Marcia L. Hermアン a
Bruce B. Lawrence

"Indo-Persian Tagkines as
memorative Communications"

Beyond Turk and Hindu
Rethinking Religious Identities
in Islamicate South Asia

Edited by David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence

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Indo-Persian Tazkiraras
Memorative Communications

Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence

Naqqār faryad hai kis ki shukhti-yi tabyīr ka
kaghaz hai faiya, har faik-ār-tasyīr ka
(Of whose careless recording does the inscription complain,
For every representation wears a paper shirt.)
Ghalib

In a volume that focuses on Muslim identity in general and Indo-Muslim identity in particular, we have a treasure trove to help us understand how South Asian Muslims identified themselves. It is the tazkira, or biographical compendium. The tazkira is a genre of literature produced by elites for other elites. Its primary linguistic expression in the subcontinent is Persian, at least during the Mughal or Indo-Turkic period, which we emphasize here. Only in the late Mughal and colonial periods of Indo-Muslim history do we find both Urdu translations of Indo-Persian tazkiraras and Urdu sequels, with companion compositions in Punjabi, Sindhi, and Gujarati. The tazkira is a staple of Indo-Muslim cultural production, and as such it demands closer analysis than it has so far received if we are to grasp the relationship between personal authority and place in structuring Indo-Muslim identity.

Or, rather, Indo-Muslim identities, since the range of elite literary reflection is very broad, and Indo-Persian tazkiraras encompass a wide variety of contexts. Above all, the tazkira traces memory through the lives of heroes, both lyrical and spiritual, and in doing so, it raises a number of interesting theoretical questions. How are its heroes selected, and who gets to tell their story for which audiences? While the heroes may display courage, evoke hope, and elicit loyalty, how do their lives relate to the unheroic, to the everyday, to the lives without traces?
A common complaint by critics has been the lack of any consistent principles of selectivity, critical evaluation of facts, or analytical framework in the tazkira tradition. An anthologist has noted "their seemingly irrelevant style of diction." Some scholars of contemporary third world literature have even suggested that we cannot go beyond describing these texts. They are resistant to critical theory because they are drenched in the minutiae of local detail.

Yet we propose a method of reading tazkiras that acknowledges the ambiguity at their core. As the poet Ghalib implies in the epigraph for this essay, there is no "careless recording." Each representation that wears a paper shirt is intended to communicate to others the quality, the cultural residue that commends its content to would-be readers. Tazkiras are not mere mnemonic repetitions. They are conscious remembrances, and therefore they are both cultural artifacts and cultural reconstructions. In Walter Benjamin's language, "the 'after' is precisely not the 'again.'" The "after" requires "the destruction of the illusion of its continuity with the past," for "only thus can the past be 'put to work' in the present as remembrance."

If it is possible for tradition to appear in the guise of cultural history, and if that history is marked above all by narrative forms, then the Indo-Persian tazkiras of South Asia exemplify what could be labeled, in a paraphrastic gloss from Benjamin, "memorative communication." At the vertical level, these memorative communications reflect the divine favor conferred on worthy Indo-Muslim emissaries—in this case, saints and poets—just as these same emissaries reflect the divine impress on their own creatively courageous lives. At the horizontal level, Indo-Persian tazkiras project a collective testimony for others who also locate themselves in the same subcommunity of South Asian Muslims. These are literary works that both remember and communicate. They concentrate the readers' focus on their heroic subjects at the same time that they disperse, or redeploy, that focus to present-day concerns and contingencies. Although they draw from the past, they are not commemorative; they do not recall the past for its own sake or for the sake of the heroes whom they exalt. They are memorative, relying on memory and remembrance to communicate with the living the legacy of prior Indo-Muslim exemplars.

Indo-Muslim exemplars are Muslim as well as Indian, and so we find that certain general cultural themes typical in Islamic civilization persist in the tazkira genre in Muslim South Asia. For example, the moods of nostalgia or boasting can be traced back even to the Jahiliyya poetry of pre-Islamic Arabs. The genealogical preoccupation of the Arabs merged with the formulation of a sacred history embodied by the early Muslim community in early biographical compendia. Works written in Arabic, such as the Tabaqat of Ibn Sa'd (ca. 784), feature the practice of extensively listing very ordinary participants in the Muslim community, as if to somehow represent its existence and significance by remembering even the names of those who had been present, in other words, to provide a trace for those who otherwise would remain traceless, unacknowledged, forgotten.

But much more important in terms of thematic characteristics is regional and urban location. The nature of Islamic civilization, at least from the perspective of the celebrators of its intellectual vibrancy, had an overwhelmingly urban focus, and we will demonstrate from several cases how the memorialization of cities came to characterize this genre as it expanded into the space of Muslim South Asia. The urban notables who abound in the pages of Indo-Persian tazkiras are rarely rulers, sometimes religious scholars, but more often urban intellectuals. It is, above all, poets and saints who become the principal subjects memorialized in Islamic biographical literature generally but even more frequently in the Indo-Persian tazkiras of South Asia. Common to each entry is attention to the rank, affiliation, profession, and year or century of death of the person remembered. But no less important is the locality of the individual's primary activities, with the double message that the urban setting enhanced the spectrum of possible activity for the deceased at the same time that the achievements of this notable brought to that city a fame or spiritual bounty it did not, or had not, enjoy before his lifetime.

