid Ahmad's reform program, where it is to remain for the rest of his life. What is still only available *in nuce* is the language related to the temporalities of civilization. Words, which may be translated as civilized or cultured (*mutammadun, muhazzib, sha'ista*)³³ are more or less used as synonyms for educated (*ta'lim yaftha*). The fact that Panipati, who is certainly one of the scholars most familiar with the archive of Saiyid Ahmad Khan uses the civilization and progress vocabulary in his translation is itself telling: this is exactly what Saiyid Ahmad Khan himself would have done a very few years later, in developing similar arguments. Close attention to the chronology of his ideas however allows us to not reduce them to the English influence, but to trace alternative and supplementary genealogies.

This emphasis on the encounter with European knowledge led directly to the foundation of the Scientific Society, whose seat was first in Ghazipore and then in Aligarh. Its activities included the organization of regular lectures and demonstrations, the translations of books from English to Urdu, and perhaps most importantly, the publication of the Aligarh Institute Gazette.³⁴ This has accurately been read as an indication of Saiyid Ahmad Khan's interest in education and the sciences. If they were the means to improve the situation of the community, it is crucial to make sure what exactly his concepts were. Change and improvement do not carry the same connotations as progress, but they

³¹ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, „Zarurat-e taraqqi-e ilm o tahzib darmiyan-e ahl-e Hind,“ in *Khutbat-e Sir Saiyid*, ed. Sheykh Muhammad Ismail Panipati (Lahore: Majlis-e taraqqi-e adab: 1968), Vol. 1, 51- 62. Panipati provides an Urdu translation on pages 62-81, which in turn forms the basis for the English translation in Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Selected lectures*, translated by Mohammad Abdul Mannan (Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy: 2005), 19-31. The Urdu translation takes some liberties with the text. For the analysis of the language it is therefore necessary to go back to the Persian original.

³² Sunil Sharma, (2004), „The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape,“ *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24 (2), 73-81.

³³ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, „Zarurat-e taraqqi-e ilm o tahzib darmiyan-e ahl-e Hind,“ in *Khutbat-e Sir Saiyid*, ed. Sheykh Muhammad Ismail Panipati (Lahore: Majlis-e taraqqi-e adab: 1968), Urdu translation p.75 [check with Persian].

³⁴ Asghar Abbas, *Print culture. Sir Syed's Aligarh Institute Gazette 1866-1897*, translated Syed Asim Ali (Delhi: Primus Books: 2015); Kidwai 2010.

can be read as developing a new relation between the present and the future – education and science (or their absence) is what links them.

Two aspects may contribute to the complexity of this conceptual development. First, the interest in European knowledge and sciences dates back to Delhi in the 1840s and 1850s, though at that moment it was Ram Chandra, the professor for mathematics at the Delhi College, rather than Saiyid Ahmad Khan, who was at the forefront of the development.³⁵ If one wanted to trace the genealogy even further back, Saiyid Ahmad Khan's family itself was involved in the late Mughal revival of an interest in mathematics and astronomy.

Second, once again the language of the sources matters. What Saiyid Ahmad Khan aims at promoting is *ilm*, which may be translated as science or as knowledge, and which can encompass anything from theology and logics to medicine, electromagnetism or evolution theory. Thus the books to be translated do encompass treatises on steam, electricity, or photography, but these never constituted a majority. According to the detailed information provided by Ashgar Abbas we can estimate them at something between 10 and 15 % of the total of the books and articles published.³⁶ Natural sciences in the narrow sense were important, but so were the other “new sciences” (*ulum-e jadid*), most prominently historiography, political economy and geography.

