

MARGRIT PERNAU

The *Dehli Urdu Akhbar* Between Persian Akhbarat and English Newspapers*

Introduction

THIS PAPER LOOKS AT the *Dehli Urdū Akhbār* (henceforward *DUA*), the first full-fledged newspaper in Urdu, which started publication in 1837, and tries to locate it at the confluence of the traditional Mughal institutions and the newly introduced British models. While the colonial administrators continued to use the traditional methods of gathering information on the different royal and princely courts through the daily reports of accredited news-writers until almost 1857, they were nevertheless convinced that the vernacular newspapers, which started to appear from the second decade of the nineteenth century, owed themselves entirely to the British initiative, model and patronage:

A native newspaper in the present state of Indian society is a luxury, for which there is no real demand beyond the limits of Calcutta. It is to be feared that the poverty of our native subjects beyond the limits of the presidency operates generally speaking as forcibly as their want of curiosity to indispose them, from affording encouragement to native newspapers.¹

* This paper is the revised and enlarged form of a talk given at the International Conference on Modern South Asian Studies at Heidelberg University, September 2002.

¹ Report on the state of the Indian Press by Andrew Sterling, compiled at the beginning of Lord Bentinck's rule; quoted in B.M. Sankhdher, *Press, Politics and Public Opinion in India. Dynamics of Modernization and Social Transformation* (Delhi: Deep & Deep Publication, 1984), p. 149.

This position finds a distant echo in some strands of present-day historiography, which, too, tends to see the colonial state, the colonial institutions and, above all, the colonial construction of knowledge as the prime moving forces of nineteenth-century India.

Without at all denying the importance of the study of power-relations and the pervading influence of the colonial power on all walks of life, this paper tries to draw attention to the lines of continuity bridging the precolonial and the colonial world, thus opening a third space beyond hegemony and resistance. In this space of “mutual encounters”² the boundaries between cultural systems become, if not fluid, at least permeable in both directions. Traditions were not so much displaced as renegotiated and adapted to new circumstances—both by the colonizer and the colonized.³

How then was the collection and processing of information transformed in the first half of the nineteenth century? Who were the patrons, who the professionals of this process and how did they interact within the framework of the newly-established colonial state? When and under what circumstances did the news-writers move from being a part of the administrative establishment of a ruler to the public sphere? What was the imagined community for which the newspapers and journalists then claimed to speak? What, in turn, was their role in bringing forth this community and evolving a public opinion? What was their new relation to the government, what place within the political process were they aiming at?

To attempt to answer these questions with reference to Delhi, this paper will first look at three collections of handwritten Persian *akhbārāt*.⁴ The second reference point will be two printed Persian newspapers, pub-

²As elaborated in Jamal Malik, ed., *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760–1860* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000).

³See, C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴These are the newsletters that were sent to the Marattha Court in 1810 and 1812 (OIOC, London, I.O.ISL 2945 and I.O.ISL 2947) and those that were prepared for Archibald Seton, the Resident at Delhi, in 1810 (BL, London, Add. 24038). I am very grateful to my Persian *ustād*, Dr. Yunus Jaffry, Delhi, for his invaluable help and untiring enthusiasm in the translation of these texts. An edition and translation of a representative collection of early nineteenth-century Delhi *akhbārāt* is planned for the near future.

lished from Calcutta but containing extended information on Delhi, the *Āīna-e Sikandar* and the *Sulṭānu 'l-Akbbār*.⁵ We shall then move on to the *Delhi Gazette*,⁶ which was published from Delhi since 1833 and hence would provide the most obvious model for its Urdu contemporary. The main corpus of source material is of course formed by the different issues of the *DUA*, both published and unpublished.⁷

Handwritten Persian Newsletters

Since the time of the Emperor Akbar, a system of manuscript newsletters (*akbbārāt* from *khabr*, news) had evolved, which permitted the exchange of information between the imperial and the regional courts through news-writers. For this purpose, letters from the imperial envoys at the nobles' courts on the one hand, and the record of the emperor's daily proceedings on the other hand were compiled into a daily account which was then publicly read out during the *darbar*. The envoys of the nobles in turn took notes of this information and sent it back to their patrons. In contrast to the gathering of information by spies—which went on side by side with it—these news-writers were the central institution of a system guaranteeing an open flow of information between the emperor and the nobles, and at times also among the peripheral courts.⁸ Even though their office was defined with reference to the ruler, whom they were supposed to supply with the information he needed for taking the right decisions, the news-writers also contributed to the creation of a community of individuals linked together by reference to a common knowledge of events

⁵*Āīna-e Sikandar*, 1833, 1835–37, 1840; *Sulṭānu 'l-Akbbār*, 1835–37, 1839–40, both National Archive of India (NAI), Delhi.

⁶*Delhi Gazette (DG)*, Microfilm copies for 1837–56, OIOC, London.

⁷The 1840 issues have been published: Khvāja Aḥmad Fārūqī, ed., *Dehlī Urdū Akbbār* (Delhi: Urdu Department, Delhi University, 1972); issues for 1841: NAI; issues for 1851–53 (not complete): Sajan Lal Collection, Osmania University, Hyderabad and Idāra-e Adabiyāt-e Urdū, Hyderabad.

⁸Bayly, pp. 10–56; Abdus Salam Khurshid, *Newsletters in the Orient: With Special Reference to the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1988), pp. 82–3; S.C. Sanial, “The History of the Press in India—Manuscript Newspapers,” in *The Calcutta Review* (1911), pp. 1–47.

and which, perhaps, in spite of its obvious limitations in numbers and accessibility, can be seen as the nucleus of a public sphere.

The number of *akhbārāt* of the early nineteenth century which have survived in archives does not nearly match the great collections of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,⁹ nevertheless, there are references which permit the conclusion that the system not only survived but even thrived at least until the 1840s, and was equally used by the Indian and the British rulers—so much so that it is at times difficult to tell for whom a particular newsletter was written. The use of the Islamic or the Christian calendar provides only a rough indication as the dual dating systems appear to have been common both for the British and for the Indians.

The collection of newsletters for the Marattha Court for 1810 and 1812 consists of continuous daily reports regrouping the news from a variety of Indian courts. Information from Delhi was entered under two different headings: the traditional “*akhbār-e darbār-e mu'allā*” (News of the Exalted Court) contained an account of the daily proceedings of the emperor. These ranged from information on his health to reports on the internal administration of the palace affairs and the persons with whom the emperor had met and conversed. On the more political side, reports were being submitted as to the ceremonial interactions at the court, the bestowing of robes of honor and the payment of *naẓr*, which indicated the influence of individuals and factions in the emperor's entourage, and the correspondence with the British and Indians, giving the gist of the letters if it could be ascertained.