Nowhere is the accent on place and the reciprocal importance of heroes and homes more pivotal than in a distinctly biographical genre developed in India due to the influence of institutional Sufism. That genre is the muraqqa, or recorded conversations, of spiritual masters. It is developed by the most notable Indo-Muslim brotherhood of the premodern period, the Chishtiya, and from its earliest appearance in North India to its later proliferation throughout Hindustan, it is identified with specific saints whose places shape their audience and whose responses, or question-and-answer sessions with close disciples, enhance the places where they settle and teach, advise and warn, fast and pray, and meditate and eventually (usually after long lives) die. From the major Chishti exemplar of his day, Shaykh Nizam ad-din Awliya (d. 1325), in Delhi to his disciple, Shaykh Burhan ad-din Gharib, in the
Deccan and especially in Burhanpur (named after him), we find the genre of malfuzat fostering an intensely localized memory, even when it is a “false” memory.

“False” memory? Yes, for as Carl Ernst has noted, we should not approach the malfuzat only as historical purists. Although many later malfuzat either were spurious or projected major distortions of their core contents, they still reinforced both the authoritativeness of their saintly subjects and the place where they resided, then expired. What interests us is that both kinds of malfuzat became included in the canon of South Asian Sufi memory.10

The lesson from malfuzat is extended in the genre of tazkira. It is attention to place, or to relocation of place, from a real or imagined Central Asian or Arabian homeland to a new South Asian primary home, that governs the principle of biographical collection and the inscription of an altered sense of identity. Even the focus on individual heroes is subordinated to a still larger purpose: the collective display of groups of individuals. It is as groups of heroes, sharing a common identity and a convergent legacy, that saints and poets reinforce the value of a Muslim presence in South Asia—not just anywhere in South Asia, but in South Asian urban settings, in premodern cities. It is bards and Sufis together who authorize the cultural symbolism of South Asia as an urban, and also an urbane, Muslim realm.

Especially during one period, the Mughal or Indo-Tirumuri, from the early sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, we find this pronounced tendency to compile tazkiras both to honor heroes and to authenticate Muslim urban spaces. For that reason, while our essay will look at multiple points of the millennia long history of South Asian Islam, we will give particular stress to those poetic and saintly tazkiras that emerged from Mughal India.11

Tazkiras, as their name suggests, both memorialize individuals and communicate their legacy to a new generation. They are, to repeat our title, “memorative communications,” projecting the worth of individual heroes as icons of urban Indo-Muslim collective identity. If there is a key word for understanding poetic and Sufi tazkiras, it is memory. Memory has a long etiology in western thought, which is bound up with its invocation in Islamic contexts. Both need to be considered before applying our analysis to Indo-Persian figures from South Asia.

The Concept of Memory in Muslim South Asia

A study of memory in medieval European culture, The Book of Memory by Mary Carruthers,12 suggests some interesting approaches to looking at memorialization in premodern Muslim South Asia. For example, consider the civilizational context of memory. In developing an Islamic concept of memory, a root image is established by the Qur’anic metaphor of the source of primordial reality in a “preserved tablet.”13 The “pen” that inscribes is also mentioned in the Qur’an (68:1), and this imagery has been drawn upon throughout the interpretive tradition of Muslim Neoplatonic philosophy and in the philosophical and poetic tradition following Ibn Arabi’s Sufi metaphysical system.14 The world itself and human, religious, and political destinies are conceived as a sequence of articulations of what has been written on this primordial preserved tablet (al-la‘ib al-mahfu‘). Embodied in mahfu‘ is a double meaning: What has been “preserved” has also been “memorized.”

Annamarie Schimmel, discussing “the pen” in a section on “letter symbolism in Sufi literature,” notes:

The mysteries have dwelt on another aspect of pen symbolism as well. There is a famous hadith: “The heart of the faithful is between the two fingers of the All-compassionate, and he turns it wherever He wants.” This hadith suggests the activity of the writer with his reed pen, who produces intelligible or confused lines; the pen has no will of its own, but goes wherever the writer turns it. . . . The hadith of the pen has inspired the poets of Iran and other countries—they saw man as a pen that the master calligrapher uses to bring forth pictures and letters according to his design, which the pen cannot comprehend. Mirza Ghālib, the great poet of Muslim India (d. 1869), opened his Urdu Diwan with a line that expresses the complaint of the letters against their inventor, for “every letter has a paper shirt.”15

We should not be surprised that the same Aristotelian categories of form and matter which structured medieval European thinking about the process of creation, whether divine or human, were also inherited by the Islamic tradition. The imagery of wax which takes on the shape of the mold or the signet ring was a way of describing the creative process as it was channeled through retrieved memory. Tracing the development of this model in Socrates and Plato, Carruthers observes, “In fact, Socrates is at some pains to say that his way of describing the memory as
Patterns in Poetic and Sufi Tazkiras

The tazkiras of both poets and Sufis evidence the changing shape of Muslim identity in South Asia through their principles of ordering as well as their thematic concerns. We have stressed their commonality, but one might also note their difference. While the role of saints is to sanctify the new soil of Hindustan and, above all, its cities, the function of the poets and poetic tazkiras lies elsewhere. In the case of the poetic tazkiras, the language and imagery of a city’s poets inscribes another sort of privileged space; most often it sets the scene for a particular “state of mind” associated with that place, and to understand that link we will examine the poetic tazkiras before turning to their saintly counterparts.

Poetic Tazkiras

So extensive has been the scholarship on tazkira as a genre applied to the lives of Indo-Muslim poets that it merits brief review. Some of the basic work in the literary history of this genre was carried out by the Pakistani scholar Farman Fatehpuri in a special 1964 issue of the journal Nigar and then in a 1972 monograph entitled Urdu Shaurat ke Tazkirat aur Tazkira Nigar. Fatehpuri suggests that the model for subsequent poetic tazkiras was the early Persian biographical compendium Lubab al-Albab, composed in A.H. 618/1223-33 C.E. by Muhammad Awfi. A glance through Awfi’s chapter headings indicates that the principle of organization of this tazkira was primarily chronological rather than spatial. E. G. Browne, who edited this work, evaluated it as primarily an anthology and disappointing in biographical particulars.

