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Conceptualizing *Reform* and Building *Consensus*: Islam in South Asia, and some Aspects of Leadership Patterns and Political Consciousness[1]

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ABSTRACT

The preponderant thrust of academic literature on the field of Islam in South Asia often projects a picture of a monolithic Muslim community seamlessly pervaded by broader religious nationalist forces. This paper suggests, this has not always been so, especially in late nineteenth-early twentieth century. Using sources hitherto inadequately utilized this historical sketch of ideas of socio-religious reformism and political culture foregrounds a much more nuanced picture. The instance of the Dāʾūdī Bohrās, a Sevener Shīʿa sect, illustrates how one brand of epistemic construction of reform and progress was taken up by a different strand of politico-ethical thought, rationalizing and relocating it in a new interpretive paradigm. The paper studies the works of two leading Bohrā thinkers, Mulla Abdul Husain and Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy. The qualified absorption of Abdul Husain's sectarian reformist-revivalist ideas by Adamjee Peerbhoy, intertwined with the latter's project of reconfiguring Bohrā identity, becomes intelligible against the backdrop of contemporaneous politico-intellectual culture. This involved constant re-charting of the boundaries of the Bohrā community, eventually leading to its linkage with the broader South Asian umma along political lines. This paper explores the theory and praxis of these moments of dialogue and negotiations, tracing the labyrinthine trajectory from socio-religious to political orientations. In doing so, it studies the role of leaders in negotiating identities with critical reference to Paul Brass's conceptualization of "instrumentality" of elites in political mobilization by way of manipulating symbols, though not losing sight of the contextual specificities conditioning such choices, and examining the role of "individual rationality".

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I. PROLEGOMENA

One of the major concerns of modern day scholarship in the various branches of social sciences is the question of challenging any grand scheme of meta-narrative. As a result researches on themes of *community, tradition, identity, reform,* or *progress* have nowadays been fragmented along both horizontal and vertical lines blowing off much conceptual rigidity though unfortunately, not in its totality. To cite an example of these vestiges of older rigidities, especially in the studies of Islam in South Asia, is the projection of a picture of monolithic "Indian Muslim" community, and of its backwardness culminating — sometimes supposedly almost in a linear way — in "separatism".[3] A further problem is that even the question of leadership is often over-simplified in such discourse. The post-1857 period, one is thus told, is marked among other things by the "genesis of a new Muslim leadership".[4]

The present essay suggests why such orthodoxies should be disposed of and the genealogy of the history of Islamic political culture in South Asia needs to be looked at afresh. Taking cue from P.G. Robb's intervention exhorting the need to look at the "multiple levels or degrees of identity and 'other-ness'" and compare "the strength and pervasiveness of religious and other identities" (Robb 1991), this paper investigates the variegated layers of emotive engagement *within* the broader Islamic rubric in late nineteenth-early twentieth century South Asia. It looks into two crucial strands of Dā'ūdī Bohrā reformist thought.[5] The life and works of Mian

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[3] See, for instance, Hamid (1967); Zakaria (1970). By and large these works draw heavily upon W. W. Hunter's "Muslim backwardness" thesis. The first serious masterly study questioning the general applicability of Hunter's "Muslim backwardness" thesis at a pan-Indian level came from Francis Robinson (1974), where he highlighted the role of the Muslims of the United Provinces (not particularly "backward" according to him), who had been in the vanguard of Muslim politics in the sub-continent, and showed that the idea of "backwardness" is essentially fragmented and flawed. The question of heterogeneity of the community comes up in some other works as well. Seal (1970: 300) talks about Muslim heterogeneity along lines of language, caste and economic standing. Titus (1959: 87-115; 170 ff) on the other hand talks about internal differences along sectarian lines. However, these works are still oblivious of the fact that the different sects or groups could interact between themselves on questions of "selfhood", "reform" or even the future of the Muslims in South Asia in general. The theory and praxis of such interactions and the rhetorical tropes of the negotiations form the focus of the present investigation. Much sophisticated, however, is Kenneth McPherson's recent enquiry into religious diversity under British rule (2004) which deals with spatial distinctiveness, with reference to authority and power structure of Muslims in Calcutta and Madras, and how such distinctiveness with their corollaries impacted on Hindu-Muslim relations.

[4] See Abbasi (1981). The very first chapter of the monograph is entitled "Genesis of a New Muslim Leadership", where the writer talks about breaks in leadership patterns in South Asia's Muslim community; this break, one is told, is marked by the "exit of the Ulema" and the rise of a "new leadership" which was supposedly conditioned by "the enlightened self-interest of the Government and the Muslim urge to progress" (M.Y. Abbasi 1981: 13). Implicit in this construction is the binary of "religious" (=backward)/ "secular" (= enlightened/ progressive).

[5] Drawing strength from Hindu converts of Western India, the Bohrās and the Khojas form two Shī'a sects and constitute the Indian Ismā'līs, but were governed in matters of inheritance by customary and Hindu laws prior to 1937, when the Sharī'a Act came into effect. However, there had been numerous cases of secession especially within the Bohrā sect on the question of rightful religious head, resulting in the formation of the Dā'ūdī and Sulaymānī groups in the sixteenth century, following Dā'ūd bin Quṭb Shah and Shaikh

Bhai Abdul Husain, representing one of these strands, illustrate how questions of social — and more particularly of educational — reformism could be wedded to religious issues though drawing decisively upon European phraseology of Progress producing an ambivalent space in the intellectual genealogy of this community.

Operating, as it was, in certain colonial historical milieu involving an active engagement with the colonial establishment, this was in no way the only strand of reformist thought; indeed, there had been parallel, and often competing, visions of reform among the Bohrās — concerning similar socio-religious issues with special focus on the authority and position of the religious head — which made their history in the twentieth century truly multi-faceted, thus betraying the different layers within the broader Islamic folds in South Asia. Mian Bhai Abdul Husain on the one hand, and Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy and his sons on the other, represent two different strands of community consciousness which could be labeled as "Islamic activism" and more decidedly "Islamist" respectively.[6]

What adds further twist to the development of these distinctive strands of community consciousness is the fact that certain threads from one of these lines of thought would be taken up by another to validate its own position, although originally not intended by its author. Mulla Abdul Husain, for all his critique of the contemporaneous depraved state of education among the Bohrās, which he blamed on the subordinate priestly classes, was highly defensive about the Head-priest's (the *dā'ī*) position. Ironically, however, his work came to be cited by Sir Adamjee's sons in their prolonged tirade against the Head-priest, which only earned Abdul Husain wrath of the *da'wat* (mission/ retinue of the Head-priest's officials). This enquiry seeks to look into Abdul Husain's epistemic construction of reform and progress, and a specific mode of interpretation that that construction was subjected to in course of a politico-ethical — and later legal — construction of selfhood drawing inspiration from, and linking it with, broader currents of Islamic thoughts in the early twentieth century. In doing so, it studies leadership patterns and role of leaders in negotiating identities (i.e. relating to, and distancing from, established Islamic frameworks) with due reference to Paul Brass's intervention that conceives of a decisive degree of "instrumentality" of elites in political mobilization by way of manipulating symbols — a view that important as it is — still understates the importance of reformist-revivalist movements, highlighted by