Next to this, but in the same format, came the information concerning the Resident, who was always referred to both by his British and his Mughal title “*akhbār-e dēvor̄hī-e Nāẓimu 'd-Daula Seton Ṣāhib Bahādur*” for Archibald Seton, and “*akhbār-e darbār-e Muntazimu 'd-Daula Miṣṭar Metcalfe Ṣāhib Bahādur*” for Charles Metcalfe. Though the emphasis on his health, toilet, meals and sleep was slightly less than for the emperor, the reports were by no means informed by a division between the private and the official capacity of a public servant, but rather attempted to

⁹Cf. Michael Fisher, “The Office of Akhbar Nawis: The Transition from Mughal to British Forms,” in *Modern Asian Studies* 27.1 (1993), pp. 45–82, p. 49; Akhtar Husain Nizami, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts and Records in the Shri Raghbir Library, Sitamau* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Historical Research, Idāra-e Adabiyāt-e Dehli), 1993. I am grateful to Michael Fisher for drawing my attention to this collection.

bridge any cultural differences by including the British in the imperial framework—an attempt which was in accordance with official colonial policy until the 1830s.¹⁰

At the Mughal court, too, these traditions of newswriting seem to have continued. In his *Bahadur Shah II and the War of 1857 in Delhi With Its Unforgettable Scenes*, Mahdi Husain refers to one *Akhhbār-e Darbār-e Abu 'l-Muzaffar Sirāju 'd-Dīn Muḥammad Bahādur Shāh Bādshāh-e Dehli* for the period October 1837–December 1838.¹¹ This was probably the same format of Persian court diary which, after 1841, was published, printed and distributed under the title of *Sirāju 'l-Akhhbār*.¹²

While the Marattha newsletters most probably and the *Akhhbār-e Darbār* certainly related to the indigenous system of collecting and processing information, the *akhhbārāt* which were written for Archibald Seton, the British Resident at Delhi, in 1810 show the use of these traditional institutions by the colonial power. Delhi was at the same time the seat of the Mughal emperor and the outpost for the northwestern expansion of the British Empire in India and therefore the center for intelligence gathering from Kabul and the Panjab, employing an extensive network of news-writers until the 1820s.¹³ The first 56 folios of the collection, relating to Delhi, reported in two daily sections the events at the “Exalted Darbar” (*akhhbār-e darbār-e mu'allā*) and the “Residence of His Lordship of exalted virtues, Nazim ud Daula, Mr. Seton Bahadur” (*akhhbār-e dēor'hi-e ṣāḥib-e vālā manāqib Nāzimu 'd-Daula Miṣṭar Seton Ṣāḥib Bahādur*). Like the Marattha newsletters, but very much more extensively, they reported every movement of the emperor: his health, when he rose from sleep and took rest, when he had his meals and with whom, when he moved to grace the Dīvān-e Khāṣ with the luster of his presence, which petitions he

¹⁰Cf. Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls: Studies in Late Mughul Delhi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 32–60.

¹¹(Delhi: M.N. Publishers & Distributors, 1987), p. 95. Mahdi Husain gives the Naziria Library at Delhi as the location of the manuscript. Unfortunately, it was not transferred to the Hamdard Library at Delhi along with the rest of the Naziria Library. Different hints indicate that it might now be in Karachi, but so far it has not been possible for me to trace the manuscript. Any information leading to its possible discovery would be gratefully appreciated.

¹²See Muḥammad 'Atīq Ṣiddīqī, *Hindustānī Akhhbār-Navīsī* (Aligarh: Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdū, 1957), p. 257.

¹³Establishment attached to the Delhi Residency, Foreign Political Correspondence (FPC), 21.6.1822/30–31.

received from the members of his household and family, and what decisions he took—ranging from granting permission to his sons to visit the shrine at Nizāmu 'd-Dīn¹⁴ to the distribution of the stipend among the members of the royal family, which was always an issue of contention with the British.¹⁵ This information on the royal court was either sent directly to Calcutta in Persian, or, at a later stage, formed the basis for the “Palace Intelligence” in English, a part of the regular reports of the Resident until the 1850s.¹⁶

The second part of the daily report described the activity of the Resident, mentioning his recreations, but centered mainly on his official functions, his interaction with the imperial court, his correspondence with the princely states under his jurisdiction and the Jagirdars of the Delhi Territory, and adding the results of the more important court cases. The function of these reports is less obvious as even at this early stage the proceedings and letters could more easily and completely be traced in the office archives of Delhi, Calcutta or London. One possible hypothesis is that they were read out in public during the Residency durbar and served on the one hand to provide information to the news-writers and *vakīls* of the nobles and Jagirdars of the region—a kind of early colonial daily press conference—and on the other hand to emphasize the exalted place, next only to the emperor himself, which the Resident occupied in the imperial framework.

It seems as if since the beginning of the century the newsletters tended to become accessible beyond the range of those persons who had originally commissioned them, possibly a device of the *akhbār-navīsī* to cope with the dwindling resources available for patronage. When, for instance, in 1807 Seton tried to trace the causes and events of a riot occasioned by a new religious procession through Delhi, he relied not only on his own first hand information of what had transpired in the palace, but compared them to “three different newspapers,”¹⁷ which might have been

¹⁴*Akhhārāt*, BL Add. 24038 folio 1.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, folio 11.

¹⁶See, for instance, FPC 30.1.1852/45 and FPC 16.5.1855/102–108. While the government in Calcutta regularly comments upon the palace intelligence, the original texts are almost never included, thus permitting no comparison between the reporting of the Persian *akhhār-navīsī* and the processing of the information by the British Resident.

¹⁷FPC 4.6.1807/17, Report of the Resident, 13.5.1807.

either commissioned by the rulers of the adjacent princely states or already produced for an anonymous public.

Far from dwindling in their importance, the number of these hand-written gazettes seemed rather to increase in the course of the next decades. Macaulay, in a report written in 1836, mentions:

The gazettes (akhbars) which are commonly read by the Natives are in manuscript. To prepare these gazettes, it is the business of a numerous class of people, who are constantly prowling for intelligence in the neighborhood of every cutcherry and every durbar. Twenty or thirty news writers are constantly in attendance at the Palace of Delhi and at the Residency. Each of these news-writers has among the richer natives, several customers whom he daily supplies with all the scandal of the Court and the City. The number of manuscript gazettes daily dispatched from the single dawk of Delhi cannot of course be precisely known, but it is calculated by persons having good opportunities of information at hundred and twenty. Under these circumstances it is perfectly clear that the influence of the manuscript gazettes on the native population must be very much more extensive than that of the printed papers (in the native languages whose circulation in India by dawk does not now exceed three hundred).¹⁸

These newspapers were not only handed round, but at times even seem to have been read out to a more general public by enterprising journalists themselves.¹⁹

Even before the advent of print culture and outside of its influence, and, as far as we can gauge at present, without noticeable change in the format of the newswriting, the function of the *akhbārāt* and the public they were catering for, were already in the process of being transformed.