The early tazkiras in South Asia were written in Persian, even those of Urdu poets. A glance through Fatehpuri’s catalog of tazkiras indicates that the three earliest tazkiras of Urdu poets were written in Persian in the same year, 1165/1752. Perhaps a conclusion might be drawn regarding the connection of tazkira preparation with patronage networks. The Mughal empire at this point was on the verge of takeover by Europeans; it was also experiencing a major shift in its revenue system. One might speculate that part of the motivation for compiling such compendia was to draw the attention of potential patrons and gain reward for the needy litterateur. The prospect of European rule could have also produced another motivation: faced with the loss of social as well as political and economic power, Indo-Persian elites may have intensified their memorial communications, with poets high on the list of those deemed to be endangered species.

According to Fatehpuri, until the Ab-i Hayat (Water of life) of Muhammad Husain Azad in 1850, most of the tazkiras were written in Persian following the old formula. Azad’s tazkira has been celebrated as a breakthrough or watershed in the genre that, according to Ralph Russell, a noted scholar of Urdu, helped “lay the foundation of modern literary criticism in Urdu.” Russell cites Azad’s readiness to learn from the British methods, that is, in employing historical critical standards. He explains how Azad advanced on the traditional tazkira form, which had been essentially that of a biographical dictionary, providing “the poet’s name, his takhallus (pen-name), the city of his birth, his patrons, the date of his death, a description of the quality of his poetry, couched in rather conventional terms, and one or two specimen couplets from his ghazals.” Azad’s principal contribution was to introduce a periodization of Urdu poetry into five periods based on chronology and the use of language by the poets.

Two scholars of Persian and Urdu have attempted to sort traditional tazkiras according to two rather unrevealing types, the general (in which the time frame is not limited) and the particular (centered on a particular period). Fatehpuri raises a more interesting tension regarding this tradition by inquiring whether these biographical works were primarily composed as a showcase for the poetry, or whether, in fact, the biographical component was the primary motive for composition.

The French scholar Garcin de Tassy took an interest in the tazkira form, compiling an extensive list of tazkiras available to him in the mid-nineteenth century and making synopses of their notices on Hindu and Muslim poets of Hindiustani, together with representative translations of their work in three volumes. He speaks of the poetic notices falling into three basic categories, based primarily on the quality and extent of a poet’s production, so that some figures merit only a brief notice, whereas poets at a middle rank who have produced longer collections known as divans or kulliyat receive an “honorable mention.” The highest category, in his estimation, are those notices of poets or authors whose works have been given specific titles.

In exploring the motivations for the composition of tazkiras, Fatehpuri makes the following proposals:

1. The memorialization of the compiler or others might have motivated tazkira writing.
2. *Biaz nigar*, or the citation of favorite or thematically coherent poetic couplets, might have been the true motivation behind biographical compendia.\(^3\)

3. Another motivation could be the urge to discuss the personal traits and rivalries of poets.

4. There was also appeal of such works during that period of artificiality in speech and imagination; they could appeal as a way of denying political and material decline by retreating to an interior world.

5. One also had to consider the increasing popularity of poetic gatherings (*musha‘as*) and the publication of more and more poetic anthologies based on the couplets recited at a particular one.\(^4\)

6. Finally, they might assist the movement to establish Urdu over against Persian.\(^5\)

By contrast, the contemporary critic Muhammad Sadiq evaluates tazkiras solely by the standards of historical accuracy.

The history of the tazkiras reveals a more serious approach and a greater desire for authenticity and fair play as time passed. The earlier tazkiras, for the most part, confined themselves to notes on the poets and drew heavily on their predecessors. Subsequent writers enlarged the sphere of their research by including discussions on prosody, diction, and the history of the Urdu language, some of them discarding the alphabetical order in favor of the chronological.

They also tried to establish contact with their contemporary poets, and obtained first-hand information about them from their friends and relatives. We may say, therefore, that the history of tazkiras shows a steady advance in research, and what was once a pastime, a desire for personal recognition, or a means of expressing one’s approval or disapproval, became a really responsible undertaking.\(^6\)

Not till very recently, though, have we seen the student of poetic tazkiras shift to the interest of our essay: the use of heroes and homes in a reciprocal form that enhanced the benefit of each for Indo-Muslim urban identity. It is the American linguist Carla Petievich who has traced the organizing principle of locating the Urdu poetic tradition. It has shifted from the space of the *markaz* or city-based circle, centered around an *ustad* (or master), to the region, which became defined by the scope of princely patronage, before it finally became linked to the school, based on canons of European literature as taught in the new universities modeled on the British system. Ironically, although this latter, accompanied by the inculcation of Victorian literary and moral standards, was an artificial fit with the reality of the South Asian Urdu poetic tradition and its lines of influence, it did become the generally accepted way of distinguishing the “Dihlavi” from the “Lakhnavi.”\(^7\) In other words, the very accent on competing traditions legitimized these major North Indian cities as spaces of urbane Indo-Muslim cultural expression.\(^8\)

What resulted was more than an innocent competition of mutually reinforcing minority identities. The intense urban/regional focus of later poetic tazkiras became a crucial marker of regional identity. Tazkiras highlighted linguistic variants, rivalries over poetic eloquence, or even the correctness of local expressions. They thus served to define a certain space in terms of a “state of mind,” with Lucknow, for example, seeking the highest ground as the epitome of refinement, “nazakat.”