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Sulaymān respectively, or again, the Alīas in the following century. The etymological meaning of the word "Bohrā"(from *vyawahar*) is said to be trade, thus pointing to the occupational profile of the people in pre-conversion times; however, this has been contested, on the basis of Sunnī Bohrā traditions, that *bahu rāh* in Gujarati means "several sects or paths", underscoring thereby the heterogeneous composition of the community (Lokhandwalla 1955). For a general account of the Ismāʿlīs, see Daftary (1990). One of the early attempts to understand the "interplay of history and legend and intermixture of Hinduism and Islam" through the prism of a "legendary history of the Bohrās" came from K.M. Jhaveri's translation of an Arabic work called *Risālat al-tarjamat az-zāhira li firqati Bohrat al-bāhira* (Jhaveri 1933). For an incisive account of the fluidity of identities, especially in the Indian context where one encounters different groups (e.g. the Bohrās and the Khojas) which could be ideally termed "liminal", given their "intermediary" nature inhabiting threshold areas between broader "Hindu" and "Islamic" traditions, see Dominique-Sila Khan (2004: especially 5-7; 44-50).

[6] The concepts of "Islamic activism" and "Islamist" are developed by Dietrich Reetz (2006: 3ff.). The former is taken to mean "active public involvement beyond personal or private contemplation, which is not necessarily political in nature" as typified, in the present instance, by Abdul Husain; this is in contrast to the category that Reetz calls "Islamist" which is underpinned with an intrinsic political agenda represented here by Sir Adamjee.

Francis Robinson.[7] A further problem with the Brass model is its fixation with elite agency to the extent of somewhat circumventing the immediate contextual backdrop. Elite agency, as we shall see, might be crucial in bringing about any change, or the lack of it; but their idioms are essentially derived from the societal matrix which they inhabit. Drawing a picture of dynamics of "structure" and "agency", and while admitting the importance of the forces of "context and conjuncture", Mitra (1999: 16ff) draws attention to the "individual rationality" of any leadership in weaving together the strands of what could potentially entail any change in society. The present engagement employs this paradigm from a historical perspective to understand the patterns of dialogue between different individuals themselves, and individuals and larger society in arriving at as basic, albeit crucial, questions as defining boundaries of a community and the implications which they bore.[8] In other words, the present enquiry, while wary of the rather overdrawn employment of the theory of elite manipulation, probes into a phase of South Asian history when contours of communities were constantly being drawn and redrawn to align with — or distance from depending on the socio-cultural matrix and the elite proclivities and choices — the socio-religious forces of the time. This becomes intelligible only in the light of the broader backdrop of politico-religious forces, and religious nationalism, a term I prefer to the rather demeaning and de-legitimizing "communalism", forming the veritable crucible of the contemporaneous theories of socio-religious reformism and community consciousness. But ultimately each of these actors, Abdul Husain, Sir Adamjee, or later his sons, had their own idea of community consciousness and development, and it was *their* "individual rationality" among other factors that translated mere discourses into actions, into an "Islamic activism" or an "Islamist" enterprise. This then is primarily a history of ideas and the realization of such ideas into action, with some in-built hints at functional modalities and praxis of translating the encoded discourses of community identity, often competing with each other as they were, into hardcore realities of the socio-political world.

The development of Abdul Husain's discourse of religio-cultural "activism" and the kind of ambivalence it came to bear, we shall see, could be effectively understood by making a broadened use of the analytical framework of "hybridity".[9] Developed by Homi K. Bhabha, and employed to understand the colonizer-colonized relationship, the concept refers to the "ambivalent" nature of identity that the colonized develops in its efforts to "mimic" the colonial discourse. The

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[7] The Brass-Robinson debate is particularly crucial in understanding the nature of Muslim separatism; whereas Brass attaches much importance to symbol manipulation, Robinson draws attention to the fundamental essential differences of Hinduism and Islam. This has led to the labeling of Brass and Robinson as "instrumentalist" and "primordialist" respectively. For some early versions of the debate see Brass (1974: 119-181; 1979: 35-77); Robinson (1979: 78-112). See also Brass (1991: 69-118) and Robinson (2001: 156-176).

[8] In fact, recent investigations into communal riots and pogroms in post-colonial India by Brass (2003) further builds upon this elite entrepreneurship framework, but has been critiqued for its flawed employment of data to understand inter-communal alienations and overt homogenizations at pan-Indian level (Mitra 2003).

[9] See Homi K. Bhabha (1998: especially 85-122). Bhabha's model is a tool to critically analyze the colonizer-colonized relationship and cultural traits of diasporic transnational communities especially in the post-colonial context; however, this paper further builds upon the model to understand how ambivalence in discourses — originally products of colonizer-colonized relationship — could also impact on relationships and patterns of negotiation between different threads of a colonized community. Such negotiations could well move beyond the ambit of "culture" and enter other realms that characterize public life.

ambivalence is due to the fact that such mimicry could never produce an exact copy of colonial discourse, but rather a "blurred impression". And it is in this rather fuzzy sphere of "blurred impression" that the germs of multivalence of any discourse (which could be more than just cultural, as I suggest) emerge. The life and works of Abdul Husain show how cultural patterns and tropes, modeled on a specific understanding of the western Enlightenment project of Progress and Rationality having cultural roots could nevertheless eventually lead to its employment in the conceptualization of issues ranging from development and progress to self-perception and identity, which could well have religious underpinnings.[10] In addition, as will be seen here, such interpretive exercises were not necessarily just employed as part of rhetorical engagement with the colonizer or its representatives; such rhetoric could be, and indeed, were actually employed and re-interpreted in course of dialogue between different sections of the colonized body as well. This explains why and how Abdul Husain's discourse of progress and reform was selectively taken up and employed by another strand of reformers in their crusade against the established religious leadership of the community. Looking into these competing discursive traditions of "progress", "reform" and "identity", and the moments of their interactions and negotiations, helps us reconstruct some neglected branches of the family-tree of the intellectual history of certain sections of South Asia's Muslims. It is interesting how the Bohrās and the Khojas, both threshold communities sharing some elements between themselves, came to relate to Islam at the different levels of socio-religious reformism, legal theory, and political consciousness. Thus, substantial part of the nineteenth century witnessed considerable debates among the Khojas regarding the kind of Islam to which to relate which found expression in a series of law cases.[11] The Bombay Khojas are said to have been urged to place themselves under the Hindu Wills Act (XXI of 1870) following which Sir Richard Temple's government appointed a judicial commission to ascertain views of the majority of the Khoja community (including, as was claimed, sections living outside Bombay city) with regard to such enactments, which invited challenges from Aga Ali Shah, son of the Aga Khan.[12] This had momentous repercussions as in due course the Khoja Succession

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[10] It is important to note the subtle difference between Victorian scientism and Rationality, the supposed sources of influence for certain thought waves in South Asia, in itself and the connotation ascribed to it by contemporaneous generations and posterity. Indeed, scholars have actually unearthed a much nuanced picture of such Enlightenment discourse, often showing the mutually interactive nature of Christianity and naturalism. It has been shown (Frank Miller Turner 1974: 246-256), how a critique of Christianity could be thoroughly linked to a critique of naturalism as well, as an expression of disillusionment and "intellectual hatred" to both, deemed to evolve a third "intellectual alternative". On the other hand, by tracing the origins of some of the contemporaneous reform issues, e.g. trans-Atlantic anti-slavery movement, to Biblical morality rather than secular Enlightenment enterprise, Charles Taylor (1992: 399-410) contests any theory of unidirectional development of secularization in Victorian England.