The first full-fledged discussion of the English concept of “civilization” took place in an article from 1868.³⁷ Saiyid Ahmad Khan explains that the English word of “civility” was linked to the word for the city. When many people came together in one place, it became necessary to safeguard their rights pertaining to property, life and personal liberty. Civilization therefore was used for the stage of progressive (*taraqqi halat*) and cultivated (*sha'ista*) people. Its opposite consisted in barbarity (*wahshat*) or semi-barbarity (*nasf wahshat*). The use of *wahshat*, associated with the desert, corresponded to the anchoring of civility in city life – a more traditional concept would have been *jahaliyat*, the condition of the Arabs before the revelation of the Prophet, marked by their lack of knowledge. The Europeans can be seen as examples for civilized people, while the Chinese and the Tartars are less civilized and the natives of America, Australia or South Africa hardly know any civilization.³⁸

He then proceeds to recapitulate European history from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance, which he links to the knowledge European travelers brought from the Islamic Orient. From there onward, Europe has known a steady progress, from which mankind in its entirety profits today. But what are the causes contributing to the progress of civilization? There is no limit for civilization and the extension of human knowledge – why then are people and countries at different stages of civilization and progress?³⁹ The answers that he gives cover a wide range starting from the

³⁵ Sadiqur Rahman Kidwai, *Master Ramchandra* (Delhi: Department of Urdu, Delhi University: 1961); Gail Minault, “Qiran us-Sa'adain: The Dialogue Between Eastern and Western Learning at Delhi College,” in *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760-1860*, Jamal Malik, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 260-77; Gail Minault, “The Perils of Cultural Mediation: Master Ramchandra and Academic Journalism at Delhi College,” in *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education Before 1857*, Margrit Pernau, ed., (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 187-200.

³⁶ Ashgar Abbas, *Print culture*. See the statistics, 126-137.

³⁷ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, “Civilization, ya'ni sha'istagi aur tahzib,” *Khutbat*, Vol 1, 168-188.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 169

³⁹ Unfortunately Saiyid Ahmad Khan does not quote the authors on which he draws for these remarks. While the first part seems to be alluding to Edward Womersley Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the*

influence of natural resources. History shows that unlike what one would assume, it is not the fertile countries which are the breeding ground of civilization, but the harsh climate of the northern countries which pushes people towards developing habits of hard work, courage and endurance, whereas in the South people lack the passionate emotions and enthusiasm (*josh o kharosh*) needed to progress. Further, no country can progress which does not develop contacts and exchange with other countries. This takes the stigma from the Muslims' need to engage with British knowledge: It is a universal law governing historical changes. The next argument goes in the same direction. If history shows religions as a civilizing force, this is also true for Islam. Finally, there is an intimate link between civilization and forms of government. Progress is only possible under conditions of personal liberty, notably of the scholars, and not under tyranny. It is only when men have the freedom to think and to translate their thoughts into action so that the arts and sciences, but also trade can take off. This does not imply that all men can attain the stage of civilization. Saiyid Ahmad Khan subscribes to the current theories linking race and civilization and condemns African to eternal barbarity. The Chinese and Japanese, though they are still in their childhood, might progress once they intensify the contact with the Europeans. European history since the dark Middle Ages, Saiyid Ahmad Khan concludes, raises hope for other people that once they are willing to forgo their wilder passions and cultivate all the potencies of their temperament (*tabi'at ki tamam qawwatan*), they too will reach the stage of civilization (*sha'istagi*).

It is during his voyage to London 1869-70, that these ideas were put to the test of new experiences.⁴⁰ Saiyid Ahmad Khan is impressed by habits of cleanliness and order, which greatly add to the beauty of the cities he visits, and he admires the general level of education. Not only the elites, but also the common people take an interest in reading – whether it is the maids which clean his London rooms, look after his comfort and perform their duties “with the precision and swiftness of a machine”, or the coachmen, who “keep a book or newspaper under their seats” so that they can read while waiting for customers.⁴¹ Even more, the refinement and politeness of the elite that he encounters as well as their sense of responsibility and compassion leaves him in awe: “They are so courteous and warm that I cannot describe. It is not that they are polite and courteous only with me, but they are in fact generally simple and full of humility.”⁴² He does visit the sites which are often hailed as the symbols of European progress, “workshops of engineers, factories that make ships and tanks, telegraph factories ... and warships.”⁴³ But they figure less prominently than the other elements.

