Abstracts: Islam and Print in South Asia Part 2

26 October, 2018

Islam and Print in South Asia workshop

Foyle Room
British Library Conservation Centre (BLCC)
British Library

Panel 1: The Social Spaces of the Vernacular

(Chair: Priyanka Basu)

Hafeez Jamali (Habib University) "A Social Space for Religious Reform: Maktaba-e-Durkhan and Emergence of a Vernacular Print Culture in Colonial Balochistan (1882-1960)"

The emergence and development of manuscript and print cultures in colonial and postcolonial Balochistan have largely eluded scholarly attention due to the colonial representation of the princely state of Kalat as a savage frontier space. Despite a Baloch nationalist awakening in the late colonial period and the flourishing of Balochi and Brahui language books and periodicals in postcolonial Pakistan, only a handful of scholars have taken serious note of these developments and their transformative effects on Baloch society. Understanding these dynamics in a frontier space is important not only in its own right but also because this helps shed light on the broader politics of religious and nationalist reform in South Asia. This paper seeks to understand these dynamics by exploring the foundation and emergence of the Maktaba-e-Durkhan (1883-1960), a madrasah and printing house in the village of Durkhan in eastern Balochistan that pioneered the use of printed books in Balochi and Brahui languages for teaching Quran, Hadith, and other religious literature. It is based on reading of key printed texts, examination of hand-written manuscripts of the Maktaba-e-Durkhan, catalogued and digitized by Balochistan Archives with the support of an Endangered Archives grant from the British Library, and field visits and interviews with contemporary administrators of *madrasah*s and *maktab*s in Balochistan. The founder of the Maktaba-e-Durkhan, Maulana Muhammad Fazil Durkhani Raisani (1822-1896), popularized the use of Brahui language for teaching Quran and Hadith and introduced social reforms such as the abolition of 'pride price' (*Lab*), injunctions against loud music and dance on wedding ceremonies, and wearing of modest clothes by all and sundry. His students, such as Maulana Nabo Jan (1851-1907), Muhammad Umar Dinpuri(1882-1948), and Hazoor Bakhsh Jatoi, translated and printed the Holy Quran in Balochi and Brahui languages for the first time and developed a specialized Arabic script for this purpose. I argue that the activities of the Maktaba were embedded within a broader culture of circulation of printed texts, manuscripts, travelling, and intellectual exchange between religious scholars based in Qandahar (Afghanistan), Kalat (Balochistan), Jacobabad, and Shikarpur (Sindh). The circulation of printed texts written by the Maktaba, in turn, created a vernacular social space for religious expression and discourse in colonial Balochistan that was independent of British officialdom or patronage by the Khans of Kalat.

Francesca Orsini (SOAS) "'Jibrill can wait at the door': Popular Urdu Islamic Print Genres"

What do we mean by "Popular Urdu" or the "Urdu popular"? The contemporary life of Urdu in popular culture consists in songs, films, detective fiction, as well as *qawwali*s and *musha'ira*s, i.e. popular spaces for poetry and songs. At the same time, the poets whom we now consider "high" or "classical" also authored works that were extremely popular—such as Mir Hasan's *masnavi Siḥr ul-*

bayān. And if we look into the world of commercial publishing in the second half of the 19th century, we see that Nazir Akbarabadi, who often appears as a marginal figure, distant from the world of *ustad*s and *shagird*s, was probably the most oft-reprinted poet of the 19c and his were only some among the many such poems on topics such as poverty (*Muflīsīnāma*), death, festivities, etc. Apart from *qissas, barahmasa, joginnamas, baitbazis* and Nazir-like poems on *realia* (as Aditya Behl put it), what we see a lot of in the 19c are religious poems—*wāsokhtnāmas, wafātnāmas*, collections of *na't, nohas, marsiyas.* These cheap printed books point to a vibrant "Muslim Urdu popular" whose genealogy I would like to know more about. When did Sunni and Shi'i religious poems (songs?) first get composed and recited in the "vernacular", in north Indian cities, *qasba*s and villages? In the 18th century as the Rekhta fashion grew among Persophile poets, or earlier? And what kinds of vernacular were these poems and songs in? If we follow the work of Shahid Amin and Catherine Servan-Schreiber, they would be in the local languages, Bhojpuri, Avadhi, and so on. Early collections of *Hindi loksahitya* included songs/poems on life-cycle rituals in local varieties of Hindi, they completely excluded Muslim ritual occasions, like the birth of Muhammad or Muharram, or the stories around Ghazi Miyan or Shah Madar, and the same is true even of later histories/collections of *Avadhī loksāhitya*. But in the 19c the Lucknow, Delhi, Kanpur, Lahore, and Bombay printing presses definitely began to publish cheap collections of religious poems in great numbers. In this presentation, I look at some of these books and try to tease out their social location, the kind of "popular Urdu" they employed, and their relation to other literary registers of Urdu verse.