[11] For instance, in 1866 the Khojas came to be regarded as of Shī'a denomination. See *Advocate General* v. *Muhammad Husen Huseni,* (1866), 12 Bombay High Court Reporter (hereafter Bom. H.C.R.) 323. At the turn of the century, however, came a final showdown between the Twelver and Sevener Shī'a denominations. See *Haji Bibi* v. *H.H. Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, the Aga Khan,* (1909) 11 Bombay Law Reporter (hereafter Bom. L.R.), 409. Punctuating these fifty years or so came up a vast corpus of judicial debates in form of proceedings and so on, on the question of Khoja intestate succession, opposed equally by the Sunnī and Shī'a factions alike.

[12] Justice Maxwell Melvill was the President of the commission; its members were said to be representing the diverging strands within the Khoja community, viz. Aga Ali Shah, Ahmedbhoy Hubeebbhoy, Jairazbhai Peerbhoy and Rahimtula Sayani. Later two more members, viz. N. Spencer and Dhurumsey Poonjabhoy were admitted at the suggestion of

Act of 1884 came to be drafted with a view to cover *the whole of India* and even further applicable to cases of intestate succession in the Consular jurisdictions in the Persian Gulf, Zanzibar and places outside British India where considerable number of Khojas were found, betraying thereby the State's concerns to arrive at standardization.[13] Contrastively, the Bohrās had been subject to systematic secessionist tendencies on the question of rightful successor to the High-priest's position on several occasions from circa sixteenth century onwards splitting the community up into the Dā'ūdī, Sulaymānī, Sunnī, Alīa, and other sections. So by the nineteenth century there had already been a somewhat clearer picture (at least in comparison with the Khojas) as to what it means, for instance, to be a Dā'ūdī Bohrā as opposed to a Sunnī Bohrā. Hence there was hardly any formal secessionism among the Bohrās, like the Khoja case of nineteenth century. The late nineteenth early twentieth century rival discourses of Bohrā selfhood, therefore, related to issues somewhat intrinsically different from that of the Khojas.

II. MIAN BHAI MULLA ABDUL HUSAIN: THE MENTAL WORLD OF A *LOYALIST* REFORMER

The centrality of the religious leadership within the sects of the Bohrās and the Khojas stems from the vital question of *ta'wīl*, the esoteric exegesis emanating from the spiritual head that would lead the initiated through different stages of consciousness to reach the hidden or the *bāṭīni* realm of knowledge. An overview of the pre-nineteenth and twentieth century secessionist movements within the Bohrās shows the essentially different nature of those instances. When in the sixteenth century the Bohrās broke into the rival groups of the Dā'ūdīs and the Sulaymānīs, the core problem was the dispute over the question of candidature for the spiritual head or *al-dā'ī al-muṭlaq* between Dā'ūd bin Quṭb Shah and Shaikh Sulaymān, the first "Indian" *al-dā'ī al-muṭlaq*'s nephew and deputy in Yemen. So was the case with the seventeenth century schism leading to the formation of the Alīa group which, led by Alī broke away from the mother community led by 'Abd al Ṭayyab. In each of these cases the common problem was the issue of succession to the position of the spiritual head. A certain claimant to the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*'s position could be challenged, but the pre-ordained sanctity of the position could not. Contrastively, much of the twentieth century reformist polemical agenda would hinge upon the very basic question of infallibility of the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*. An early, but rather innocuous, incarnation of this theory comes from Mulla Abdul Husain who, while supportive of the Dā'ūdī Bohrā Head-priest's position, was severely caustic about the lower priestly classes.

Abdul Husain was not just another self-styled "reformer". What makes this personality particularly intriguing is the multi-layered nature of his reformist-revivalist enterprise. Thus for all his critique of the contemporaneous state of affairs within the Bohrā brotherhood, especially of the sphere of education, he was thoroughly steadfast in his defense of the Head-priest's authority and position. Writing in the early part of the twentieth century, Abdul Husain's *Gulzare Daudi*

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the Aga Khan. Four of these members represented the Shī'a division of the Khojas, except for Ahmedbhoy Hubeebbhoy, who came from the Sunnī branch. 'Bill for regulating succession and inheritance among (Khojas) of Bombay', Home Department, Judicial Branch, March 1880, Proceedings 123- 134 (A), National Archives of India (hereafter NAI).

[13] India Office Records (hereafter IOR), Public & Judicial Department Records, The Khoja Succession Bill, 1884, L/PJ/6/131, File 1428.

for the Bohras of India: A Short Note on the Bohras of India, their 21 Imams and 51 Dais, with their Customs and Tenets,[14] posits a reformist schema that envisaged a clear cleavage between a subordinate priestly class and the religious head. His reformist intervention — verging on the edge of certain qualified revitalization — was occasioned by the need to address the question of the depravation of the priestly class, while still remaining firm in support to the Head-priest. Reflective of a gradual opening up of an Islamic "public arena",[15] by the late nineteenth-early twentieth century education had emerged as the crucially important site of contention between a brand of self-styled reformers and the religious leadership. Abdul Husain's reformism alleged that this degeneration of education, among other things, reflected the dilution of the rank and position of the *mashāyikh* due to indiscriminate conferment of that title especially on the unworthy.

Regarded as "a distinguished scholar of Burhanpur Bohras", Abdul Husain passed his Bachelor of Arts with Honors from the University of Calcutta, started his professional career as headmaster of Anjuman Islamia High School, Jabbulpur, and later joined the Provincial Service of the Central Provinces. He received a second class Kaiser-i Hind for public services in India in 1900 and came to receive an honorarium from the government for writing Ethnographical Survey notes in 1906. This must have given him an exposure to — if not connected him with — the administrator- historians' craft fashionable at the time. This is not to say, his was a mere replication of the colonial epistemic constructs about the Dā'ūdī Bohrās. While drawing upon European phraseology of Progress and Development, it was nevertheless meant to be a corrective supplement to an article on the Bohrās written by a colonial administrator-historian in volume xvii of the Ethnographic Survey, Central Provinces. The *Gulzare Daudi*, as has been noted, first came out around 1919-1920, and ran into a modest figure of 500 copies; in the Preface Abdul Husain claims that hardly any information is original while specific efforts were made to authenticate such information with reference to published material. This, however, need not be seen as a drawback hindering any appraisal of Abdul Husain's brand of reformism. In fact, it is quite the contrary. It is precisely this that makes his work particularly significant and adds to its strength. Different visions, narratives (even oral testimonies), and analytic frameworks current at the time are woven together in a single cover with Abdul Husain's own commentary, acting at times as subtexts. Even a cursory glance at the range of works referred to in Appendix G to Abdul Husain's *Gulzare Daudi*[16] is most instructive: works of colonial administrative-ethnographic genre, e.g. the *Bombay Gazetteer, vol. ix, 1899*; Russell's *Ethnographic Survey of Central Provinces, vol. xvii*; some classics of Western scholarship (including, but not limited to Orientalist scholarship) like

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[14] This undated edition consulted here says that the first edition was printed at the Amarsinhji Private Press, Lal Darwaza, Lalkaka Lodge, Ahmedabad by Pathan Nurkhan Amir Khan Vakil, and probably in 1919. The edition consulted here might be the 1921 edition, published from Ahmedabad, but certainly not later than 1921 since it contains reference to an *ongoing* law suit, purporting to the Chandabhoy *gulla* Case, the verdict of which came out in only 1921.