Printed Newspapers in Persian

The first English newspapers began to appear in Bengal in the last decades of the eighteenth century.²⁰ From the beginning, journalists and editors

¹⁸As quoted in Khurshid, p. 86.

¹⁹Sanial, p. 10.

²⁰Cf. Margarita Barns, *The Indian Press: A History of the Growth of Public Opinion in India* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940), pp. 1–72; Nadir Ali

saw themselves as the central agents in the creation of a public opinion, drawing from the enlightenment philosophy that truth can only be arrived at through open deliberation. As they held this to encompass the right to discuss and, if need be, to criticize the actions of government, it soon led to an acrimonious fight for the freedom of the press.

What is interesting is that the dividing lines in this fight against censorship, although it separated Tories and Whigs, went right through the Government and the British living in India, and regrouped British and Indian liberals and journalists in common action. The public debate on the social functions of newspapers promoted not only a new self-awareness among the news-writers, but also led to a mutual reinterpretation of both the British and the Mughal traditions. Thus Raja Ram Mohan Roy, one of the leaders of the agitation, could claim in an appeal to the King in Council against the press regulations:

Notwithstanding the despotic power of the Mogul Princes ... the wise and virtuous among them always employed two intelligencers at the residence of their Nawabs ... *akhbar-novees*, or news-writers who published an account of whatever happened and a *Khoofea-navees*, or a confidential correspondent, who sent a private and particular account of every occurrence worthy of notice. ... (This) shews that even the Mogul Princes, although their form of Government admitted of nothing better, were convinced, that in a country so rich and so replete with temptations, a restraint of some kind was absolutely necessary to prevent the abuses that are so liable to flow from the possession of power.²¹

These discussions and agitations brought about a wave of new journalistic ventures, not only in English, but for the first time also in Bengali (1818) and Gujarati (1822), followed shortly afterwards by the first printed Persian newspapers (1822).²² The *Ā'īna-e Sikandar*, published in Calcutta since 1833 by Ghālib's friend Sirāju 'd-Dīn,²³ contained a wealth of detailed information on the royal court and the Residency at Delhi. What

Khan, *A History of Urdu Journalism* (Delhi: Idāra-e Adabiyāt-e Dehlī, 1991), chapter 1, pp. 1–24.

²¹As quoted in Barns, pp. 124–5.

²²For a list of the newly-founded newspapers from 1828 to 1835, see Sankhdher, pp. 146–9.

²³Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Ghalib, Life and Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 60–2.

is astonishing in that respect is less the fact that the newspaper was able to collect this information, drawing mostly on handwritten gazettes, supplemented by occasional letters from correspondents and friends, but the interest these events still seemed to arouse among readers all over India and the amount of background knowledge the articles obviously could take for granted.

In the style of the traditional *akhbārāt*, the column on the royal court gave detailed accounts not only of the state of health of the king and his comings and goings, but also of the correspondence he exchanged with the British, the visitors he received, the *naẓrāna* paid to him, the robes of honor granted, and of the power struggles of the courtiers and princes. While this type of information provided valuable clues at a former time, when shifts of influence in the entourage of the king had a political significance, it is surprising that the change from one royal physician to another was still considered “news” having more than local significance in the 1830s.

To an even greater extent than the manuscript *akhbārāt*, the *Āīna-e Sikandar* carefully observed all the traditional etiquettes when referring to the emperor or members of his household, introducing every article with a different verse-line praising the exalted glory of the monarch:

The angel is his guardian and the sky is his
threshold
The King is the shadow of God, the creator
of the two worlds²⁴

The King is the protector of the path of
Islam
He is the vice-regent of the Truth and the
shadow of God’s kindness²⁵

Already by these introductory lines, the newspaper placed the monarch firmly within the parameters of Muslim and Persian history and cosmology: as if there was no British Resident, Delhi was still the seat of the Khilāfat, the emperor the shadow of God, the protector of the universe and of the Islamic religion. He was the *qibla* of the people of the

²⁴ *Āīna-e Sikandar*, 19.1.1835.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.2.1835.

world, the *ka'ba* of his time.²⁶ The sky was his threshold; he equaled the sun and the moon in beauty and luster. He was of the glory of Saturn and the dignity of the Pleiades.²⁷ On a more mundane level, he was the ruler not only of Delhi or even of India, but of the seven continents, the Lord of the universe.²⁸ He equaled and even surpassed the rulers of old, being of the grandeur of Solomon, the dignity of Alexander, the generosity of Faridun and the richness of Jamshed; therefore Darius was his gatekeeper.²⁹ Perhaps these ostentatious references to tradition can also be read as a fine criticism of the colonial government, a denial of its legitimacy by ignoring it and by pretending that its arrival was a matter of no consequence.

Nevertheless, as a newspaper even the *Ā'īna-e Sikandar* could not afford to dwell only on the timeless and unchanging glory of the empire. In an important innovation as compared to the traditional *akhbārāt*, the editor directed his interest not only to the courts of the monarch, the nobles and the Resident, but sometimes, if still rarely, included a column on “*khabar-e dāru 'l-khilāfat-e Shāhjahānābād*” (News from Shahjahana-bad), in which *fait divers*, culled mainly from the court proceedings, are reported.³⁰

Much more explicit in its critique of the colonial power, though less given to colorful hyperbole, was the *Sulṭānu 'l-Akhhār*. This weekly, too, was published from Calcutta since the early 1830s. Its editor was one Rajab 'Alī, who might possibly be identical with the poet from Lucknow, Rajab 'Alī Surūr.³¹ Unlike the newspapers we have looked at so far, the *Sulṭānu 'l-Akhhār* is no longer concentrating on rulers whose every act is seen as endowed with an intrinsic importance, but on events, on “news” in the modern sense of the term, which it reports and—this is important—comments on.

This can be shown in an exemplary fashion in the representation of the events following the assassination of the British Agent, William Fraser, in 1835, which led to the public execution of Shamsu 'd-Dīn, the

²⁶*Ibid.*, 18.5.1835.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 18.1.1836 and 6.3.1836.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 13.1.1835 and 19.1.1835.

²⁹*Ibid.*, passim.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 22.4.1833.