Panel 2: The Practicalities of Printing: A View from the Trade

(Chair: Francis Robinson)

Gianni Sievers (University of Pennsylvania) "Learning how to print: The Nizami Press in Badaun and the first Urdu manual on the art of lithography"

The introduction of lithography on the Indian subcontinent in the 1820s represents a turning point in the history of print in northern India. Suitable for the reproduction of all languages irrespective of the varying scripts, the new technology became an enormous success story for publishing entrepreneurs dealing with North Indian languages like Urdu or Persian, for it allowed a certain continuity with the older manuscript tradition. Lithography additionally came to be known as relatively easy to handle and it proved extremely cost-effective. By the late 1830s, publishing had evolved into being a viable commercial activity and relatively quickly, Indian press ownership became widespread all over northern India. The history of the book and the commercialization of print in nineteenth-century South Asia has received increased attention by scholars in the past decade and there now exist several excellent studies on the establishment of Indian publishing houses across India, such as the legendary Naval Kishore Press of Lucknow in 1858 (Stark, 2008) and others. Less attention has been paid to smaller, more local publishing houses. This paper looks at what claims to be the first Urdu manual on lithography, published in 1924 by the Nizami Press in Badaun and presented to the public at the All India Muslim Educational Conference in Aligarh. The paper introduces the Nizami publishing house (est. 1905) and compares the manual with earlier and contemporary manuals in European languages. How did publishers and artisans learn about all the technical aspects of the printing process? What were the tools and materials employed in lithographic printing in South Asia and how were they called in Urdu? How did lithography evolve in the hundred or so years since its introduction in northern India? And given the popularity of the printing technique at the time, why don't we have more manuals like this one in Indian languages? By exploring the material and technical aspects of the lithographic printing process that are explained in this Urdu manual, my paper engages with the larger scholarly debates revolving around knowledge production, pedagogy and technical developments in colonial North India. Furthermore,

it draws attention to the audience the manual seeks to address and the language its author employs to show how printers and publishers in North India were deeply engaged in discourses about nationalism, modernization and social reform.

Abhijit Gupta (Jadavpur University), "Intellectual Property and Islamic Printing in 19th-Century Calcutta"

The passage of Act XX of 1847 gave copyright protection to books printed in British India. This act was passed largely at the behest of Ramgopal Ghosh of the British India Association, and followed on from a copyright act passed in English parliament in 1842. The printers who seized upon the act with the greatest alacrity were from the popular 'Battala' trade in north Calcutta, and particularly those who specialized in the genre designated 'Mussulmani-Bengali' by the Rev. James, Long, the first bibliographer of print in India. Such works, though printed, adhered faithfully to the distinctive layout and typography of the *puthi* or manuscript, and used the title-page to provide copious metadata, in the process laying bare the often invisible ecology of the making of the book. In this paper, I will look at the title-pages of some Battala productions, and describe how early notions of proprietorship, entailment and authorship were being worked out in the process. I will also look at how such productions reinforced literary property by recourse to both colonial legislation as well as older forms of ownership such as the *muhar* and the *dastkhat.*

Panel 3: The British Library Collections

(Chair: Abhijit Gupta)

Mahmood Kooria (Leiden University) Arabi-Malayalam and Arabu-Tamil Works at the British Library: A Survey of the Uncatalogued Materials and their Circulatory Networks