[15] Here I draw upon an expression as developed by Freitag (1989). The expression has been used to denote a realm "encompassing activity by locally constituted groups, and that structured by state institutions… an alternative world to that structured by the imperial regime, providing legitimacy and recognition to a range of actors and values denied place in the imperial order." See S.B. Freitag (1989: 6). The concept, encompassing the variegated nuances of public life, characteristic of both state-created structures and beyond, is a corrective to the rather restrictive Habermasian bourgeois analytical framework of "public sphere".

[16] For an exhaustive list of the works drawn upon, see Abdul Husain, (n.d.: 156 ff).

Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*; De Sacy's *Religion de Druzes* and *Expose*; Todd's *Western India*; government reports like the Report of the Educational Commission of 1882 AD; and above all, tracts written in both European and non-European languages by other Dā'ūdī Bohrā thinkers now difficult to access. This latter category includes works ranging from "history" of the community like Shaikh Mohamed Ali Jiwabhai's 'Mosame Bahar'; through accounts of Dā'ūdī Bohrā customs and religious practices, e.g. the rare 1896 edition of 'Sahifatus-salat'; down to Shaikh Faizullabhai's *(A) Historical Sketch of the Bohra Highpriests*. This needs to be juxtaposed with the fact that Abdul Husain is not hesitant to offer his readers a glance into the once guarded bastion of theological pedagogic tradition at the Surat College; and in this his informal networks proved to be of utmost help. The list of theological books in the Surat College curricula, Abdul Husain thus adds, was supplied by ex-students of the College (n.d.: 82ff). It is this intersection of different levels of engagement with public life that makes Abdul Husain's work so important. What the reader gets in the end is a narrative with rich intermeshing of views flowing from the pen of both the *compiler* Abdul Husain and the *author* Abdul Husain, with his own brand of reformist agenda, and its rationalization, writ large.

According to Abdul Husain his venture is meant to:

> … give a broad view of the organisation of the Bohra sect and it is hoped that it will be of use to the English knowing Bohras. This is intended to hint for them the ways and means for obtaining the correct and complete knowledge of the doctrine of the sect from the European point of view. (n.d.: 3-4)

Let us now chart out the terrain of his intellectual concerns. He is, as is evident from the above quote, concerned with: Firstly, the "organisation of the Bohra sect"; secondly, the "English knowing Bohras"; thirdly, certain "ways and means for obtaining the correct and complete knowledge of the sect"; and fourthly, such an appreciation from the "European point of view" (italics mine). Abdul Husain's target audience, the "English knowing" Dā'ūdī Bohrās, are thus exhorted to internalize a specific form of adab literature so as to appreciate in a "correct and complete" fashion the doctrines of their own sect. However, according to Abdul Husain, such literature propagating a specific brand of moral conduct with Dā'ūdī Bohrā sectarian values as its core should be appreciated from a "European" perspective.

Implicit in Abdul Husain's work is therefore a certain concern to impart among his Dā'ūdī Bohrā brethren an *adab*.[17] This has its roots in the essential components of the faith, the nurturing of which, according to Abdul Husain, helps one appreciating the true "knowledge of the doctrine of the sect". But the claim that such appreciation should also effectively have an anchorage in the "European point of view", betrays a specific form of discursive spirit in the domain of ideas, understanding and conduct. This concern to (re)construct or re-fashion a "tradition" — though originally having roots in the "religious traditions" of the community — along lines set by European norms is something that he shares with a whole generation of South Asian elite groups regardless of their "Hindu" or "Muslim"

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[17] This notion of *adab* — almost inevitably referring to the "religious traditions" of a community — is derived from Metcalf (1984: 5).

background. This marriage of secular Western education with Dāʾūdī Bohrā sectarian code of conduct and orthopraxy happened in, to borrow Bhabha's phraseology, "The Third Space of enunciation"[18] in a way neither envisaged by the Bohrā priestly class whom Abdul Husain was challenging, nor the advocates of Anglicist learning like Lord Macaulay. For the former Western education was *the* threat to faith; for the latter, Oriental learning was utterly derisory.

However, his effort to locate the reformist panacea in the sphere of education was certainly not the only brand of "reformism"; nor was he the only reformer addressing the issue of education. Somewhat echoing Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's concerns about the Indian Muslims in general about half-a-century before, Abdul Husain observed that the Bohrās, though "industrious and enterprising", were still mostly — some 95 per cent according to him — "bigoted religionists, superstitious, and ignorant…"[19] The priestly class, *partially* educated in Arabic as they were, were in his schema the villain supporting "the reactionary movement against education" (i.e. English/ Western education). It is primarily this concern that occasions Abdul Husain's intervention. The work should not be just an eye-opener. In addition, it must have a redemptive aspect to it, capable of setting off forces which could become instructive for internalization of certain values having potential to mould certain moral conduct. Yet this appreciation, this internalization to be proper and meaningful requires the Bohrā to look through Western eyes.

III. MIAN BHAI ABDUL HUSAIN: THE MARRIAGE OF EDUCATIONAL REFORMS AND SECTARIAN ORTHOPRAXY

For Abdul Husain a certain vision of educational reforms could, and should, be wedded to a certain mode of Dāʾūdī Bohrā sectarian orthopraxy. In such a reformist schema the knowledge of the Dāʾūdī Bohrā sectarian tenets and practices would be emphasized; its focal point — the Surat *Dars* — is also of typical Dāʾūdī Bohrā sectarian nature. Indeed, his exclusivist vision hardly left any space for Aligarh or the Bombay Anjumān i Islāmia. Cut off from the broader Islamic politico-intellectual culture of his age, Abdul Husain wished that the Dāʾūdī Bohrā sectarian traditions be re-established, and its restored pristine values be disseminated. This would have required efforts much in the line of vernacularization and concomitant dissemination of ideas, that later characterized, e.g. the Tablīghī Jamaʿāt movement (Metcalf 1993). Sadly for Abdul Husain, this did not happen in a scale as he would have loved it be.

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[18] It is in this contradictory nay ambivalent sphere that "all cultural statements and systems" are said to develop. See Homi K. Bhabha (1998: 37). Its ambivalence keeps open the option of multiple interpretations, and indeed appropriation, of the different symbols and meanings of culture even in different historical contexts. As will be seen, it is in this light that the appropriation and eventual modification of Abdul Husain's critique of the Dāʾūdī Bohrā religious establishment by another strand of reformism, represented by Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy and his sons, becomes intelligible.