³¹Šiddiqī, p. 244; Imdād Šābrī, *Tārik-e Šahāfat-e Urdū*, 4 vols. (Delhi: Jadīd Printing Press, 1953–74), vol. 1, p. 84.

Navab of Loharu. This murder case has for a long time been taken as originating in a property dispute between the Navab and his brothers, in which Fraser (as well as Ghālib) took the side of the younger branch, but which might well prove to be more complicated than that. Public opinion in Delhi and beyond, right from the beginning, vehemently took the part of the accused nobleman, turning the trial into a major legitimization crisis for the colonial government.

While the process was pending, the *Sulṭānu 'l-Akbbār* voiced the popular feelings as to the innocence of the Navab, discrediting the witnesses for the prosecution,³² and denying the fairness of the trial, as the representative of Shamsu 'd-Dīn was constantly hampered in his defense and the witnesses for the defense threatened with imprisonment.³³ The newspaper skillfully played with public rumors, for instance in the report of the ordeal which the Navab underwent at the instigation of the special magistrate and in which he was blindfolded but nevertheless chose the cup of milk, proving his innocence, from among the cups of blood and poison. The reporter himself ended by denying the probability of this report, which would be out of tune, as he put it, with “the wisdom and knowledge” of the English, who would never permit “such childish play”; but this denial came only after the message of Shamsu 'd-Dīn's innocence had gone home.³⁴ Once the Navab and his accomplice were hanged, the articles took on strong religious overtones, reporting on prayer meetings at the Jama Masjid for the “*gul-e shahīd*” (flower of the martyrs) and on the gathering of pious Muslims at their graves, illuminating them and spending the nights in singing and dancing.³⁵

Thus the new print media came to provide a link between the traditional local public opinion, expressing itself in festivals, processions and public ritual,³⁶ and the new public, which was no longer based on direct interaction but on imagined communities.³⁷ In its critique of British rule,

³²*Sulṭānu 'l-Akbbār*, 2.8.1835, 16.8.1835 and passim.

³³*Ibid.*, 9.8.1835.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 2.8.1835.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 20.9.1835 and passim.

³⁶See Sandria Freitag, *Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³⁷In the sense of Benedict Anderson as expounded in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

the newspaper was able to draw on a consensus about the tasks and duties of government, whose fulfillment it was not hesitating to demand.

The *Delhi Gazette*

Though these newspapers reported intensely on Delhi and were avidly read by the local learned people, all of them (including the *Jām-e Jabān-Numā* and the *Māh-e ‘Ālam-Afrōz*) were based in Calcutta. The first newspaper of Delhi, the English *Delhi Gazette*, was founded in 1833. It is often claimed that the British model was central for the development of the vernacular press—if this were true, it is probably here that we would find the blueprint for the *DUA*.

Unfortunately, no issues seem to have survived from the first four years of the paper. From the *Mirror of the Indian Press* we know that it had been founded by one H. Hope who was also associated with the *Meerut Observer*.³⁸ This editor left the *Delhi Gazette* in December 1836 on obtaining Government employ and for some months the newspaper was kept alive by “some kind friends, who have at leisure moments aided Mr. Gregory,” the printer and publisher.³⁹ The newspaper explained in a short notice to its correspondents that they should “never lose sight of the one great object for which our paper was established, the development of the immense natural resources of these provinces and the improvement of the moral and social conditions of the inhabitants” and “devote the time, which they are disposed to dedicate to us, to subjects which are likely to afford either amusement or information to our readers.”⁴⁰

Already at this point in time the reporting was primarily addressed to the British community, featuring columns on births, deaths and marriages, giving the notification of arrivals and departures at the different North Indian stations, including the moving of army regiments, announcing sporting events and balls and carrying a large number of advertisements—from newly-founded boarding schools in the hills to English books, wines, and even houses for rent—besides articles catering exclusively to the interests of the colonial army and civil population such as debates on the pension funds or new promotion rules.

³⁸Sankhdher, p. 175.

³⁹*DG*, 2.8.1837.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 15.2.1837.

However, in the earlier time this did not exclude pieces focusing on local events. Letters by members of the royal family, drawing the attention of the public to their plight, were given respectful attention;⁴¹ in the debates on the increase of the royal stipend, the editor even took up the position of Bahādur Shāh, as “we can, as public journalists, only express our deep regret at the disappointment which must now be universally felt.”⁴² Still imbued with the ethos of the fight for the freedom of the press, the newspaper claimed that “our duty as well as inclination, induce us to comment on every improper act of authority,”⁴³ as “the press, to be useful, ought always to be against the Government, that is to say it ought to be so dependent on the people as to be always prepared to oppose any innovations or acts of oppression.”⁴⁴ The press thus situated itself firmly within the public sphere as opposed to the state; neither the public nor the state being at this stage defined or identified by criteria of race. Even if the editor shared racial qualities with the rulers, he did not identify with the state and perceived it as an integral part of the journalist’s task to guard the people’s freedom and expose abuses of power.

This position underwent a profound change from the late 1830s onward. The moving force, as far as the *Delhi Gazette* is concerned, appears to have been the intense competition for the restricted market available for English language newspapers in North India, which led first to the takeover of the lithographic press of the *Meerut Observer*,⁴⁵ then to the merger with the *North West Englishman*.⁴⁶ The new editor succeeded, within a relatively short span of time, in raising the subscriptions for the newspaper from 350 to 900 and to more than 1100 in 1843.⁴⁷ This takeoff certainly profited from the increasing demand for up-to-date news during the first Afghan War. However as the newspaper succeeded in holding and even in further raising this level after the cessation of the hostilities, the change in the editorial policy seems to have been even more significant. It decidedly turned the newspaper into a mouthpiece of and forum for the Anglo-Indian community in North India, catering to their specific

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8.2.1837.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 12.4.1837.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.6.1837.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.10.1837.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.2.1839.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.5.1842; 3.5.1843.

interests and giving large amounts of space to correspondence, debate and articles by readers. Added to this were new columns of news “from home,” reports on the sessions of the House of Lords and the House of Commons and events at the Court of the British Monarch, as well as literary and social news—together with the official gazette and the different circulars, these columns accounted for more than two thirds of the space of the newspaper.