What is important is less what he observes than the way he explains it. Comparison becomes the most important strategy which drives the account. Comparison is at the core of the nineteenth century British concept of civilization, where it allows the organization of differences along a temporal line. It is through comparison that the hierarchical world order is created, which places every society and people on the imagined line stretching from savagery and barbarity to the highest

Roman Empire (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1994 [1776-89]) what follows reads like a paraphrase of Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England* (London: Longmans, Green & Co. London, 1908 [1861]).

⁴⁰ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *Musafiran-e Landan*, ed. Sheykh Muhammad Ismail Panipati (Aligarh: Sir Syed Akademi, 2009); Saiyid Ahmad Khan, *A Voyage to Modernism*, edited and translated Mushirul Hasan and Nishat Zaidi, (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011). Originally the travelogue was written in the form of letters to be published in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*. Both editions supplement them with private letters written at the same time.

⁴¹ Khan, *A Voyage*, 184-185.

⁴² Ibid, 154, letter to Mahdi Ali Khan, 4.6.1869.

⁴³ Ibid, 176 .

forms of civilization.⁴⁴ Saiyid Ahmad Khan is struck by the difference between what he observes in England and what he knows from India at every instance: “I have journeyed to Europe, seen much and learnt much; before I went Hindustan did not seem to be in such a deep dark pit, but when I came here, and saw for myself, I became aware of the fact.”⁴⁵ To his own comparison is added the reverse gaze with which he assumes the British must be regarding the Indians. This leads to a highly ambivalent set of emotions, reaching from utter humiliation and shame, as this comparison seems to place the Indians even below the savages, at the level of dirty and barbarous beasts (*maile, kachile, wahshi janwar*),⁴⁶ to the use of this shame to goad his countrymen into action and the hope that he has finally found the way to guiding his community into a bright future, where they will be able to hold their own among the civilized nations.

Emotions and temporalities change together in these few years between the foundation of the Scientific Society and Saiyid Ahmad Khan’s return from London. Gone is the ideal of emotional detachment and the striving for a balance. Civilization is not to be had without a passionate fight, and where the *Asar us Sanadid* were all about the relation between the past and the present, now it is the future towards which the present starts looking. These are the topics that Saiyid Ahmad Khan will continue to develop in great detail for the rest of his life.

Aligarh, the struggle for the future

The years Saiyid Ahmad Khan spent at Aligarh were marked by his two lasting achievements: the foundation of the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College, teaching the new knowledge he deemed central for the rejuvenation of the community,⁴⁷ and establishing the journal *Tahzib ul Akhlaq*, inaccurately but aptly translated into the Mohammedan Social Reformer on the title page.⁴⁸ For both Saiyid Ahmad Khan himself acknowledged British models, Oxford and Cambridge for the Aligarh College, and the eighteenth century journals *Tatler* and *Spectator* for *Tahzib ul Akhlaq*.⁴⁹ A detailed reading of the texts he wrote during these years will show that while the British influence is undeniable, Saiyid Ahmad Khan’s conceptualization of temporalities – at the basis of all of his reformist projects – was much more complex than the simple adoption and translation of a British blue-print.

In the last section we have seen to which extent Saiyid Ahmad Khan had engaged with the historical model of the stages of development, leading from barbarity to an ever increasing civilization. For most of the contemporary British writers the last stage corresponded to modernity, a condition which Britain and a few other European countries had attained. Modernity for most of them would be characterized by a newness, which was no longer relative compared to the recent past (this form

⁴⁴ Margrit Pernau, Helge Jordheim et al., *Civilizing Emotions. Concepts in Europe and Asia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁴⁵ Khan, *A Voyage*, 197.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 177 ; Khan, *Musafiran*, 169.