[19] See Abdul Husain (n.d.: 78). About half a century before this comment, the *Report of the Director of Public Instruction, Bombay,* for the year 1873-74 showed that out of only 22 Muslim students in government colleges throughout the Presidency in 1874, some 4 were Bohrās, compared to 15 Khojas. Cited in Dobbin (1972:164). See, for the general state of Muslim education, Mahmood (1981 reprint: especially 147ff).

The resuscitation of the Dā'ūdī Bohrā religious and sectarian pedagogic tradition to be effective and meaningful also required a certain infrastructural reorganization in the sphere of education. Abdul Husain's quest thus brought him to a study of the history of the much acclaimed Surat *Dars,* founded in the early part of the nineteenth century by Sayyidna Saif ud din, the 43rd *dā'ī,* with a view to "take the advantage of the religious freedom, peace and prosperity of the British rule, and to spread higher sectarian education on an extensive scale, and open competitive system" (Abdul Husain n.d.: 75).

The sectarian ethos is particularly reflected in the curriculum of the Surat College. Typifying this ethos, a candidate is thus first of all required to take an oath of allegiance, i.e. *mīthāq.* Only then could he go on to study simple Islamic theology and then at a higher level, once he proves his mettle, the allegorical *bāṭīni* exegesis of Islamic theology, and the esoteric doctrines of *ḥaqīqa* that is, truth/inward vision of divine power, and *ta'wīl* i.e. allegorical interpretation of Islamic precepts (Abdul Husain n.d.: 73-74). The books in the fields of literature and history also capture this sectarian spirit. Evidently, therefore, cultivation and promotion of sectarian doctrines and tenets formed the fulcrum of the Surat College curricular activities. Clearly, therefore, the *umma* thus visualized is somewhat coterminous with the Dā'ūdī Bohrā sectarian category, albeit not inconsonant with the broader Islamic worldview.[20]

In his choice of diction, however, Abdul Husain betrays a clear influence of Eurocentric tropes. The degrees conferred upon the students in the College are thus also said to have parallels from the English academic world; thus the degree of *shaykh*, according to him, corresponds to an English University degree. It is easy to trivialize these traces of influence as too superficial; but the fact remains, for Abdul Husain this comparative approach added to the legitimization of his normative schema of "progress", having roots in the European Enlightenment project. Carving a European model out of the Surat *Dars* — by stressing on its role in grooming the *mashāyikh,* the learned bureaucracy, the upholders of the true doctrines of the sect and finding parallels from the Western world — was integral to Abdul Husain's approach to rationalize the foundations of his sect, perceived to be suffering from problems of backwardness which necessitated his intervention.

At this College, Abdul Husain adds, at least five hundred students were fed and lodged freely, the cost of maintenance being about Rupees 40,000. No clear reference to the exact date, however, is made here. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the subsequent history of that College through the entire nineteenth century is one of gradual decline. This, however, need not be seen as an isolated instance. Indeed, the nineteenth century witnessed a gradual dismantlement of the indigenous system of education and its replacement by the English model that was articulated in the 1850s with such strength as never before. At the turn of the century it was recorded that around that time the College was kept up at a much reduced annual charge of about Rupees 10,000; no less than some 150-200 boys,

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[20] The different modes of conceptualizing *umma* and the different resultant imports have been dealt with at length in recent years. For instance, seen primarily as a group of people bearing common characteristics, *umma* is also said to denote the different units which form a community, and can consequently imply, "a people, a society, a nation, a tribe, a culture, a multi-social, multi-cultural community in the sense it is used to describe Muslim civilization." (Wyn Davies 1988: 128- 130; see also, 107- 108). For an evaluation of the multiple connotative paradigms of the term *umma* and the Orientalist discourse see M. J. al Faruqi (2005).

coming from different parts of India or even Arabia, were said to have been clothed and fed at that cost; they would stay for about three years and would be taught Arabic, geometry, logic, and law.[21] In about twenty years time from then, Abdul Husain noted that the said College had reduced into a *maktab,* or primary school, "without good and devoted teachers" (n.d.: 75).

In an era marked among other things by development of competing brands of religious nationalisms and efforts to arrive at identifying individual splinter communities, within the Islamic folds, with *mainstream* Islam,[22]Abdul Husain oscillates between the two alternatives of asserting the pristine identity of the Dā'ūdī Bohrā "self" at one level and situating that community within the broader rubric of Islam. But as is evident from a dissection of his magnum opus, the latter was not an obvious choice (far less a political choice) for him and his primary concern remained *his* community, i.e. as he himself visualized, the Dā'ūdī Bohrā community. With Abdul Husain locating his community in the Islamic landscape never involved a dilution of his own community's specificities.

IV. APPROPRIATING "TRADITIONS": THE CASE OF SIR ADAMJEE PEERBHOY'S SONS

Around the second decade of the twentieth century another strand of socio-religious reformism was underway among the Dā'ūdī Bohrās. In due course its proponents, Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy and his sons, discovered themselves locked in a prolonged tirade against the Dā'ūdī Bohrā Head-priest. Sir Adamjee's reformist concerns related firstly to the sphere of education; but unlike Abdul Husain he transcended its limits and sought to chart out the boundaries of his community, locating it within the South Asian Islamic universe with a declared political underpinning that found its expression in the newly founded All India Muslim league, of which he was the First President.

Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy was no religious exegete. Coming from a sect — not considered by the vast majority of the Muslims to be one of them — he was no heir to any established Islamic tradition to which the dominant Sunnī circles might comfortably relate. But there is more to it. This reformer and merchant-prince was one of the largest cotton manufacturers of the time, who made his fortune by making supplies to the British army, and a politician with substantial influence in the local political power structure (being the Sheriff of Bombay, among other things). Thanks to him, by the second decade of the twentieth century sufficient progress had been made in the direction of integrating the Bohrās with the broader currents of South Asian Islam, thanks to the efforts of men like Sir Adamjee. For Sir Adamjee, forging links first with other sub-sects of the South Asian Islamic world, and then, with the dominant strands of Islamic worldview defined the *problematic.*[23] This positive assertion of a specific language of identification with

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[21] *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, volume IX, Part 2, 1899* (Bombay, 1899), 32.

[22] This trend is typified by personalities like Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy, leading Bohrā merchant, philanthropist, reformer and President of the First session of the All India Muslim League (1907); or H.H. Aga Khan III, spiritual head of the Khojas, whose life marked discernible efforts to situate the Nizāri Khoja within the Muslim rubric and strike a balance between these competing identities.