The reporting of local events involving the native community of Delhi, on the other hand, was proportionally reduced. Where it still took place, the former respectful or at least polite attitude had given way to condescension and open ridicule: when the editor learned of the existence of the *Sirāju ’l-Akhhbār*, the official court gazette mentioned above, he arranged “to exchange copies with the Editor and dare say we shall find some very interesting or, at least, if not instructive, amusing details in it.”⁴⁸ However, he seemed to have been less amused than he expected and some months later commented with acerbity, “We cannot help thinking that it is almost time that some of the tom fooleries of the would be royalty of the Timour dynasty were attempted to be clipped and that the potent Sovereign in this city should be taught that the day has gone by for the observance of privileges he claims, at least as regards Europeans.”⁴⁹

Very few topics emerged as of common interest to both the British and their “black brethren,” as they had now become:⁵⁰ the state of the roads, the law and order situation, and linked to it the allegation of police corruption, enlivened by the occasional *fait divers*, the preparation for sati by a “Cashmirienne,”⁵¹ or of a fire that nearly destroyed the Moti Masjid.⁵² An exception has to be made, however, for the recurrent reporting on the Delhi College and on the proceedings of the Delhi Relief Society, which also formed regular columns in the *DUA*.

On the whole, however, it seems improbable that the editors of the *DUA* would have been willing to take the *Delhi Gazette* as their journalistic role model, and, even if they had been willing to do so, that they would have found enough articles of interest to translate or summarize for their own readership. It is by way of a closer look at the history and text

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.8.1841.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.7.1842.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.2.1843.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 29.7.1840.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19.3.1842.

of that newspaper that we shall now attempt to situate it with reference to its Persian and English predecessors and contemporaries.

The *Dehli Urdu Akhbār*—Patrons, Publishers and Editors

The *Dehli Akhbār*, renamed *Dehli Urdū Akhbār* in 1840, is traditionally deemed to have been founded by Maulavī Muḥammad Bāqir in 1836 or 1837 and to have been printed on a lithographic press, which the said Maulavī bought from Dr. Sprenger, the principal of the Delhi College.⁵³ This knowledge is based on a report given by Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, the son of Maulavī Muḥammad Bāqir. Out of respect for the word of such an eminent scholar, generations of researchers have wondered how Maulavī Muḥammad Bāqir could buy the press in 1836, when it was only in 1842 that Dr. Sprenger came to Delhi and introduced the press to the Delhi College, and why his name is never mentioned in connection with the newspaper until the early 1850s.⁵⁴ The easiest explanation might perhaps be that Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād's commitment to factual accuracy was not only matched but even surpassed by his filial piety, and that he tended to exaggerate his father's role in this journalistic venture.

The earliest reference we have to the *DUA* dates from 1837.⁵⁵ The oldest surviving copy we know of at present is the 1840 volume located in the National Archive at Delhi, which was published by Khvāja Aḥmad Fārūqī. The information as to the persons associated with the newspaper at the time is confusing. Complying with the requirements of the Press Law, from January to July it was mentioned that the *DUA* was published *ba ihtimām* (i.e., under the management of) Sayyid Mu'īnu 'd-Dīn, who was also the owner. The same Sayyid Mu'īnu 'd-Dīn changed his title to "Superintendent" (in English) in July, in which capacity, however, letters were addressed to him already in January.⁵⁶ In August some internal crisis seems to have prevented the naming of a person in charge, the proprietors

⁵³Šiddīqī, pp. 266–8; Šābrī, *Urdū kē Akhbār-Navīs* (Delhi: Šābrī Academy, 1973), p. 147; Khān, pp. 66–8.

⁵⁴Šābrī, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, pp. 121–6.

⁵⁵Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, "A Year in Pre-Mutiny Delhi (1837 A.C.)," in *Islamic Culture* 17 (1943), pp. 282–97. The copy, which formed the basis for this article, seems to have been lost during Partition.

⁵⁶*DUA*, 26.1.1840, p. 7.

of the *DUA* Press taking collective responsibility. Later in August, Sayyid Mu‘īnu ‘d-Dīn reappeared, to be joined for a short span by Mirzā Imdād ‘Alī Bēg, only to be replaced by Mōtī Lāl, both as “publisher” (in English) and as *muhtamim*. In 1852, the situation was hardly less bewildering. The formula now had become *ba ihtimām, printar-o-publishar DUA*. The persons referred to, however, changed frequently, Sayyid Ḥasan, Muḥammad Ḥusain, and Imdād Ḥusain all in turn being named as responsible. At this stage Muḥammad Bāqir was never mentioned, except for the fact, that the printing press was located at a house belonging to him; we know however that he was the responsible editor in 1857.⁵⁷

What do these details tell us about the working of the newspaper? All of the persons just mentioned—with the exception of Mōtī Lāl—were Shī‘a ulama. For most of them, their link to the Delhi College was not direct, but mediated through Navāb Ḥāmid ‘Alī Khān, the son-in-law of Navāb I‘timādu ‘d-Daula, once prime minister of the Awadh State, whose generous endowment had provided the initial impetus for the founding of the Delhi College.⁵⁸ Navāb Ḥāmid ‘Alī Khān was the most influential patron of the Shī‘a community in Delhi from the middle of the 1830s to 1857, holding not only a pivotal position in the local committee for education, which controlled the Delhi College, but also serving as Prime Minister for Bahādur Shāh at several instances in the early 1840s. He was the founder of the Shī‘a Masjid near Kashmiri Gate, which provided the focal point for the community, and the patron of many Shī‘a scholars, amongst others those who were associated with the publishing of the *DUA*.

Muḥammad Bāqir’s relation with this group of editors seems to have been a difficult one. This was due partly to his personal animosity to Maulavī Qārī Ja‘far, who taught Arabic at the Delhi College, a quarrel which resulted in an acrimonious exchange of pamphlets and fatwas and also finally in a case before the British court, partly to the different positions they took with regard to the appropriate celebration of the Muḥarram festival and specially the custom of the cursing of the first three Khalīfas. Muḥammad Bāqir was the only one among the persons associated with the editing of the newspaper who had been both a student

⁵⁷*DUA*, 31.3.1851.

⁵⁸Margrit Pernau, “The Delhi College” (Introduction), in C.F. Andrews, *Zakaullah of Delhi*, eds. Mushirul Hasan, Margrit Pernau (Delhi: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

and a teacher at the Delhi College, before he left it for a post as *sar-rishtadār* in the revenue department of the British Residency. It is in this capacity that he was first mentioned in the *DUA*.⁵⁹ He was dismissed after sixteen years, possibly on the charge of corruption, after which he is often referred to in the newspaper in connection with his preaching activities.⁶⁰ Shortly afterwards his name began to appear as an editor of the *DUA*. The years in the revenue department clearly seem to have left him with much wealth: he not only built an *imāmbārā* near the Shi‘a Masjid, but also constructed a caravansary cum auction house at Kashmiri Gate—an interesting highlight on the fluidity of the boundaries between scholars, religious leaders, professionals and businessmen.⁶¹

Journalism—A New Professional Consciousness

If the large number of people associated with the editing and printing of a newspaper was not exceptional for the *DUA*, many more people could have been involved with the new print media than hitherto believed, even though it can be supposed that most of them were not full-time journalists, but drew on a whole range of occupations for their livelihood.