Carla Petievich has criticized this “two school” construction of Urdu poetry in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\(^9\) Lucknow poetry, she observes, is too often represented as decadent: “It is acclaimed as the quintessential symbol of what Muslim culture in India achieved, yet it is simultaneously denounced today for the societal immorality, waste and decadence of its past.” She goes on to lament that “in the case of Lakhnavi poetry, most critics have described the society of Lucknow as leisured, pleasure-loving and courteous.”\(^10\) Other characteristics of Lakhnavi style cited in the critical literature include effeminacy, sensuality, frivolousness, a certain vulgarity, amorous repartee, and a lack of the traditional ambiguity regarding the beloved’s gender and whether a divine or human beloved is really the object of the poet’s address.\(^11\) Petievich, however, tries to rescue Lucknow from the slanders of its detractors; she analyzes samples of poetry from various cities in order to disprove the applicability of these stereotypes solely to Lakhnavi poetry.

Nor is the shift in cultural memory as represented in the tazkira tradition limited to Lucknow. Another city-based tazkira from the twentieth century is the *Kamilan-i Rampur*. Written by Hafiz Ali Khan in 1929, it was reissued by the Rampur library in 1986\(^7\) with the addition of a postnationalist preface to the original composition. In this the writer of the new preface, Abid Rida Beder, develops the concept of Rampuri Urdu poetry as a “third school” aside from Delhi and Lucknow.\(^12\) He evokes symbols of Rampuri identity such as a Rampuri cap (topi), a knife, and a particular style of knife fighting. And he also argues for the inclu-
minded courtier that throws light on the patronage that shapes the production of other Mughal period Sufi tazkiras. But to understand the rareness of Badauni’s project, one must first note other tazkiras that confirm the pattern of privileging one’s own order in telling, or retelling, the entire drama of Muslim saintly labor.

Let us consider the ill-fated older son of Shah Jahan, Dara Shikoh (d. 1659). Before he was executed by his younger brother, Aurangzeb, Dara was both a Sufi adept and a Sufi tazkira author. Dara composed not one but two Sufi tazkiras, fulsome dictionaries of antecedent Muslim spiritual heroes. Dara seems to have been motivated by a concern for getting the record straight, but it is a surface concern. Dara’s apparent concern masks his overriding goal: not only to affirm Abd al-Qadir Jilani as the foremost Sufi exemplar and the Qadiriya as the paramount Sufi brotherhood but to undergird his own authority vis-à-vis rival claims to Qadiiri spirituality. His was not the first Indo-Persian biographical dictionary written by a Qadiri. He was preceded by the formidable scholar of hadith, himself a Qadiri adept, Shaykh Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi (d. 1642). Abd al-Haqq’s Akhbar al-akhyar, completed in 1618, had already gained considerable fame by 1640, and Dara models many of his own entries on Indian saints after the longer, fuller entries of Akhbar al-akhyar. Yet in presenting the Qadiriya, he bypasses the lineage traced by Abd al-Haqq, acknowledging only that line of Qadiri affiliation traceable through Abd al-Qadir ath-thani to Abdallah Bhiti to Miyan Mîr (d. 1635) and then to his own preceptor, Mulla Shah (d. 1660).

The significance of the Islamic past for Dara Shikoh is functional: its retelling helps to affirm his own status as a Qadiri adept. The tazkira, in his imaginative plane, becomes the ideal tool of memorative communication. Giants of Persian Sufism like Ala al-Dawla Simmani and Jalal al-Din Rumi, when mentioned, are accorded half a page, consisting mostly of a cursory recap of standard biographical, travel, and literary data. While their inclusion affirms Dara Shikoh’s awareness of the long tradition in which he stands, their sole purpose is to provide a backdrop for the stage onto which he parades as central exhibit the Qadiriya, especially his own immediate spiritual mentors, and their location in the region of Lahore. Is it mere coincidence that his disagreement with the Delhi author of Sufi tazkiras, Shaykh Abd al-Haqq, has to do with the region of their respective Qadiri affiliations? It would seem that even within the domain of elite Indo-Persian cultural production the importance of space, specifically urban sacred space, was determinative, even if unstated.
Dara Shikoh's *Safinat al-auliya* also contrasts with another biographical dictionary from Mughal India. While much has been written about *Safinat al-auliya*, mention is seldom made of the Chishti master, Shaykh Abd ar-Rahman (d. 1094/1683), or his Sufi tazkiya, *Mir’at al-asrar*. Although it appears in several published catalogs, *Mir’at al-asrar* has never generated a fraction of the interest directed to *Safinat al-auliya*, yet the two works merit comparison, if only because their authors were near contemporaries, they employed the same inclusive method of tazkiya writing, and, above all, they were both preoccupied with the relationship of personal authority to place.

In *Mir’at al-asrar*, after noting the twelve family clusters into which Sufi brotherhoods may be parcelled, Shaykh Abd ar-Rahman reviews no less than twenty-three generations of spiritual exemplars. He brackets the prophet Muhammad and his three immediate successors as the first generation, followed by ‘Ali and the other eleven Imams in the second generation. He continues in this manner until he reaches the tenth generation in which the first Chishti master is said to have lived and died in Syria (ca. 328/940). Appearing in the same generation with him were his contemporaries Shibli and Hallaj. By the time of the fourteenth generation when Qutb al-Din Mawdud (d. 537/1142) became the successor at Chisht, he counted among his contemporaries Muhammad and Ahmad Ghazzali as well as Ayn al-Quzzat Hamadani. Successive generations boasted still more illustrious names, so that by the sixteenth generation when Uthman Harvani (d. 607/1210) became the Chishti standard-bearer, he welcomed as fellow *mashaikh* both Abd al-Qadir Gilani and Abu Madyan Maghribi.

Abd ar-Rahman’s primary purpose is to retell the saga of Persian/Indo-Persian Sufism as a single dramatic endeavor shaped by the Unseen for the benefit of humankind. Yet from the nineteenth generation on, that is, from the time of Shaykh Farid al-Din Ganji Shakar (d. 664/1265), a major Chishti saint in the Sultanate period, to the end of *Mir’at al-asrar*, the Indo-Persian actors begin to overshadow their Persian predecessors. After the eighteenth generation, few if any non-Indian saints are even mentioned, and the reason is directly connected to place and its importance for structuring collective identity. Shaykh Abd ar-Rahman is not only a Chishti master; he is also the incumbent of a shrine in Avadh, well to the east of Delhi in modern-day Uttar Pradesh.