[23] A clear identification of the *thematic* and the *problematic* elements in any social discourse (a nationalist discourse, in Partha Chatterjee's analysis) impinges upon the cognition of the morphology of such a discourse. The *problematic* component of any social ideology might be identified as the realm of historical assertions, or "practical realizability"

certain conceived view of mainstream Islam — in a period conceived of as one witnessing the crystallization of the concept of a "monolithic 'Muslim community'" (McPherson 2004) — was coupled with a vehement negation of the Bohrā sectarian socio-religious leadership's position. The latter trend — culminating under his sons after his demise — was worked out in the rooms of the Bombay High Court, leading in effect to a legal redefinition of the contours of the Head-priest's authority over religious and temporal aspects of the lives of the followers. The *thematic* justificatory mechanism, therefore, was substantially rooted in the legal rhetoric of the time. The colonial judicial system and its legal rhetoric became the definitive features of this brand of socio-religious reformist discourse and its justificatory modalities.[24] Like his illustrious contemporary Abdul Husain, he too chose the field of education as his site of work, but unlike the former, he would take care to look beyond the boundaries of *his* community, and forge links with *other* communities. In 1885, in a letter written to the leading Indian National Congress member Sir Badruddin Tyabji, who came from the Sulaymānī sub-sect of the Bohrās, Sir Adamjee expressed his great disappointment at not being able to find adequate support (even among the Muslims of the city) to start a school for the *Anjuman i Islam*[25] in Bombay. He then went on to request Sir Badruddin's intervention in the matter. But what makes this brief letter particularly interesting is Sir Adamjee's choice of idioms and diction. The opening sentence runs as follows:

> Referring to the personal interview which I had the pleasure to have with you in the company with (sic) other gentlemen of *your Community* in respect to the erection of a school of subject do not seem disposed to contribute towards this desirable object.[26]

> (emphasis mine).

On his part, however, he expresses his willingness to offer monetary help to Sir Badruddin to start the school. Towards the end of the letter he further requests Sir Badruddin to "make it convenient personally to see the Chief members of *our Community*" so as to convince them of "the benefits desirable from the measures which you have in view for (sic) ameliorating the condition of *our* long neglected

of the same; and this becomes intelligible with reference to the justificatory claims and legitimizing modalities and tropes embedded in the field of the *thematic*. See Chatterjee, (1986: 36-53). This model gives us a conceptual framework with which to understand the morphological structure of any social discourse, in the present context the Bohrā socio-religious discourse.

[24] The crucial role of the colonial legislative system with regard to the formation of community identity, especially of communities inhabiting the interstitial spaces between the broader traditions of Hinduism or Islam, has been studied at length in recent years. For the conceptualization of Khoja identity around the mid-nineteenth century see, for example, Sodhan (2001).

[25] The Bombay Anjuman-i-Islam was just one of the several Anjumans operating around the time; some others were the Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam, Lahore, or the Anjuman-i-Islamia, Amritsar. See, in particular, Abdul Rashid Khan (2001: 60). The Bombay Anjuman was started in 1876 under the auspices of the Tyabjis and the ship-building tycoon Muhammad Ali Roghay with a view to promote an overall improvement of the Muslims. Nevertheless, from the very start the Anjuman had to struggle to convince the Bombay Muslims of its objectives. See Christine Dobbin, (1972: 231ff). In fact, the plan to establish an English school — as is evident from Sir Adamjee's letter cited here — is a classic case, testifying to the above point.

[26] Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy to Sir Badruddin Tyabji, August 12, 1885, Bombay. NAI, the Tyabji Papers, Volume 1, Serial Number 24.

Community…"[27] (emphasis mine). The oscillation between *my* community (i.e. the Dā'ūdī Bohrās) and *your* community (i.e. the Sulaymānīs) is quite evident. Nevertheless, in contrast to Abdul Husain, Sir Adamjee labored to invoke an idea of common good and reach out to an over-arching theme of *our* community which in the present case implies certain vision of a broader Bohrā fraternity. This conceptualization of *my* community, *your* community, and most importantly, of improving the condition of "*our* long-neglected community" (emphasis mine), therefore hinged upon certain idea of communal solidarity, having religious underpinnings, and substantiated with reference to the discourse of persecution that the Bohrās and the Khojas were said to have undergone before the coming of the British.[28]

The ingeniousness of Sir Adamjee's tryst with an enquiry of "selfhood" lies in the mutability of his system of thought — in tune with the broader political culture of the time — that betrayed a shift from religious sectarianism to definitive political orientations. Defining the boundaries of such a fuzzy community as his, and locating it within the Islamic folds depended squarely upon ironing out the traits peculiar to that community. This explains the vehement negation of the socio-religious leadership among the Dā'ūdī Bohrās that reached a fever-pitch under Sir Adamjee's sons in course of the Chandabhoy *gulla* law case. Embedded in the legal polemics of the time, it was thus an issue of more than just immediate religious import. This becomes intelligible against the backdrop of the development of a political discourse of a shared South Asian Muslim identity, accommodating the multitude of sects and groups. Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy was above all a visionary of this politico-intellectual genre.

In the said law case the Plaintiffs, sons of Sir Adamjee, brought against the Head-priest charge of misappropriation of funds collected in the offertory box of Seth Chandabhoy's tomb.[29] The original purpose of charity of the collected funds were said to be maintenance of the tomb; annual '*urs* feast, i.e. death anniversary, especially of a *dā'ī al-muṭlaq,* and *majlis* ceremony in honor of Seth Chandabhoy Currimbhoy; maintenance of the mosque; holding of a *Ramaẓān* feast; and any other charity which the *dā'ī* or his successors in office may deem to be of benefit for the Dā'ūdī Bohrā community at large which, according to the Plaintiffs, should be the educational objectives. The Defendants, on the other hand, claimed that

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Indeed, for the vast majority of the Musta'līs and the Nizārīs, exposed to the atrocities of persecution throughout its history, the coming of the English had been a providential boon. In Muzaffar Shah's Gujarat, and during Aurangzeb's reign, the Bohrās and the Khojas were thus often harassed. See, for a translation into English of the Supplement to the late-Mughal Persian text Ali Muhammad Khan's *Mirat I Ahmadi,* Syed Nawab Ali and C. N. Seddon (1928: 109-110). See also Asghar Ali Engineer (1980: 100-141). As late as circa 1850, Richard Francis Burton saw some traces of mutual animosity and condemnation between the Sunnīs and the Khojas of Sind, in the course of his sojourn in the region. See Burton (1973 Reprint: 250).

[29] Originally a wealthy merchant, Seth Chandabhoy is said to have attained "sainthood" upon his death and was claimed to be embodying the gamut of saintly attributes like, "piety, shrine, worshippers, offerings, intercession, miracles, anniversaries, feasts and illuminations"— a fact that did not go uncontested. Justice Marten, taking cue from Shaikh Faizullabhai's *(A) Historical Sketch of the Bohra Highpriests* (1916) went on to declare Seth Chandabhoy as a saint (*wali*) of a lower degree, as distinct from the saints of higher degree, represented by the *Imāms* and *dā'īs*; the lack of his being canonized, however, is explained in terms of absence of such tradition in the Dā□ūdī Bohrā community. See *Advocate General* v. *Yusuf Ali Ebrahim et al,* (1921) All India Reporter Bombay (henceforth A.I.R. Bom.) 338.

while the suit properties were certainly *not* the personal properties of the *Mullājī Saheb*, the same nevertheless formed part of the *da'wat* properties. The term *da'wat*, according to the *Mullājī Saheb,* meant "the spiritual kingdom of the Dawoodi Borahs and their general affairs".[30] The *Mullājī Saheb* further claimed to hold the suit properties by virtue of his being the *dā'ī al muṭlaq* or Head of the community, a position that makes him *unaccountable* to anybody but the *Imām* for whatever he does. This virtual claim to infallibility hinged upon the activation of certain key practices and rituals, e.g. the oath of *mīthāq* — an oath of allegiance to God and the *dā'ī al-muṭlaq*. The oath is taken by all believers of the faith upon reaching puberty, and is also repeated annually in the month of *zyl-Hajj*.