⁴⁷ Still unsurpassed: David Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation. Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁴⁸ The Urdu title references Ibn Miskaway’s tenth century translation and adaption of Aristotle’s *Ethic*. Literally translating into something like “the polishing of the habitus,” it became one of the standard Urdu translation of civility since the 1860s. For details see Margrit Pernau, “The virtuous individual and social reform: Debates among North Indian Urdu speakers” in *Civilizing emotions*, 169-186.

⁴⁹ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, “Tahzib ul akhlaq,” *Tahzib ul akhlaq*, 1. Muharram 1289 H (1872 C.E.), 2-5.

of newness was recurrent throughout history), but absolute: with a heroic gesture, modern man ventured into the completely unknown, where future was an uncharted territory and past experiences could no longer provide a guideline. In such radicalness, this experience was limited to the vanguard of modernity. Owing to the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, all others were thought to be able to gauge their own future from the British (or later American) present experiences. This held true not only for the colonies, but also for European countries which perceived themselves as latecomers, as the classical cases of Germany and Russia. Derivativeness was the normality for almost every nation.⁵⁰

Given the centrality of the concept of modernity, it is surprising that Saiyid Ahmad Khan neither translated it into Urdu nor used the English word (which he did in other cases, when he thought that the Urdu equivalents did not convey the precise meaning). To understand why in Urdu “modern” became the much less loaded concept of “new” (*jadid*), and to get at the language he uses for negotiating temporalities, it is necessary to move beyond these words and to place them in the larger semantic net linking temporal categories (past, present, future, time, era, etc.) and categories of movement which indicate the passage from one time to the other (progress, decline, evolution, decadence, etc.). In order to capture both the geographical and the historical comparisons central to the theories of stages of civilization, these shall be supplemented a look at the description of countries which he considered to embody specific stages, Britain at one end, and Africa at the other, but also those which were placed in the middle, and whose future could still take one turn or the other: Turkey and Egypt most prominently, but also China and increasingly Japan.⁵¹

My argument is that the most important function of the replacement of the modern with the new was to allow Saiyid Ahmad Khan a continued access to the past and its experiences. What he had seen in Britain during his voyage was one possible model for the future the Indian Muslims could aspire to. The other model, and emotionally as well as politically probably the more important one, was suggested by the history of Islam. This is true notably for the time of the Prophet, who was sent to Arab tribes mired in the barbarous customs of the *jahiliyya*, the time of ignorance, and who reformed them and led them to the perfection of the polity of Madina; it then covers the time of the Abbasid empire, which engaged with Greek philosophy and science, not only translating and preserving the texts, but also adding to them and finally becoming the teacher who helped the Europeans out of barbarity of their dark ages. Dwelling on the figure of the Golden Age allows Saiyid Ahmad Khan to refute anyone who claimed that the present stage of decline had something to do either with the Muslims as a community or with Islam as a religion: if they had done it once, they could do it again now.⁵² These two models, as has often been remarked, did not exist independently from each other, but to point out, in how far the Islamic ideal was refigured to accommodate contemporary desires is to underestimate the importance of this heritage – the influences moved in both directions, and the modernity Saiyid Ahmad Khan perceived in London was also a function of his previous experiences and intellectual choices.

⁵⁰ Partho Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. The Derivative Discourse* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) (first edition: London, Zed Books 1986).

⁵¹ As Saiyid Ahmad Khan’s articles and speeches are not yet available in searchable full-text, I have selected those writings after 1871, which have one of these categories (time, movement, countries) in their title and supplemented them with another set of articles on emotions. The result is an archive of some 40 articles which have been subjected to a close reading of their conceptual structure.

⁵² Saiyid Ahmad Khan, “Tarraqi-e ulum,” in *Tahzib ul akhlaq ki isha’at ki zarurat*, ed. Fazl ud Din (Lahore: Malik Fazl ud Din, 1938), 444-46.