In a very interesting article, dated 7 August 1853, the editor, Imdād Ḥusain, spelled out the ethos of the journalistic profession—a piece of writing so interesting that it is worth quoting in some detail:

It is evident, that the dignity (*manṣab*) of a manager (*muhtamim*) of a newspaper is in fact corresponding to the position of a preacher (*vā‘iz*). The main object of producing and publishing a newspaper ... is the teaching and preaching of subjects, which are useful for the human beings and the common welfare (*rifāh-e ‘ām*). The intention is that the common people should imbibe virtues and shun vices. They should feel ashamed of their bad conduct when they read the newspaper and as a result fight to give it up. Therefore, the manager of the newspaper should first himself strive for laudable manners (*akhlāq-e ḥamīda*) and agreeable qualities (*fazā‘il-e pasandīda*). If he wants to teach something to the common

⁵⁹ *DUA*, 12.8.1840, p. 185.

⁶⁰ *DUA*, 8.8.1852; 22.8.1852; 19.9.1852; 26.9.1852; 14.11.1852; 26.12.1852; article, ca. May 1853, (first page of the issue missing).

⁶¹ Ṣābrī, *Akhhār-Navīs*, pp. 144–66.

people, he should practice it himself. As far as possible, therefore, he should acquire knowledge of the arts and sciences, and ponder over questions of morality. When he intends to take up the pen, he should become grave and serious ... and never indulge in satire and foolish prater. This should also be the attitude he should encourage in his correspondents (*karespāndanī*). ...

As far as possible, the manager of a newspaper should investigate whether the reports of the correspondence are true or false. Otherwise, the standard of the paper will be brought down and it will lose its reputation. The readers will then begin to cast doubts even on true news.⁶²

The article ended with praise for the British who introduced the art of printing to India and thus brought about the expansion of knowledge.

It certainly echoed the contemporary discussions in the English-medium newspapers on the responsibility of the journalists for the spreading of truth and the enhancement of morality. Nevertheless, it placed this enlightenment discourse into the framework of the conception of the duties of a religious teacher to reform first himself and then those around him and lead them on the path of virtue, simultaneously harnessing the journalists to the project of religious reform and claiming a position in the modern public sphere for the religious leaders. This intertwining of religion and public debate might have partly arisen from the fact that it seems that the ulama were the first to take to the new profession; at the same time it sheds further light on the profile of the pre-1857 ulama, whose scholarship and interests were by no means limited to religion in the restricted sense of the notion.⁶³

Interestingly, this religious reconfiguration of the role of the journalist by no means precluded the rise of a professional consciousness transcending the boundaries of the communities. The large and ever increasing number of printing presses, which came up since the 1840s, seriously cut down the profits of the shareholders and led to the bankruptcy of a number of ventures.⁶⁴ In spite of this competition, we find an

⁶²*DUA*, 7.8.1853.

⁶³For further observations on the changing role of the ulama, see Margrit Pernau, "Middle Class and Secularization: The Muslims of Delhi in the 19th Century," in *Middle Class Values in India and Western Europe*, eds. Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2002), pp. 21–41.

⁶⁴See, for instance, *DUA*, 19.9.1852 for the closing of the *Maṭbaʿu 'l-'Ulūm*; for the proliferation of printing presses, see *ibid.*, 7.8.1853.

exhortation, dated 2 October 1853, to all the journalists that they should not rejoice in the troubles of their colleagues, as “it is necessary for us to think of all the persons of our profession (*ham-pēsha*) as one unity (*vāhid*), and consider their sorrows our own sorrow and imagine their comfort to be our own comfort.”

It may be hoped that once we find more detailed biographical information on the persons linked not only to the *DUA* but also to its contemporaries, it will be possible to see more clearly along which lines—profession, patronage, family, friendship, religion—these networks of solidarity were developed.⁶⁵

The “Mental Map” of the *Dehli Urdu Akhbār*

The colonial British officers reporting on the development of the vernacular press in its beginnings have always claimed that it showed little originality. Most of the choice of what constituted “news” as well as the actual articles, they insisted, were derived directly from the Anglo-Indian press. If, however, we try to visualize the geographical distribution of the articles of the *DUA*, both with reference to India and even more strikingly with reference to the world, so as to constitute a sort of “mental map” of the editors and readers, a very different picture emerges.

Contrary to the large emphasis given to news from Europe, but specially from England, in the *Delhi Gazette*, scarcely any importance was accorded to them in the *Dehli Urdū Akhbār*. England figured in just 7 articles in 1840, closely followed by France with 4, and surpassed by Russia with 9 articles. Already Egypt was considered more notable with 10 articles, while the Arabian Peninsula featured in 15 articles. The large number of articles on Burma (11) and China (20) may be explained by the military events; the same holds true for Afghanistan (94), the Middle East (15) and Central Asia (11), which reflected the First Afghan War. Nevertheless, still in 1852/53, the 9 articles on Europe (England 6 France 2, Italy 1) were matched by more than double that number on Central Asia (19). On the whole, interest in the world outside of India tended to diminish further, from 31.3% of the articles in 1840 to a mere 16.4% in 1852/53.

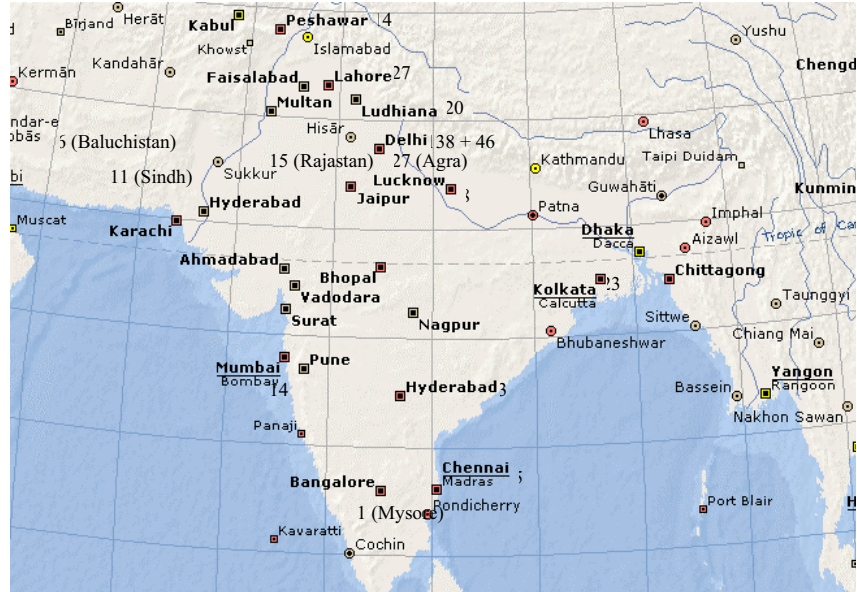
⁶⁵The role of the Kayasth community in the printing business in Delhi, both in Urdu and in English, would in this perspective constitute a fascinating topic of research.