In course of the law case the very fundamentals of such rituals would be contested, stripping the Head-priest of the claim to infallibility. First and foremost what was challenged was the nature of contents of the very oath. On the basis of the first line of the third *ruku* from the Holy Qur'ān, viz. "God purchased from all the faithful their souls and their property in consideration of Paradise", and the central position of the *dā'ī* in the *bāṭīnī weltanschauung,* a total surrender to God and the *kal mā'ṣum* (*like* infallible) nay *mā'ṣum* (infallible) *dā'ī* was claimed from the faithful.[31] *Mīthāq* was thus a key ritual of intensification. However, its precedent nature still did not go uncontested. The defense of Advocate General Inverarity, the Counsel of the *Mullājī Saheb*, building on the above quote from the Qur'ān, proceeded along lines of establishing a chain connecting the *dā'ī* with God. However, the crux of this polemical diatribe nevertheless lay in the fact that any challenge to this schema of authority would be in effect tantamount to a challenge to the very foundational basis of the religious leadership. With Sir Adamjee's sons this challenge became stronger than ever before.[32]

Interestingly, Abdul Husain's work would be taken up by Sir Adamjee's sons to buttress their own position, something that Mulla Abdul could have hardly intended. Abdul Husain's reference to a succession problem to the *dā'ī*'s position was further taken up by Sir Adamjee's sons to prop up their critique of the *dā'ī*'s claim to infallibility. Abdul Husain, basing his account on a late nineteenth century work which the Bohrās generally regard as their authentic history, recounts that towards the end of the nineteenth century "the unbroken chain of succession to the *Dais* by divine Right" was challenged for the first time resulting in, from the times of Sayyidnā Najm al-Dīn the 49th *dā'ī* (d.1323/1906), a debasement of the Head-priestship into what he calls "management of the class organization" (i.e. Nizāmat).[33] The critique, with all fairness, was not so much against the Head-priest, as it was against the priestly class in general whom the Head-priest supposedly won over by way of grants of honors and position. Abdul Husain himself was careful to draw attention to this though, with decisive certitude, not challenging the Head-priest's position itself. His plea to gather support for the Head-priest *Mullājī Saheb*, however, did not save him from the wrath of the

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[30] *Advocate General* v. *Yusuf Ali Ebrahim et al,* (1921) A. I. R. Bom. 338; see pages 340, and also 343- 344.

[31] Ibid.: 343.

[32] It has been also argued that the core argument of the reformers against the ritual was: the oath of allegiance was made more rigorous by Sayyidnā Taher Saif al-Dīn in the early part of the twentieth century, while the original version was much less rigorous. This line of argument gradually crystallizes into the dissidents' Plaint in the Burhanpur Durgah Case, the Judgement for which was delivered in 1931. See Jonah Blank (2001: 320-321).

[33] Abdul Husain's model was Shaikh Muhammad Ali Ibn Mulla Jiwabhai's *Mausīm i bahār* (Abdul Husain n.d.: 49ff).

da'wat, and copies of his book are thus said to have been ruthlessly destroyed.[34] This further emanated from the fact that in spite of all his support to the Head-priest, Abdul Husain was prudent enough to add that the highly centralized controlling system had no scriptural sanction (n.d.: 88). This was an innocuous statement coming from a thinker much mesmerized by the Eurocentric tropes of "progress" and trying, in his own way, to strike a balance between this schema of progress with Dā'ūdī Bohrā sectarian culture. What emerges out of this is certain poly-semanticity of the idea of Progress. In his own words:

> The progressive party of the Bohras welcome the autocratic spiritual rule of their Head Priest, for they fully realise that this power if well and rightly directed will accustom the rude followers of his faith to the manners of Islam, and the bigoted Bohras will gladly take to *secular training* in the primary and the secondery (sic) schools if the training is combined with *religious training.*

> (n.d.: 78-79; emphasis mine)

For a fuller picture of his mental world, however, one has to look at what he says just some pages down his work:
In these days of liberty, freedom and democracy the bona-fide reformers do not claim any rival spiritual position or divine inspiration as Jafar, Ali, Suleman, Hibtulla, or Abdul Husain of Nagpore did, but respectfully and humbly pray Syedna to restore the systematic teaching of the Esoteric doctrines of the Fatemide Lodge… (n.d.: 89-90).

The latter reference among the secessionists is to one "Abdul Husain of Nagpur, son of Jiwabhai" who towards the end of the nineteenth century claimed direct communion with the *Imām* and, taking advantage of the internal problems within the *da'wat* owing to the succession question of the *dā'ī* around that time (referred to above), broke away from the Dā'ūdī Bohrā community with a small following. From the name of the centre of its activities, this secessionist group derived its name *Mehdibagwallas.* Abdul Husain Jiwabhai, in Mulla Abdul Husain's view, was "a pretender, a man of very poor knowledge", his whole enterprise being, "an assembly for worldly gain", inhibitive of modern advancements (n.d.: 49-58). Interestingly enough, the legal trials initiated by Sir Adamjee's sons are also rather tangentially dealt with, and indeed with no explicit reference:

> the unfortunate events leading to litigation at Bombay, Amreli, Ujjain, Bhopal, and Burhanpore go to expose the mismanagement and incompetency (sic) of the priest classes.[35]

It is an irony that selected parts of a tract — professed to be steadfast in support of the Head-priest's position and indeed critical of the contemporaneous secessionist tendencies and litigations — came to be used as a source material in

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[34] See the introductory note by H.K. Sanchawala, publisher of the 1977 reprint volume of *Gulzare Daudi*, and who also happened to be the editor of the *Dawoodi Vohra Bulletin.* (Abdul Husain 1977 Reprint).
[35] See Abdul Husain, (n.d.: 89); the argument is revisited, almost with the same rhetoric, in page 120. The "arbitrary power" of the priestly class to appropriate *waqf* property is challenged also in page 114.

the making of a very different brand of legal rhetoric. Its appropriation and selective employment by the other reformist strand, having definitive political underpinning, shows how elements of socio-religious reformism, encoded in a particular text, could be subjected to a different set of interpretive paradigms, and utilized by political projects of building consensus in a community, thus attesting to a relative instrumentality of leadership as the Brass model suggests.[36]

By the first decade of the twentieth century, Sir Adamjee had gradually emerged as an avid proponent of the interests of "the Mohammedans of India", and presiding at the First session of the All-India Muslim League exhorting "the true children of Islam" to follow the path of advancement.[37] Indeed, this called for some justificatory anchorage in certain specific version of Islam and depiction of the image of the Prophet, as illustrated in his Presidential Address first session of the Muslim League:

> I believe in the dignity of labour as the great Prophet did. The history of *our* people, the history of *our* heroes and of those who have carried the flag of Islam over the world has been one of strenuous and ceaseless effort… I believe it is along these lines that he can best exert his influence and carve for himself a high position in the Empire.
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> (Pirzada 1969: 19; emphasis mine).