If the theory of civilization and stages of development belonged to a linear concept of history, the idea of the return of a Golden Age related to a cyclical view – central to it were the concepts of rise and fall (*uruj o zawal*) and ebb and flow (*madd o jazr*). The opposition and the temporal sequence between the cyclical and the linear, however, might themselves belong to the imaginary of modernity, famously formulated by Reinhart Koselleck as history losing its position of *magistra vitae* at the moment that the experience and expectation parted company.⁵³ Both coexisted historically in different ways, not only in the work of Saiyid Ahmad Khan, but also of European thinkers. Not only would it be impossible, on the one hand, to effect any meaningful action guided towards the future without some form of knowledge or at least assumptions as to its probable results, which can only be gained from past experience. Even the most ardent belief in unending progress, on the other hand, remained haunted by the fear of decline and degeneration, specially towards the turn of the century and in the years leading up to the First World War. The anthropomorphic conception of society's growth from childhood into youth and maturity had too strong a hold over the minds, not to evoke senescence and, in the end, death.

This persistence of the cyclical within the linear model of change was made even more complicated by the interface between the temporalization of the rules which governed history and their universalization. If the future was no longer to be governed by the rules of the past, this called into question the validity of any rules through which to understand history and endow it with meaning. However, the very rationale behind the idea of the stages of development had the creation of an interpretation of the diversity encountered globally, and its organization along a single time line, valid for all peoples and societies. This reduced the chaos of infinite differences to the logic of a no-longer or not-yet. Because the situation in Britain a hundred years ago was the same as in India today, and because both countries moved according to the same universal laws, Saiyid Ahmad Khan could relate the future of his nation back onto the past of another: "Man cannot look into the future, but he can draw hope from past experiences for the future. Therefore we look back to the past for the sake of the future."⁵⁴

But the multi-layeredness of his conceptions how the past relates to the present and the future did not stop here. The past, and especially the ancestors who had lived in the past, should not just constitute a source of pride, but needed to be emulated. "Why are we not like our forefathers?" Saiyid Ahmad Khan asks. It is not enough, he explained, to blindly imitate their actions. The spirit of the ancestors drove them to surpass their own ancestors; it is this spirit which was needed today. In the very name of faithfulness to the past it was required to leave the past behind and to reach out to the future.⁵⁵ What was needed was to live up to the standards of progressiveness embodied by the venerable elders of the community.

However, *taraqqi* is a complex concept in Saiyid Ahmad Khan's writings. If simply translated as progress, it is difficult to make sense of expressions like *taraqqi dena* (to give progress), *taraqqi par pahunchna* (to arrive at progress) or the description of a development, when a society which once

⁵³ Reinhart Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories," in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255-75 and Idem "Historia Magistra Vitae: The Dissolution of the Topos Into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process," in *Ibid*, 26-42.

⁵⁴ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, "Tahzib ul akhlaq," *Tahzib ul akhlaq*, 1. Muharram 1289 H (1872 C.E.), 2-5, quotation 2.

⁵⁵ Saiyid Ahmad Khan 'Ahl-e hind ki taraqqi-e tarbiyat', in *Khutbat-e Sir Sayyid*, vol. 1, Shaikh Muhammad Ismail Panipati (ed.), (Lahore: Majlis-e taraqqi-e adab, 1968 [Speech 1867]), 130-45.

had progress, lost it and now needs to recover it.⁵⁶ *Taraqqi* can be open towards the future and unlimited. But more often than as a category of movement between stages, it is used as a stage in itself, which allows for an arrival. The possible roots of *taraqqi* in Sufi literature have not yet been explored – if there *taraqqi* designates not so much a movement forward but upward with God as its ultimate aim, this might be an explanation to the imagery it continues to draw on.