Authenticating Avadh as an urban Muslim realm is as delicate as it is crucial for Shaykh Abd ar-Rahman. He traces his own spiritual lineage back through the Sabiri rather than the Nizami branch of the Chishtiyya. That lineage is beset with chronological difficulties that cloud its initial years. Its eponymous founder was one Shaykh Ala al-Din Ali ibn Ahmad Sabir, who died in 691/1291 in Kalyar, a town in northern Uttar Pradesh. He is said to have been identical with the Shaykh Ali Sabir, who is briefly mentioned in *Siyar al-auliya* as a disciple of Shaykh Farid al-Din Ganji Shakar. No less an authority than Shaykh Abd al-Haqq, however, questions the conflation of the two names and persons. Even if it were to be accepted, there seems to be more than a generation between Ali Sabir’s successor, Shams al-Din Turi Panipati (d. 718/1318), and his successor, Jalal al-Din Panipati (d. 765/1364). Further comprising the historical markings of the lineage is the fact that Ahmad Abd al-Haqq (d. 837/1434), who succeeds Jalal al-Din and is the biological as well as spiritual ancestor of Abd ar-Rahman, was not born until ca. 751/1350.  

Yet our concerns with chronological plausibility and historical accuracy were not Abd ar-Rahman’s. Instead of lingering on these hiatuses and discrepancies, he paints a colorful canvas of spirituality that includes all the major figures of the Nizami branch of the Chishtiyya as part of his own mystical legacy. Unlike Dara Shikoh’s brief reminders, these are full, vivid accounts of both Persian and non-Persian saints of earlier eras. The organization by successive *tahqiq* or generations, despite the chronological discrepancies, draws attention to the preeminent Sufi authority (the “axis” or *qutb*) of each age. From the perspective of Abd ar-Rahman’s lineage, the qutb of each age, since the appearance of Shaykh Ali Sabir, had to be, and has been, a Sabiri Chishti master. Yet his is not a partisan view arguing for Sabiris over Nizamis, Chishtis over other Sufis, Sufis over other Muslims, or Muslims over Hindus. Instead, he shows a wide acquaintance with classical Persian Sufism and an appreciation for the luster that its exemplars bring to his own generation and to his own place. While each generation is marked by a qutb, he is situated among, not apart from, other Sufi masters. Although he stands at their head, they add to his preeminence. By this ingenious artifice the author of *Mir’at al-asrar* accomplishes a double purpose: (1) he makes clear how vital was the connection to a Persian Sufi tradition for all Sabiri Chishtis while (2) conferring the highest spiritual rank on a handful of obscure saints, most of whom lived and died and in north-eastern India, specifically in the region of Avadh.

What is evident in Abd ar-Rahman’s wide-ranging account of his saintly forebears is also discernible in the very different project of
Badauni. Although he devotes but one section of his _Muntakhab at-tawarikh_ to saintly biographies, it would be hard to overemphasize their significance for him. Not only do they exude a freshness lacking in the comparable section of _Ain-i Akbari_, itself part of the _Akbarnamah_, the most famous commissioned history of Mughal India, but they also indicate the variety of spiritual endeavors that were taking place outside the royal court. Unlike the narratives of Shaykh Mustafa, the Mahdavi master whom Derry MacLean analyzes in a later essay of this volume, none of the endeavors depicted by Badauni were in explicit competition with the imperial cult increasingly focused on Akbar after 1574, that is, for almost the entirety of his reign at Fatehpur Sikri.

Badauni was a maverick intellect. He had no illusions of obtaining a reward for his book. He did not write to please his powerful patron. At most, he may have entertained the hope of some historical redress. Above all, he wanted to acquit himself at the court of Divine Justice, as is clear from his final supplication: "[If it] please God this work will, for a while, be preserved from the treachery of lack of preservation, of faithlessness, or of evil guardianship ... and being constantly hidden under the protection of God's guardianship, will receive the ornament of acceptance." Yet, even if one discounts the author's special pleading for the authority of his own experience, the sum total of these individual accounts provides an independent profile of Indo-Muslim identity as shaped through institutional Sufism, and it confirms both the resilience of the orders in their regional manifestations and also the significance of local, often urban Sufi lodges.

For Badauni, the strongest claimants to spiritual authenticity were those Shaykhs who combined a grounding in the traditional religious sciences of Sunni Islam with an attachment to mystical pursuits. Two exemplars from less well known urban sites are Shaykh Nizam al-Din Ambethi and Shaykh Daud of Chati. In both cases Badauni dwells on noble ancestry, pursuit of learning, and calm judgment under fire. The present-voice narrative infuses his account of these and other saints. Both Shaykhs come alive as holy men constantly being tested, whether by jealous notables, a distant sultan, or a persistent visitor. With Shaykh Nizam al-Din, it is Badauni who is the overzealous guest, making a verbal faux pas that seems to doom him never to obtain the saint's favor. But in the case of Shaykh Daud, it is the saint himself who is set up to be the victim of a court conspiracy against Sufi masters (perhaps because of his Mahdavi persuasions). His gracious manners and sound learning not only rescue him. They actually turn the tables on his would-be persecutors and secure fame both for him and for the minor urban location of Chati where he taught and prayed and was buried.