Given this specific mode of interpretation of certain classical Islamic values and Prophetic ideals that Sir Adamjee arrived at, it will probably not be an exaggeration to locate him, above all, in a qualified "contextualist" tradition seeking to balance and interpret classical Islamic and Qur'ānic ethico-theological, nay politico-legal, systems in the light of broader socio-historical contexts.[38] Furthermore, this exhortation for a certain entrepreneurial character is no longer confined within the limits of the Bohrā sect. "*Our* people" and "*our* heroes" (emphasis mine) have now been equated willy-nilly with the broader Muslim community in general. Some anticipation of bridging the gulf could be located in 1906, when he made generous donations of some Rs. 1, 10, 000 for a science college at Aligarh (Pirzada 1969: 16). Providing leadership in the field of education was one of the different vehicles of reconciliation — if somewhat symbolic — and reaching out to the broader Islamic worldview, whereby conscious efforts would be made to dilute the individualizing tendencies and sectarian identities. This needs to be studied in conjunction with the broader politico-educational backdrop of "the

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[36] Cf., for an interesting analogy, how history gets its "explanatory effect" partly through the vehicle of what Hayden White calls "emplotment" or "the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle [historical text] as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures…" See White (1987: 83).

[37] The Presidential Address of Sir Adamjee at the First session of the All-India Muslim League, Karachi, December 29-30, 1907. See Pirzada (1969: 16 ff).

[38] I borrow the term from Abdullah Saeed (2008) and make a broadened use of it. Saeed uses it to understand Qur'ānic "ethico-legal" parameters in the context of specific socio-historical backdrops; I have, instead, used it to include diverse shades of Islamic ethico-theological and politico-legal discursive traditions as well. It is difficult to map the contours of the intellectual horizon of this so-called "Contextualist school" as it could well include exponents, ranging from "Progressive Ijtehadis" down to traditionists with reformist bent, but sharing in common a general approach towards the Holy Book and Traditions, viz. attaching varying degrees of importance to the broader socio-historical contexts in determining the pertinence of Qur'ānic ethico-legal systems. See Saeed (2008).

Muslim University movement" of the early twentieth century that was, at once, an enterprise to evolve a specific cultural definition while at the same time carving out an all-India Muslim constituency (Gail Minault and David Lelyveld 1974). This goes to show how, despite decisive degree of agency with which leaderships could function, they were nevertheless constrained by set patterns of religio-cultural norms — with appeal to the people they claimed to represent — to fall back upon while campaigning for consensus (Robinson 1979: 80ff; cf. Quentin Skinner 1974). Indeed, the degree of elite maneuver, for all their crucial importance, is always conditioned by the broader contextual choices they get. Sir Adamjee's rational choice, his journey of defining "selfhood" that had begun around late nineteenth century, flirting with mapping the contours of a Bohrā fraternity, had thus come to a full circle by early twentieth century when certain links had been successfully forged with the broader *umma* of South Asia. This poltico-cultural project was later propped up by his sons when they dragged their religious head to law court and demarcated the boundaries of the spiritual leadership in strict legal terms.

V. CONCLUSION

With the development of competing brands of religious nationalism from the late nineteenth century onwards, smaller sects and splinter-groups often inhabiting the interstitial spaces traditionally falling under the folds of neither Hinduism nor Islam and bearing their own specificities were virtually left with no practicable option but to identify with either of the broader religious categories of Hindus or Muslims. Sectarian leaderships thus from time to time, though not necessarily in all instances, sought to fuse sectarian values with the broader Islamic/ Hindu nationalist forces; but what they saw as rational choice, was also conditioned by their contextual specificities. This involved constant negotiation between the different currents of self-perception sometimes leading to qualified utilization of tools picked up from smaller sectarian repertoire. It is in this light that the appropriation of some of the elements of Abdul Husain's system of thought by Sir Adamjee and his sons should be seen.

The life and works of Mulla Abdul Husain exemplify certain brand of social reformism characterized by conscious efforts to harmonize the tropes of Rationality and Progress, with pristine sectarian values. Tempered with selective employment of European values and phraseology, the viabilities of his specific brand of *adab* thus hinged upon the approximation of values which had certain Dā'ūdī Bohrā "tradition" as its core. In his efforts to address the question what it meant to be a Dā'ūdī Bohrā, Abdul Husain arrived at a restricted vision of that community, though also touching upon the problem of situating it in the greater Islamic rubric. It was, however, bereft of any stark political agenda, as typified by Sir Adamjee in particular, and his sons. In other words, whereas Abdul Husain embodied one brand of "Islamic activism", Sir Adamjee represented the emerging "Islamist" political culture of the time.[39] Abdul Husain was first and foremost a Dā'ūdī Bohrā, concerned with reformist issues of that community, seeking to rediscover its identity along pristine sectarian lines. His enquiry into such issues of social reformism convinced him of the need for certain revitalization — albeit in a qualified way — of the sectarian tenets and practices. It is this concern that not only occasioned his polemical engagement, but in fact conditioned the entire work,

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[39] For Dietrich Reetz's distinction of the two concepts, see f.n. 4 above.

shaping it as a work meant for the Dā'ūdī Bohrās, coming from a Dā'ūdī Bohrā. His epistemic construction of the history, culture and religious tradition of the Dā'ūdī Bohrās represent a specific strand of early reformist-intellectual tradition coming from within the community, and thus betraying certain image of the "self".

On the other hand, proceeding from a stage where the different branches of the Bohrās were still involved in the process of negotiation to evolve a common conceptual category of Bohrā brotherhood, Sir Adamjee actually ended up in constantly defining and redefining the boundaries of his own community consummating eventually in linking it with a specific Islamic *weltanschauung*, an "Islamist" enterprise, to use Reetz's terminology, as opposed to the Indian National Congress politics first, and then the rising Hindu nationalism, also seen as an essentially political creation deriving ideological roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but finding articulation since the 1920s, thanks once again to the instrumentality of the elites (Jaffrelot 1996: 25). The intriguing part of Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy's system of thought lies in his enabling a development of a specific brand of religious nationalism, buttressed by an array of justificatory modalities impinging on the need for building consensus within the Muslim fraternity of South Asia, forging the smaller sects together. The idioms of reconciliation, which stemmed from this, enabled individual communities and sub-sects relocating themselves, along socio-political lines, within a broader worldview shared by the Muslims of South Asia.

The present enquiry was an effort to outline these two reformist-intellectual traditions, touching upon the question as to how one could become the source of validation of another, developing in a specific political matrix. Indeed, if an assimilation of the Bohrās with the broader currents of Islam in the sub-continent along socio-political lines was ever to happen, a clear specification of the Head-priest's social and religious position and of the boundaries of his authority stood as a crucial precondition. The employment of parts of Abdul Husain's socio-religious concerns by Sir Adamjee's sons was, viewed in this light, the means to arrive at the specific end of building consensus among the different branches of South Asia's Muslims that their father had championed, betraying a crucial shift from the religious towards politico-legal orientations.

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