Dehlī Urdū Akhbār, 1840, distribution of articles (1)



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If we turn to the distribution of the 465 articles on the Indian subcontinent, the administrative centers Calcutta (23), Bombay (14), Madras (5) and Agra, the capital of the North Western Provinces (27) stood out. Otherwise, the south was almost completely ignored and the reporting followed the lines of the heartlands of the Mughal Empire, stretching from Lucknow (8), via Delhi (138), its surroundings (46), and Rajasthan (15) to the Panjab (Ludhiana 20, Lahore 27) and from there to Sindh (11) and Baluchistan (6) on the one hand and the Hindukush (17) on the other.

Dehlī Urdū Akhbār, 1840, distribution of articles (2)

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It was the old Hindustan which formed the frame of reference for the editors and readers, not the colonial concept of a “British India” interspersed with “Princely States.” At least in this respect, the *DUA* was much closer to the tradition of the Persian *akhbārāt* than to its contemporaries publishing in English.

Readers and Topics

The number of copies of the *DUA* which were printed every week varied between 80 in 1849 and 44 in 1851, never including more than 10 European subscribers.⁶⁶ We would need more information as to the geographical distribution of the newspaper’s readers, but as a hypothesis it may be held that the mental maps show the geographical distribution of

⁶⁶Muḥammad ‘Atīq Ṣiddiqī, *Ṣūba-e Shumālī-o-Maghribī kē Akhbārāt-o-Maṭbū‘āt* (Aligarh: Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdū, 1962), p. 102.

the “imagined community” fairly well. Socially, the price of 2 Rs. a month—at a time when even the grandsons of the emperor received monthly stipends of not more than 5 Rs.⁶⁷—excluded not only the lower classes, but a substantial part of the literati as well.

The *DUA* continued the traditional reporting on the events of the royal court. However, unlike in the Persian newspapers referred to above, the emphasis moved from the exaltation of the royal power—Bahādur Shāh lost his anchoring in the history and cosmology and became a mere “*huzūrvālā*”—to a survey of the events taking place inside the palace. While the emperor was still spared direct criticism, his counselors and ministers were not. In a way that showed an awareness of the influence of modern media not usually associated with the inhabitants of the Exalted Fort, the newspaper was at several instances turned into a mouthpiece for one or the other faction at the court. It castigated the corruption of the imperial administration, which was leading to delay in the disbursement of the monthly stipends.⁶⁸ But it also attempted to discredit individual princes, for instance gloating over the difficulties Mirzā Shāh Rukh encountered during his pilgrimage to the Qadam Sharif shrine, when he was waylaid and held up by the moneylenders demanding their due,⁶⁹ or extensively reproducing the royal exhortation to careful fund management at the address of the Crown Prince.⁷⁰

This “media consciousness” was also reflected in the attempts of the court to modernize its own information policy by having the traditional *akhbārāt* printed at the royal press,⁷¹ at times even in a bilingual edition.⁷² Bahādur Shāh regularly had the printed newspapers read out to him and took care to correct misrepresentations related to the court by means of the *Sirāju ’l-Akbbār*, which was primarily distributed within the palace, but copies of which were also sent to the most important British administrators.⁷³

The events relating to the colonial state, too, were regularly described in detail in the *DUA*—at the all-India as well as at the provincial and

⁶⁷FPC, 24.10.1836/13; FPC, 11.10.1850/199; FPC, 3.5.1857/16–18.

⁶⁸*DUA*, 10.5.1840 and 13.1840.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 10.5.1840.

⁷⁰Qureshi, p. 292.

⁷¹*DUA* (title page missing, probably May 1853).

⁷²*DG*, 26.4.1843.

⁷³Şiddiqī, *Akbbār-Navīsī*, p. 259.

local level. This information ranged from short announcements regarding newly-posted officers, the departure of officers on leave and their return, to abridged and translated versions of government circulars, and notices of the interactions of the Agent (as the Resident was renamed after 1833) with the royal court or with the nobles and their representatives. As a whole, the *DUA* could probably be classified as a loyalist newspaper—whether this was due to the continued surveillance of the press law or to the fact that, apparently, a substantial portion of the editors and readers were either in British service or dependent on British patronage has to be left open. Nevertheless, the government was not spared harsh condemnation, once the immediate interests of the readers were touched upon. Among these criticisms was an attack on the government for its inaction during the famine of 1853, which, according to the editor of the *DUA*, was due less to the scarcity of grain than to the failure to control the prices.⁷⁴ The newspaper often voiced the grievances of the *mafidars* (*mafidārs*), the holders of tax-free tenures, traditionally scholars and religious persons, who under the British were threatened with the resumption of their grants.⁷⁵ However, the excitement seemed to have subsided once it became clear that the owner of less than 10 *bigḥā* would not be touched by the measure, which in turn gives us a fairly precise idea of the economic background of the typical reader.⁷⁶ Another topic which drew comments from the editor as well as prompted letters from the readers was the introduction of an order requiring residential property owners to provide a bond for their lodgers,⁷⁷ with the aim of facilitating the search for potential criminals—once again providing not only an indication of the topics of public discourse, but also of the economic strata from which the readers were drawn. In the same group of articles the numerous references to the inefficacy and corruption of the police should also be included, which at the same time serves to challenge the British legitimization of government through the guaranteeing of law and order.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *DUA*, 1.2.1853.

⁷⁵ Qureshi, p. 292; *DUA*, 26.1.1840; *ibid.*, 2.2.1840.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.5.1840.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.2.1840; 1.3.1840; 8.3.1840; 22.3.1840 and *passim*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.1.1840; 2.2.1840; 9.2.1840; 15.2.1840; 1.3.1840; 26.7.1840; 25.10.1840 and *passim*.

This reporting on the imperial court and the colonial power may be seen as a continuation of the institutions of the *akhbārāt*. However, by discussing the implications of the acts of those in power for the general public, and trying to influence those in power through the creation of a public opinion (as distinct from an information policy directed at an individual ruler), the traditions were subtly, but none the less profoundly, transformed.