Taraqqi stood in close relation to other concepts also denoting the improvement, either at the individual or at the social level. *Islah* originated in religious discourses, where it denoted the rectification of sinful habits and the return to the right path. Saiyid Ahmad Khan almost always uses it in conjuncture with *taraqqi*, which leaves the concept in a telling limbo between the individual and the social as well as the religious and the worldly. *Tajdid*, the next concept in the semantic net, can be translated as renewal, but the new (*jadid*) which is traditionally referenced in this context is not the new of modernity, but carries a specific religious connotation: though Muhammad was the seal of the prophets, meaning that there would be no more prophets after him, this did not end the process of decline and corruption setting in after every revelation. Once every century, therefore, God sent a renewer (*mujaddid*) to his community – the new here is the original purity of God’s word, it is a new which is geared not to the future, but to the past and at the same time transcends temporality as it is aimed at the eternal. This action was exponentiated by the renewer of the millennium (*mujaddid-e alif sani*). Though Saiyid Ahmad spiritual affiliation was with Ghulam Ali, the leader of the *mujaddidi* branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, who traced their origin to Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, the millennial *mujaddid*, he hardly ever uses the concept of *tajid*.⁵⁷

While *sha’istagi*, the translation for civilization Saiyid Ahmad Khan seems to have leaned towards in the beginning, had no temporal reference, his final choice, *tahzib ul akhlaq*, was geared less to the final product of civilization than to the process of reaching it. In its traditional usage, it was directed at the ethical improvement of the individual – often, but not exclusively, the ruler. It is only in the discourse of the later nineteenth century that the community as a whole becomes the object of *tahzib*.

The fact that all of these concepts have a religious or at least ethical mooring does not make the role of religion in the civilizing process less ambivalent. Islam, Saiyid Ahmad Khan insisted, cannot and will never change. It is a light which can never decline (*la-zawal nur*), which shines since eternity and will continue to do so.⁵⁸ What however needed reform is the heartbreaking condition of the Muslims – if they were not willing to act for their own sake, they should at least do so for the sake of Islam, as their degradation would bring about the degradation (*zillat*) of Islam and make it contemptible in the eyes of the world.⁵⁹ Religion thus is double linked to the reformist project: on the one hand Islam profits from reforms, as the worldly success of the community reflects back on their religion. On the

⁵⁶ *Taraqqi dena*: Saiyid Ahmad Khan, “Ahl-e Hind,” 137, 139, Saiyid Ahmad Khan, “Rasm o rivaj ki pabandi, Panipati,” *Khutbat*, vol. 1, 234, Saiyid Ahmad Khan, “Zamane ki taraqqi ki asar,” *Maqalat*, vol 11 (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1963), 536-538, quotation 536; *taraqqi par pahunchna*: Saiyid Ahmad Khan, “Musalmanon ki qismat ka akhri faisla (1),” *Khutbat*, vol. 2, 306-308, quotation 308, Saiyid Ahmad Khan, “Adni halat se a’la halat par insan ki taraqqi,” *Maqalat*, vol 4, 41-47, quotation 47.

⁵⁷ For the reform concepts of the Naqshbandis and specially their use of *tajdid* see Waren Fufeld, “The Shaping of Sufi Leadership in Delhi: The Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya, 1750-1920,” dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1981. For a comparison with the Ottoman conceptual universe see Alp Eren Topal, “From Decline to Progress. Ottoman Concepts of Reform 1600-1876,” dissertation, Bilkent University 2017.

⁵⁸ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, “Musalman ki guzishta aur maujuda halat,” *Khutbat*, vol. 1, 427-35, quotation 428.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 431.

other hand, it is one of the most important forces which lead the community on the path to a better future. For this, however, it is necessary to purify it of the misunderstandings and superstitions which have crept into it and distorted its original meaning. As Saiyid Ahmad's opinions concerning these reinterpretations were among the most controversial aspects of his work, he tended to downplay the role of this reformed Islam in order not to endanger his most important mission: the Aligarh College. More than anything that he mentioned as the causes of civilization in his article discussed above, it is education – and increasingly education in the humanities and not in the natural sciences – which was to bring forth the leaders the community so desperately needed if it was to have a future.