In South Asian Islamic print culture, the Malayalam and Tamil religiolects of Muslims have played an important role in vernacularising their religion, its worldview, value system and socio-cultural order. By the late nineteenth century, when printing press became much popular across the Islamic world, both Tamil and Malayalam spheres intensified the production and dissemination of vernacular materials printed in Arabic script. This intermarriage of local languages with a cosmopolitan script was part of a larger trend of the time, and in South India those were advanced by Arabic-Malayalam and Arabu-Tamil literatures (sometimes also referred as Malabari and Arwi respectively). Hundreds of texts printed annually at the prime centres of Islamic printing on both Malabar and Coromandel coasts were circulated among mobile and immobile communities of the region across the Indian Ocean, Pacific and Atlantic littorals. The reach and impact of such vernacular printings are yet to be explored thoroughly, for these materials have been spread across several formal and informal collections all over the world and there has not been any systematic attempt to identify or catalogue them. In this presentation, I focus on some uncatalogued materials at the British Library London on which I have been working on and off in the last two years. These materials from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries reveal some very interesting aspects on the impact and resourcefulness of Arabic-Malayalam and Arabu-Tamil works for the history of the region, religion and printing. After a brief survey, I focus on some texts directly related to my own research on the circulatory networks of the Indian Ocean world.

Nur Sobers-Khan (British Library) Illustrative Programmes and Bibliomantic practices in Urdu *Tilsim-i Aja'ib* texts: Visuality and Divination from Manuscript to Lithograph

While questions of circulation, readership, and translation have been central to the history of print in South Asia, the question of illustration in lithographs and printed works and the relationship of image to text has yet to be examined in great depth. My paper examines the genealogy of *Tilsim-i*

Aja'ib texts in Urdu lithographs of the 19th and early 20th century in the British Library's collections, and explores the relationship between illustrative programmes in these texts, both between different editions of lithograph, as well as possible continuities with the *Aja'ib al-Makhluqat* manuscript tradition and the relationship between text and image. In addition to establishing the basis for an empirical study of this genre of Urdu lithographs, my paper will examine their social use beyond reading, such as in practices of bibliomancy and divination, as texts from the genre of the *Tilsim-i Aja'ib* seem to have been read side by side with various other genres of divinatory text, such as *Ta'bir al-Ruya* or dream interpretation, and other forms of *falnama,* which were intended to be used as a conduit to access realms of spiritual insight and prognostication.

Panel 4: The circulation of religious texts beyond the Subcontinent: from London to Mecca and Calcutta to Australia

(Chair: Nur Sobers-Khan)

Nick McBurney (John Randall, Antiquarian Bookseller) "Amulet, Curio, Text: The Lithographed Qur'an in Miniature"

The miniature Qur'an ("Mite Koran") produced by David Bryce was the first miniature Qur'an to be printed and widely distributed. Collecting bibliographies have long associated the Bryce Qur'an with World War One and Muslim soldiers in the British forces, but Bryce produced his first edition of these miniature books in 1899, with earlier Delhi and Istanbul editions often cited. This paper examines the reasons why a Glasgow publisher would produce such a photolithographic facsimile of an Ottoman Qur'an, so small as to be practically illegible, in an edition of thousands, with India (specifically Bombay) as the centre of a distribution network extending across the Islamic world. This book was produced for two different markets: a British curiosity market, where these Qur'ans were sold together with miniature examples of the Bible, Shakespeare, and English literary classics, and the wider Islamic world, where these locket Qur'ans fitted neatly into a cultural space occupied by manuscripts and talismanic texts carried on one's person for protection. Few examples with location-based provenance survive, but those which do point to a remarkably broad circulation, from Mecca to Aceh. These "Bryce" Qur'ans remain far more common in the book trade than in institutional collections, making any sort of census a challenge. Despite the lack of scholarship on these lithographic amulets, their use and circulation suggest useful questions about the relationship between British and Indian publishers and booksellers, and the way in which commercial ties produce unexpected traffic for these book-objects.