The intermingling of tradition and change becomes even more obvious in those articles which focused on events in the public sphere. The *DUA* was known to be the mouthpiece of the Shī‘a community, and the British complained that it was “a scurrilous print which abounded in personal and covert attacks on the native gentlemen of respectability who differed from the editor in their religious views.”⁷⁹ However, with the exception of some articles on Sunnī-Shī‘a riots during Muḥarram, which involved the dispute over the cursing of the first three Khalīfas on which Muḥammad Bāqir and his rival Qārī Ja‘far ‘Alī took strong positions,⁸⁰ the editors attempted to cover the entire range of religious events—from the Pḥūlōn kī Sair in Mehrauli,⁸¹ to the ‘Īd celebrations,⁸² the Bāra Vafāt⁸³ and the Rām Līla festival.⁸⁴ It is too early to say, what the impact of the reporting on these events, traditionally constitutive of the localized public sphere, had on the transformation of religious perceptions themselves. But even presuming that here changes took place only at a later date, the very fact of their descriptions being available almost simultaneously throughout North India transformed the setting in which they were taking place and began creating a new trans-local public audience for these religious functions.

None of these topics figured—except as an occasional curiosity—in the pages of the *Delhi Gazette*. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, the debate on education dominated the English as well as the

⁷⁹Quoted without reference in J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism (Part II of the Report of the Press Commission)* (Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1956), p. 63.

⁸⁰*DUA*, 1 5.3.1840; 22.3.1840; 1.2.1852; 18.7.1852; 7 .11.1852; 14.11.1852; 12.12.1852.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 12.7.1840; 19.8.1840; 13.9.1840; 22.8.1852; 29.8.1852.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 16.2.1840; 29.11.1840; 1.8.1852.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 11.2.1852.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 11.10.1840.

vernacular public sphere, before political reforms took over as the central topic of discussion in the last decades prior to the turn of the century. Both the *Delhi Gazette* and the *DUA* contained regular articles on the Delhi College. In the 1840s, this institution had already been transformed from a *madrasa*, centering on religious scholarship and the classical languages, into a college, in which the British controlled the curricula and the textbooks. Though Urdu was the medium of instruction, the aim was the introduction of Western knowledge and the training of Indians for the middle and lower level jobs in the colonial administration, notably in the fields of education and the judicial system, but also in public works and surveys.⁸⁵

To a much larger extent than the other famous educational institutions in Delhi, the Delhi College in the 1840s and 1850s became the focal point for the debate on education and the possibility, necessity, but also the danger of cultural transformation. However, possibly due to the loyalty it felt it owed Navāb Ḥāmid ‘Alī Khān as a member of the local board of education, the *DUA* neither referred to tensions within the teaching staff nor even ventured more than a fleeting remark on the greatest crisis which shook the College, viz., the conversion of Master Ramchandra to Christianity.⁸⁶ Instead, we find long reports on the annual prize-giving ceremonies, mentioning the names of all the awardees, and the recognition of the College by local and visiting British functionaries.⁸⁷ A more discreet—but perhaps even more efficient—advertisement is found in the recurring mention of the jobs that former alumni of the College have been able to secure in the British administration.⁸⁸

All these findings point to the existence of a little studied class of people, who formed the core of the readership of the *DUA*, and—we may presume—also of the other Urdu newspapers published in the two decades before 1857. They were situated between the old nobility and the menial classes, not only well-educated, but increasingly making their education a means for their livelihood, working for the traditional powers, as administrators of the royal or noble households and as their attorneys and advocates, but also for the colonial administration. These professions

⁸⁵Pernau, “Delhi College.”

⁸⁶*DUA*, 25.7.1852.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 1.2.1852, 6.2.1853.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 16.2.1840, 12.8.1840 and *passim*.

surely existed already before the advent of the British. What was new, however, was the extent to which the print media provided them with a platform to voice their interests, to interact with each other on a supra-local level and to develop a consciousness as a distinct social group. Like the European middle classes, they increasingly identified their interests with the public good (*rifāh-e 'ām*). From there, to constitute themselves as the “true representatives” of the nation was only a small step.

Conclusion

Discussions of civil society and the public space in India, which have brought about many excellent studies in recent years, tend to take their starting point from the late nineteenth century at the earliest, thus concentrating on a period when the colonial power was already at its pinnacle and dominated the public knowledge and the discourses to a large extent. Viewed from there, the public sphere and its institutions can indeed seem a foreign import. If, however, we move back in history and focus on the period of transition between the late Mughal Empire and the early colonial state, it is possible to capture encounters between cultural systems and discern how even institutions seemingly imported from the West bore the imprint of earlier traditions and how these traditions in turn came to impinge on the perception of the other and its transformation.

This paper has tried to show that the *DUA* stands in the continuum of the Persian *akhbārāt*, which had already been undergoing adjustments since the early 1830s when they began being printed for a larger readership. These changes were less perceptible in the reporting on events taking place at the court, be it the durbar of Bahādur Shāh or the public audiences of the Resident, which were constructed and perceived in analogy to the royal model. They became more distinguishable once the news-writers moved out of the scope of traditionally sanctioned topics and started to include events from the public sphere such as religious processions and festivals and literary gatherings. Reports on educational functions and charitable associations, finally, found their place both in the vernacular and also in the English press. Although there still existed differences of style, on these issues the streams almost merged.

Unlike the *akhbārāt*, which were written to provide a ruler or a ruling group with information (which of course did not preclude an information policy on the part of the news-writer), the *DUA* consciously aimed at forming public opinion and providing a forum for discussion for a group

which, while still well-defined in terms of education, social status and to some extent also income, tended to become increasingly anonymous. While the letters to the “superintendent ṣāḥib” were a feature taken from the English newspapers, we don’t know enough to judge whether the public and critical discussion of government measures owed only to the Western tradition of enlightenment. British references to the “circulation of inflammatory papers,” which were recopied and distributed by the readers and which were held to contain “the most absurd reports and mischievous misrepresentations ... to agitate men’s minds and to produce evil which might have been prevented or guarded against if the circulation had been effected by printed paper”⁸⁹ tend to indicate that there might still be an entire genre of newspapers which has so far neither been analyzed nor even found in the archives.

Far from being displaced by the advent of British journalism and information technology, or even by “mixed forms” like the *DUA*, the *akhbārāt*, and perhaps also the more popular newsletters, continued to lead a vigorous existence, forming a pool from which not only the printed newspapers but also the British administrators drew their information at least until the 1840s, and probably even beyond. The picture which thus emerges is much more complex than a simple colonial construction of knowledge, wielding and securing power through the displacement of indigenous intelligence by the invention of new structures. The *DUA* was, rather, the product of mutual encounters which led to a multiple intertwining of the self and the other, the indigenous and the colonial, the traditional and the modern. □

⁸⁹Khurshid, pp. 85–7.