The importance of place in Badauni's Sufi biographies becomes still clearer when his vignettes are intercalated with the acknowledged master of Mughal hagiography, Shaykh Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi, whom we noted above. Abd al-Haqq is himself the subject of one of Badauni's sketches, confirming that the production of saintly biographies was a proven means of securing memorialization in one's own right! Like Badauni, Abd al-Haqq was among the Indo-Persian urban elite of the late sixteenth century: even though he survived well into the reign of Shah Jahan, his most famous tazkira, _Akbar al-akhyar_, was written during the third phase of the Akbar period, ca. 999/1591. Also like Badauni, he was not beholden to the new imperial ideology constructed by Abul-Fazl and advocated by Akbar in the late 1570s, for although he studied at Fatehpur Sikri as a teenager, by age twenty-one (1572) he opted to return to Delhi, where he had been born and reared, where his parents still resided, and where he could teach in his father's madrasa.

Unlike Badauni, however, Abd al-Haqq is clearly writing his work for public dissemination. In the light of Badauni's fears, his literary strategy has to be subtly shaped, at once revealing and concealing his true intentions. Unable to disagree with the emperor directly, he also cannot follow the not so subtle pattern of Badauni's clandestine work: to criticize those who were the confidants of the emperor, especially Faizi and Abul-Fazl. Instead, Abd al-Haqq constructs his work in such a way that it both supports Akbar's imperial agenda and offers an alternative set of spiritual authorities. He lauds the Chishtis epigones of virtue but does not dwell on Shaykh Salim. Rather, he adopts a diachronic scheme that begins with the Chishtis and so with Muni al-Din and then progresses generationally through the Delhi Sultanate to the Akbari era. The saints who merit most extensive attention and whose biographies mirror Abd al-Haqq's disposition are the later Qadirs. They were the spiritual precursors of his father, Sayf ad-din, and also his own mentor, Abul-Wahhab. So generous does he appear to be toward all saints that a censor would have been hard-pressed to fault him on either his organizational strategy or his more than 250 individual entries. In short, Abd al-Haqq attempted to be more than a pawn in the grand design for expanding Mughal hegemony that Akbar, with assistance from his couriers, directed. Yet the Delhi savant could not operate outside the constraints of a bureaucratic structure that dominated, even as it animated, all aspects of the emergent Indo-Persian culture complex, and he himself was
prone to privilege those saints whose labor confirmed the region of northern India where he himself lived and labored, prayed and fasted, and died. The very process of memory and recording had its constraints: Not all Indo-Persian memorative communications had the freshness of Badauni or the comprehensiveness of Abd al-Haqq. While the period of Mughal imperial expansion made possible the concept of a pan-Indian scope in historical writing, as we have seen above, most later tazkiras tended to have a more limited scope, because of the restricted audience for whom their authors were recording as they tried to memorialize the saints of earlier epochs. Rather than the analytical study of tazkiras, which might generate new categories, one too often finds a replication of the genre, still another tazkira of tazkiras rather than a creative or locally derived approach to memorialization.

In the colonial period we find the routinization of tazkira writing taken to new depths of serial logic. The idea of the comprehensive or cataloging tazkira, one which listed Sufis of all orders in tabular form, became prevalent, in part due to the influence of maps and censuses taking. Examples of such compendia abound, the most notable being the Masālik al-Salikin: Tazkira al-Wasilin of Mirza Muhammad Abd al-Sattar Baig (Agra: Matha’ Faid, n.d.) (Urdu) and Hadiqat al-Ashrāf fi Akhbar al-Ashrāf of Imam Bakhsh (Lahore, 1364/1944).

More interesting for our general thesis is the way that Indian cities become Muslim holy spaces for certain Sufi tazkira authors. From an early date Ajmer had been recast as Madina in the biography of Mu’in al-Din Chishti, but more extensive still was the new topography of holy cities charted in Kalimat al-Sadiqin of Muhammad Sadiq Dhalavi Kashmiri Hamadani. The work is a tazkira of the Sufis buried in Delhi up to the year 1023/1614. The author, a student of Baqibillah, the Delhi-based Naqshbandi Shaykh, whose prize disciple was Ahmad Shirhindi, discussed in the next essay by David Darreel, claims to have modeled his work on the Kasha‘ahat of Kashif. Consider how the author depicts Delhi as Muslim “sacred space.” In his preface, he asks God to protect Delhi from calamities, and then continues:

Know, may God support you with the light of gnosis, that Delhi is a very large and noble city and that certain of the saints of the nation (ummat) have said things about it like, “One in a thousand and very few out of the multitude recognize its greatness.” Thus, whoever has the least understanding and the slightest knowledge will surely recognize that after the two holy cities (of Mecca and Madina), if there is any nobility to be found in a place or greatness in a land, it is in this noble land which is distinguished completely over the rest of cities and is exceptional. Therefore it is said by the common folk that Delhi is a little Mecca and even the elite have no doubt of its greatness. Everyone asserts its exaltedness, whether due to the fact that the great ones of the religion, the ulama among the people of certainty, the great shaikhs, the reputable wise men, the powerful rulers, and the exalted nobles have filled this city and have been buried here, or due to its fine buildings, delightful gardens and pleasant localities ...

According to some esteemed personages, since one of the people of mystical intuition said in elaboration, “All of Delhi is declared to be a mosque,” all of this city is distinguished from other places by its greatness and nobility. In summary, these verses of Khwâja Khusrav inform us of the greatness of this city and certain of its sites.

Noble Delhi, shelter of religion and treasure,
It is the Garden of Eden, may it last forever.
A veritable earthly Paradise in all its qualities
May Allah protect it from calamities.
If it but heard the tale of this garden,
Mecca would make the pilgrimage to Hindustan.