The temporalities that mattered in *Asar us Sanadid*, as we have seen above, were the relations between the past and the present. This was partly a question of genre, but even this selection of a historiographical genre was a conscious choice, and one which was not uncontested.⁶⁰ In the Aligarh years, this had changed profoundly. While the past might still provide lessons and hope, it was the future which stood at the center of attention. The present was the moment of a choice depicted in harsh dichotomies. It was the choice between the new and the old (*jadid – qadim*), between learning and ignorance (*ta'lim – jahiliyat*), between light and darkness (*nur – tariki*), between progress and decline (*taraqqi – tanazzul*), and hence between hope and despair (*umid – mayusi*) and between honor and shame (*izzat – sharm*). Watches reminded everyone that time was fleeing, and accounts would be demanded soon. Saiyid Ahmad Khan describes having his clock repaired: "It began moving and ticking. I noticed it going day and night, beginning its revolution at one and ending it at twelve and thus in its single revolution day and night are gone and on taking stock of what we have done we realize that we have done nothing. This has been agitating me for some days."⁶¹ The concept of *ghalfat*, carelessness and negligence, began to carry temporal overtones: wasting time led to utter despondency, as it put the future, the personal and the future of the community at risk.⁶²

This led to an ever increasing emotionalization. In the early 1870s Saiyid Ahmad Khan had been conscious of the possibility of despair, but overall his tone of one of hope: "Only beautiful only daughter with a shining face! Oh hope, it is God's light which is with you. It is you, who consoles us in the difficulties of our misfortunates. You help us in our hours of need, through you we receive joy. ... Only you kept this heart, which was entangled in death, from dying. Only you saved it from ignominy (*zillat*)."⁶³ In later years, this gave way to the awareness that the window of opportunity was closing and that the chances for carving out a prosperous and honorable future for the Muslim community were shrinking rapidly. In a speech at the Mohammedan Educational Conference, delivered four years before his death, he cries out: "My use of the word despair (*mayusi*) is not just a manner of speaking. Not at all! This image of hopelessness is in my heart. The words are but a shadow of this image and the smell of hopelessness is the smell of my burning heart (*dil-e sokhta ki bu*). ... [If Aligarh fails] the community (*qaum*) will be dead, even if it keeps up the external appearances of life (*murda*

⁶⁰ The poet Ghalib famously berated him for spending time to re-edit the Mughal *Ain-e Akbari*, instead of focusing on present developments, see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "From Antiquary to Social Revolutionary: Syed Ahmad Khan and the Colonial Experience." published remarks presented at the Sir Syed Memorial Lecture, Aligarh Muslim University (2006).

⁶¹ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, "Mirage of Life," in *Selected Essays of Sir Syed Ahmad*, vol. 1, trans. Muhammad Hamidullah (Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy, 2004), 131-138, original in *Tahzib ul Akhlaq* 1293.

⁶² For a close reading of Saiyid Ahmad Khan, "Guzra hua zamana," *Tahzib ul Akhlaq*, 1873 (2), 14-16 see Margrit Pernau, Max Stille, "Oh time, oh time! Why did I waste you?" A nightmare. *History of Emotions - Insights into Research*, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14280/08241.58>.

⁶³ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, "Umid ki khushi," in *Tahzib ul akhlaq ki isha'at ki zarurat*, ed. Fazl ud Din (Lahore: Malik Fazl ud Din, 1938) 107-111, quotation 107.

ba surat-e zinda). There will be no education, no wealth, no honor, no energy, no courage and no pride (*ta'lim, daulat, izzat, himmat, himayat aur ghairat*), and we will not succeed in rising again (*uruj*).⁶⁴

This emotionalization is not easily explained, certainly not in the light of the tradition associating modernity with an ever increasing control of the emotions and their disciplining. One possible explanation might lie in exactly the shifting temporalities, which have been at the center of this paper. By opening up the future, by formulating its possibilities in stark alternatives of an all or nothing, and by placing the burden of this decision on the generation of the present, the scope of the present actors' responsibility increases as never before. The emotionalization can be read as an attempt to mobilize every resource for this great task. At the same time, the emotional ideal moves from balance (*'adl*) to passionate fervor (*josh*). Not the disciplining of the emotions, but their supreme increase is what can save the community at this late hour: "There is not enough passion for the community (*qaumi josh*) among you!" is Saiyid Ahmad Khan's ultimate analysis why the Muslims have only one chance left before irrevocably heading towards their downfall.⁶⁵