Samia Khatun (University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh) "Re-reading Stories of the Prophets: Self and Other in Late 19th Century Bengal"

In this paper I examine an 1894 edition of *Kasasol Ambia* (Stories of the Prophets) published at Battala - the late 19th century Bengali print-production industry in Calcutta that perhaps started under the shade of a banyan tree (*Battala*). Bearing the seal of one of the most prolific publishers in the Battala book industry, copies of *Kasasol Ambia* circulated as widely through British colonial circuits as workers, sailors, ayahs, merchant traders and their wives, one copy travelling to a desert mosque in the Australian mining town of Broken Hill some 500 kms inland from the nearest port. Reading this copy, I examine a metaphor that appears early in this Sufi text that claims to be translated from Persian and Hindi to Bengali. I argue that through an intricate metaphor for translation and authorship that constructed genealogies to many knowledge traditions long circulating the Indian Ocean, this printed book gives new life to a set of relations between the self and other that has been obscured by colonial-modern analyses of Islam and print.

Panel 5: Scandal, Gossip, and Songs

(Chair: Francesca Orsini)

Razak Khan (CeMIS, Göttingen University) "Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: Islam, Music and Print Culture in Rampur"

This paper argues that print should be seen not just as a technology but also as a site where competing visions of being Muslim were displayed. Being Islamic was one of them but certainly not the only view. Being Musically Muslim was another possibility. This paper looks at the relationship between Muslims and Music as articulated by a variety of actors in the age of Hinduization and Nationalization of Music in colonial India. How did Muslims respond to this process? Were they marginal to these histories and, if so, in what ways did they articulate histories and developed visions of being musically Muslim? This paper does so by examining a variety of materials ranging from unpublished manuscripts, published books, speeches and reports: the locus being Rampur state and its printing projects. I will first discuss the historic legacy of Rampur library as a site of rich manuscript collection and preservation especially on Music as well printing texts on music I will focus on works patronized and published by Rampur state press to rethink the role of Muslims and music in colonial India. I shall also attempt map the musical geography that centers on Rampur but encompasses qasbati locale of Bilsi, and Sahaswan as well as colonial cities like Bareilly, Lucknow, Calcutta and Bombay to help us rethink the role and space of princely state in our understanding of print and musical modernity in colonial India.

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Richard Williams (SOAS) "Salacious Songs: *khemta* dancers and lyricists between Rampur, Lucknow, and Calcutta"

From at least the 1860s onwards, songbooks were an especially popular product of the north Indian book industry. From cheap chapbooks to multi-volume tomes, collections of lyrics covered a range of tastes and genres, appealing to different social settings, cultures, and performance practices. This paper will excavate the worlds of music-making invoked by these books through the case study of *khemta.* While music historians have examined the lyrical pasts of classical and semi-classical genres—especially *dhrupad*, *khayal*, and *thumri*—lower-status genres have received less attention. That said, scholars like Sumanta Banerjee have demonstrated the wealth of social material embedded in street songs, while Francesca Orsini has interrogated how the printed popular lyric can shed light on modes of literary and musical consumption. The *khemta* dancing girl was a low-status performer, associated with the playboy culture of early-nineteenth century Calcutta. *Khemta* lyrics were considered especially salacious and sensual, and the common view today is that the genre was geared towards titillation rather than artistry. Following the exile of Wajid 'Ali Shah of Awadh (r.1847-1856) to Calcutta, this genre began to be choreographed and performed in the royal court, and the ex-King began to collect—and compose his own—*khemta* lyrics. By the late-nineteenth century, *khemta* dancers were performing at fairs across northern India, and their verses were being compiled in and printed in different scripts and languages. *Khemta*'s increasing popularity seems to defy the general impression of the late nineteenth century as a period of rising conservatism, public morality campaigns, and a rejection of "decadent" literary and musical forms. Against this hinterland, it is difficult to make sense of the activities of Muslim lyricists, choreographers, dancers, and songbook editors. This paper will explore these activities, and consider how *khemta* was printed, read, sung, and danced, and the modes of listening and arousal embedded in the songbook.

Discussion: Led by Priyanka Basu, with Two Centuries of Indian Print project advisors, Francesca Orsini and Abhijit Gupta