Yet Delhi was not the sole claimant for divine favor as the urban Muslim capital of South Asia. “Even more than the Akhbar al-Akhbar, which is a Delhi-oriented work, Khaznâ’at al-Aシリya is Lahore directed, including the entire region to the North and North west of Delhi.” It was in the late 1800s that Mutti Gulam Sarwar Lahori wrote his massive and impressive Sufi tazkira, Khaznâ’at al-Aシリya. It was a memorative communication that privileged Lahore over all other Indo-Muslim capital cities, and in the postcolonial period Lahore acquired a renewed importance with the creation of Pakistani sacred space. Since Ajmer and, of course, Delhi remained within the Republic of India, the sacral role of Lahore became upgraded through its “patron,” ‘Ali Hujwiri, whose tomb, the Data Darbar, has been increasingly celebrated during the last half century.

The Data Darbar underscores what has been hinted at but not developed in the literary focus of this essay. Heightening the power of tazkiras to both create and sustain Muslim cultural memory in urban South
Asia was the cemetery. All tazkiras took note not only of death dates but also of burial places, so that the symbolic resonance of the cemetery was crucial for Indo-Muslim urban identity. On the one hand, the tomb-cults were transitional spaces between the higher world and this one, but on the other hand, and with increasing emphasis, they were symbols of a distinctly Muslim identity in the Indian context (since Hindus cremate their dead). Graveyards as sites, then, are both a locus of inscription for local communal memory and the means of this inscription.\footnote{Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence} 

Conclusions: Space and Identity

Muslims over time imagined their space in South Asia differently as their sense of identity changed in the light of social and political development. This change may be traced in the organizing and structuring principles of the tazkira genre.

The frame for this genre is memorialization, or better, memorial communication. One key element in this is inscription, which is done through the writing of memory on new spaces whose imagined shape is also subject to reconfiguration. Critical also in the South Asian tazkira tradition is the language of inscription, which serves to define a space even as it is the medium for writing it.

In the course of this process, spaces have expanded from cities to regions to nations, while the principles of affiliation have loosened: no longer direct initiation, or even continuity in space and time, they have relied on a sense of “imagined community,” as suggested by Benedict Anderson in his classic study of the construction of nationalist identities.\footnote{Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence}

While the production of books generally encouraged a mnemonic reflex, it went well beyond memorializing dead heroes, whether poets or saints, in the Indo-Persian tazkira genre favored by South Asian urban Muslim elites. Whatever their location or their authors’ motivation, the premodern tazkiras laid a claim to Muslim space in South Asia. They did so by Islamicizing the soil, by creating a “new” home, by configuring “new” spiritual and intellectual centers, and also by laying out “new” circuits of pilgrimage.\footnote{Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence}

The late Mughal and early modern period introduced a different tone in tazkira writing. While the urge to celebrate cities did not disappear, it appeared in a new guise. The desire to project memorial communication that is felt in times of expansion takes a different turn in times of crisis or despair. Among Indo-Muslim versifiers it has been reflected in the laments over chaos in the poetic shahir askab tradition.\footnote{Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence}

\begin{quote}
Is ahd ko na janiyee agla sa ahd Mir voh daur ab nahin, voh zamin asman nahin

\end{quote}

These times are nothing compared to the old days, Mir;

That age has passed, that heaven and earth are no longer.

Mir

Beyond Mir but through his agency, what we discover as the final accent on tazkiras is the possibility of mapping the altered sense and shape of urban Hindustan. Tazkira writers continue to project an inscribed space and identity in the colonial and post-independence periods of South Asian history, but the modern/postmodern reflex traces a more solemn sense of spatial orientation and organization of collective memory in contemporary tazkiras.

The modern/postmodern space is one of aggressive retrieval of memory, for example, the proliferation of translations of old tazkiras from Persian into Urdu in Pakistan, as well as attempts to erase it. In the case of the poetic tazkiras, new canons of literary appreciation\footnote{Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence and even an altered mode of eloquent expression have rendered them obso-lete. In Ab-i Hayat, Azaz mourns the fact that “the page of history would be turned—the old families destroyed, their offspring so ignorant that they would no longer know even their own family traditions.”} Pritchett observes, “The critical attitudes and vocabulary used by the tazkiras are all but unintelligible to most scholars—and in fact arouse considerable disdain.”\footnote{Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence}

It is, above all, the threat of chaos\footnote{Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence} that looms in the remarks of the late tazkira author Muhammad Din Kalim.\footnote{Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence} In contrast to the hope of relocation, which marked many of the Indo-Persian tazkiras from Mughal India that we examined above, Kalim sees dislocation, even erasure, as the theme for his own memorial communication. Commenting on the contemporary situation in Lahore, he laments:

Wherever you see an old grave, the keepers or greedy persons have spent quite a bit of money on fixing it up, popularizing it, and giving it some name which is unknown in the old sources so that they make it a means of earning money. [He then lists several such shrines saying, “God knows who is really buried there.”]\footnote{Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence}

Nowadays the style of constructing new tombs has incorporated a lot of use of marble and other expensive stones and even the use of inlaid mirrors in some, so that you don’t feel that you are in a graveyard but rather in a Shush Mahal. These tombs have proliferated to the point that they are found in every lane, street, bazaar.
field, government park, and even in cinemas and government offices etc. even though there is no historical mention of them. ... For some years I have been shocked by the lamentable situation that certain disolute persons have pitched tents in the public graveyards out of which they deal in drugs.

In response, Kalim writes of the special features of his work. He personally visited the shrines he writes about, he investigated the accurate names of the persons whom he mentions, and he reports the names of poets falsely attributed to shrines when no such individuals were ever known to exist. Even while decrying "the lamentable situation" he confronts, he finds in the act of writing a recuperation of the past for the benefit of responsible mediation in the present; he remains a memorative communicator.