Conclusion

This article can only be a preliminary step towards a conceptual history of modernity in the Aligarh tradition, fully deserving this name. The first remaining step will be to take serious the social character of language. Saiyid Ahmad Khan, influential though he was, could not change concepts on his own. Rather, his efforts were part of a dialogue involving his collaborators and adversaries, but also the public at large, which took up his innovations or ignored them. We need to expand our archive by including the texts of his associates, notably Zaka Ullah's historical writings, Altaf Husain Hali's poems, Nazir Ahmad's novels and the articles and speeches by his coworkers Mahdi Ali Muhsin ul Mulk and Mushtaq Husain Viqar ul Mulk. Many of Saiyid Ahmad Khan's texts are written in reply to arguments which he does not make explicit. These might be British debates which he summarizes, but not always attributes to specific persons. More often, however, they might respond to his adversaries and detractors, who published polemical tracts, fatwas and journal articles against him, and lambasted him in poems and cartoons. With the exception of the writings of Zaka Ullah, Hali, and Nazir Ahmad only few of the texts, which together constitute the archive of the debate on modernity and its temporalities, have been systematically, if at all, collected.

The second step will be to relate concepts to the experiences at their basis. This implies drawing on social history to bring out the experiences potentially available to a man of his age and class in the heyday of imperialism in North India. This in turn has to be supplemented by a close reading of the experiences Saiyid Ahmad Khan (and the other authors who form the enlarged archive) actually considered worth relating. This involves attention to the sensory and bodily experiences and their interpretation to see which of these the authors link to modernity or not. Unlike European texts, which often focus on the railway as a symbol for modernities noise and dirt as well as for the

⁶⁴ Saiyid Ahmad Khan, "Musalmanon ki qismat ka akhri faisla (2)," *Khutbat*, vol. 2, 309-338, quotation 309-310, 319.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 327.

acceleration of everyday life,⁶⁶ for Saiyid Ahmad Khan railways seem hardly worth mentioning. While he is conscious of the need to account for his time, as shown above, this does not lead to a perception of being rushed. This does of course not imply a normative statement as if he had to conform to European experiences, but it seems important to draw out the differences unless we succumb to the assumption that modernity is always about an experience of acceleration because it was so in some parts of Europe.

The last step finally leads us to practices. What were concepts of temporality good for? To what uses were they put, and where did they transform practices? Political loyalty, the reform of the Muslim community and putting Aligarh on a secure foundation for Saiyid Ahmad Khan came together in one single aim. His ideas on temporalities – the assumption of a singular time line, in which the most advanced countries showed the way, in conjunction with images of rise and fall and the possibility to rise once again – were at the basis for his willingness to learn from the British and his hope that the Muslims were capable of achieving the same grandeur if only they were consistent, tireless and passionate in their efforts. Education was at the center of his reform project, education was the one force which moved a nation from one stage to the next. If these ideas could be found in contemporary British literature on civilization and history, what Saiyid Ahmad Khan offered, was a selective reading, leaving out the role of the state and of law, and increasingly leaving out the role of technology and changes in the economic sphere. Translating civilization as *tahzib ul akhlaq* not only transported British knowledge into the Indo-Persian cultural universe, but also work back: if it was assumed that it was *tahzib ul akhlaq*, which the British meant when they talked about civilization, this concept was opened to a Persianate interpretation, which stressed the cultivation of the virtuous individual through the higher forms of learning – for the sake of the community they were born and bred to lead. Aligarh became the focal point for all the different aspects of his ideas and activities. It therefore made perfect sense if most of his most impassionate speeches ended on a seemingly mundane note: soliciting donations for the College.

⁶⁶ Hartmut Rosa, *Acceleration: The Change in Temporal Structures in Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).