And so there is a link between the oldest and the most recent phases of tazkira writing among South Asian urban Muslim elites. Kalim, as a contemporary tazkira writer, finds himself responding to an imminent threat of chaos, yet his remains a quest for the recovery of history, not a repetition of the past. Like the poet Ghālib, he struggles to understand how the act of erasure still retains its quality of a trace, a reminder, an emberlike hope. As Ghālib himself attests, with the fullness of his own sense of irony and place:

\[
y\text{a rabb zamana mujh ko mtāta hai kis li\text{e}}
\\text{laub-i jahan peh ār-i muqarrar nahn huft maftī}
\text{O Lord, why is time erasing me?}
\text{I am not a repeated letter on the tablet of this world.}
\]

Whether one accents the trace that is never a repeated letter, or bemoans the self erased by time, one acknowledges in both cases the power of the Lord, the One who can both erase and re-create all that is. The poet, like the saint, locates his faith in language and in space. Ghālib implores the Omnificent through Urdu (or Indo-Persian), and he implores Him from a familiar place, the still sacralized though much reduced Muslim space of Delhi. Memorative communication thus becomes more than a trace. It continues to embody hope; it projects the erased self in a reduced space as the servant before the Lord, the letter of Muslim identity etched not on the tablet of this world but on the Tablet that is both preserved and memorized, al-laub al-mahfuẓ.

Notes

3. Ammenarie Schimmel comments on this and other couples of Ghālib that are apposite to the present topic in her chapter "Poetry and Caligraphy," in *A Dance of Sparks: Imayogy of Fire in Ghālib's Poetry* (Delhi: Vikas, 1979), 112-36.
4. Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995), 179. There are other aspects of Benjamin's project, especially his dialectical sparring with Marx, Heidegger, and Freud, that lie beyond the scope of our article, but his accent on time as nonlinear, at once disruptive and recuperative, is key to our own project.
5. The actual phrase "memorative communication" is coined by Peter Osborne in trying to distinguish the benefit of Benjamin's approach to tradition from the flawed approaches of Gadamer and Ricoeur. Insofar as "memorative communication" projects historical narrative in its living relationship to the present, the two categories elide, but memorative communication accents the role of the one who both remembers and uses memory to communicate; hence its special benefit for interpreting the catalytic role of the Indo-Persian tazkira.
7. Noting here H. A. R. Gibb's statement that "the biographical dictionary is a wholly indigenous creation of the Islamic community": Gibb, "Islamic Biographical Literature," in B. Lewis and P. M. Holt, *Historians of the Middle East* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 54. Reflecting on the inclusion of very ordinary persons in the biographical dictionaries (tabaṣṣūt), Gibb further observes that the history of the Islamic community is essentially the contribution of individual men and women to the building up and transmission of its specific culture. That is, it is these persons (rather than the political governors) who represent or reflect the active force of Muslim society.


15. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 414–15. This is the very couplet cited at the outset of the current chapter.


21. Literally, “keeping in mind,” or as one Sufi puts it, “keeping in the presence of God in all situations” (jad means “memory”), this refers technically to one of the steps of practice in the Naqshbandiya Sufi order that might be summarized as remaining aware at all times. See Fritz Meier, *Zwei Abhandlungen über die Naqshbandiya* (Istanbul: Franz Steiner, 1994), 44–46.


23. These consist of ritualized recitations of rhymed spiritual genealogies of previous saints in a particular Sufi lineage.


27. The phrase was used by Stetkevych in *The Spheres of Nadir*, 121.


31. Fatehpuri, *Nigar*, 14–15. They were Nahat ash-Shuara of Mir Taqi, Gulshan-i Gofur of Hamid Aurangabadi, and Tufaylat as-Shi’i of Afzal Beg Qazvini. The latter two were produced in the Deccan, but they mentioned northern poets as well.


38. Pritchett describes *bayaz* as “the ubiquitous little notebook that lovers of poetry carry around with them for recording verses that caught their fancy”: *Net of Awareness*, 66.


42. Petievich, *Assembly of Ritas*, 204.

43. Pritchett also notes the role of tazkiras as being “the most important genre of literary record and commentary that existed in Urdu”: *Net of Awareness*, 74.
44. Two works specifically organized according to this paradigm are Nur ul Hassan Hashuni, Dilli ka Daibstan-i Sha’ri (Delhi school of poetry) (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1971) and A. L. Siddiqi, Lahri or Daibstan-i Sha’ri (Lucknow school of poetry) (Lahore: Urdu Markaz, 1955). The paradigm was criticized by Ali Javed Zaidi, Do Adabi Iskuli (Two literary schools) (Lucknow: U. P. Urdu Academy, 1970), a work which is examined in Petievich, Assembly of Rivals, 89–95.

45. Petievich, Assembly of Rivals, ix, xiii.

46. Ibid., 13–15.


51. Ernst, Eternal Garden, 89–90.

52. Abd al-Qadir al-Badauni’s Muntablhab at-tawarikh (Summation of histories) was translated into English at the turn of the century; see G. S. A. Ranking (vol. 1), W. H. Lowes (vol. 2), and Wolseley Haig (vol. 3) (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1884–1925; reprint, Delhi: Idarat-Adabiyat-i Delli, 1973). Although volume 3, with which we are concerned here, abounds with inaccuracies, it is still remarkable to have an English version of this maverick biographical review of Sufi masters provided by Badauni.


54. See Badauni, Muntablhab at-tawarikh, 3:335–36.

55. The Shaykhi’s experience at the Mughal court was interrupted by a five-year absence (1587–92), most of it spent on a “pilgrimage of penance” to the Hijaz, where he furthered his own studies of hadith with the Indian ulama, Shaykh Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi, who also receives prominent attention in Akbar al-anki, see N. H. Zaidi, “Abd al-Haq Mohaddith Delhiwali,” in Encyclopaedia Iranica (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982): 1/2: 113–14.

56. Ernst, Eternal Garden, 90.


58. Lawrence, Notes from a Distant Shore, 70.