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Tracing the Inscription of Identity through the Tazkira Tradition in Muslim South Asia¹

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Abstract. This article reflects on broad themes of memory, identity, and place running through the South Asian *tazkira* tradition, ranging from pre-modern Persian examples to contemporary Urdu works, with a focus on Sufi works of memorialization.

Keywords: *Tazkira* Tradition, Muslim South Asia, Sufi Texts.

Introduction

In the following paper I deliberately broaden the category of explicitly religious literature in order to consider the relationship between the Islamic religion and the literary/writing activities of South Asian Muslims as exemplified in one biographical genre known as the *tazkira*, or memorial.

Currently, traditional ways of categorizing literature, such as the rubric of the nation, are being called into question. For example, Aijaz Ahmad, in an article entitled “Indian Literature,” calls “national literature” an opaque category that may obscure more than it illuminates. This is due to the problem of positing a theoretical unity or coherence by assembling its history in terms of adjacent but discrete histories of major language-based literatures. In South Asia, the linguistic complexity of the region, combined with the rapidly shifting significance of language choice, complicates the project of attempting anything like an overview of religious literature. One traditional strategy had been to define literature according to the language that carries it, for example, as was employed in the Harrasowitz series on various regional literatures, such

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as Urdu, Sindhi, etc.¹ The very existence of a volume in the same series organized around the designation “Islamic literatures of the Indian subcontinent”² demonstrates the fact that complex historical and linguistic relationships complicate the project of sorting writings into discrete linguistically defined compartments.

This brings us to question other aspects of the problematic of categorizing religious literature. For some anthologists, “Islamic spiritual literature” refers only to Sufi texts, while for others religious literature includes those works that might be suitable for a madrasa curriculum. The impact of colonialism, new technologies of disseminating information, and mass education all contribute to shattering any monolithic concept of religious literature.

In summary, a concept such as “Islamic Religious Literature” is perhaps only useful in so far as it leads us to broadly consider developments such as changing social and intellectual contexts for the production and significance of this literature.

Over the course of the Muslim presence in South Asia, the issue of language has been critical in determining the audience, genre, and purpose of religious literature. While Arabic is the sacred language of the Qur’an, it was in fact accessible to only a few products of the madrasa education system. In Muslim South Asia there was certainly a strong tradition of producing such experts,³ and in general their works were contributed to in the most traditional fields of Qur’an commentary, Hadith studies, and Islamic law.

Persian remained the dominant language of South Asian Muslim religious literature for a long period (approx. 1300-1900). Many works relating to the Islamic sciences were translated from Arabic into Persian, or Arabic texts were commented on in Persian. In addition, many original Persian works were composed, especially in the areas of mysticism, religious biography, and popular devotion. Thus, the vernacularization and reproduction of sacred tradition displayed certain gradations of linguistic appropriateness—a certain religious “core” of works normally commented on in Arabic—whereas other genres demanding a less specialized educational preparation and targeting a different audience were composed in Persian. Much of the literature of the regional languages remained oral, sung, or recited, thus allowing greater participation of nonspecialists and females.⁴

The regional languages of South Asia were vehicles for the spread of Islamic knowledge and devotion through the activities of poet saints

who expressed their teachings in the idiom of the people.⁵ In some regional languages there is scarcely any written literature; in other languages the output is limited to mystical poetry and popular religious tracts such as the lineages of Sufi orders and catechisms of basic practices. Rural audiences and females may not have been conversant with Persian or even Urdu. Under British patronage, an Urdu prose tradition emerged in the late 1800s; thus, it is only in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that one finds a burgeoning core of religious works written in Urdu.

From the medieval to the pre-modern period, many genres of writing in South Asia shift in terms of defining a sense of location. While earlier texts such as those of Āzād Bilgrāmī (1782) constructed a Hindustan and an Indian identity that had its own talents and charm in the face of Arabocentrism,⁶ later texts increasingly celebrated particular cities as sites of culture and sanctity.⁷ In the twentieth century, Urdu increasingly came to represent the national religious identity of Muslims living in regions that are today found in India and Pakistan, although not without certain tensions.⁸ Attempts to extend this identification with Urdu to East Pakistan, later Bangladesh, were, however, a failure.⁹

Contemporary discussions of biographical writing have pointed out the problematic of its being situated between the fields of history and literature.¹⁰ In the case of Islamic civilization, biographical writings have played a distinctive role from an early period until the present. The following brief study of one South Asian biographical genre, the *tazkira*, attempts to portray its role in inscribing Muslim identity and sustaining collective memory throughout changing historical circumstances.

naqsh faryādī hai kis kī shokhī-e tahrīr kā

kāghazī hai pairahan har paikar-i tasvīr kā

Of whose careless recording does the inscription complain?

For every representation wears a paper shirt.

Ghalib¹¹

This approach will investigate how the *tazkira* form inscribed identity through its tone, evocation of symbols, and role in the intellectual culture of Muslim South Asia. I will consider the genre as a whole as well as some representative works written in Persian and later in Urdu.

Initially I intend to propose a way of reading *tazkiras*, which provides an entry into the daunting proliferation of exemplars of this

form. As one anthologist remarked, “Writers of *tazkira* have been much criticized for their seemingly irrelevant style of diction.”¹² A common complaint of critics is the lack of any consistent principles of selectivity, critical evaluation of facts, or analytical framework in the *tazkira* tradition.¹³ Some scholars of contemporary third-world literature have raised a point that I attempt to address in this paper, namely, “Is it possible to discuss these texts in terms of a critical theory—isn't description all you can do?”

While biographical literature is not exclusive to Islamic societies, it fulfills a particularly prominent and significant role in their literary historical traditions. The persistence of certain general cultural themes typical of Islamic civilization is evident in the *tazkira* genre in Muslim South Asia, for example, the moods of nostalgia or boasting, which we can trace back even to the *Jahiliyya* poetry of the Arabs.¹⁴ The genealogical preoccupation of the Arabs merged with the creation of a sacred history embodied by the early Muslim community in early biographical compendia written in Arabic, such as the *Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd (ca. 784), as well as the practice of extensively listing sometimes 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.¹⁵

In terms of thematic characteristics, the nature of Islamic civilization, at least from the perspective of the celebrators of its intellectual vibrancy, had an overwhelmingly urban focus, and the memorialization of cities is a feature of this literature, which expanded into the space of Muslim South Asia.¹⁶ Nobles, intellectuals, poets, and saints are major categories of persons memorialized in Islamic biographical literature, and this is also the case in South Asia. Principles of organization of these compendia, known first in Arabic as *tabaqāt* (ranks or classes)¹⁷ and later in the Persianate tradition as *tazkirat*, included the rank, affiliation, profession, year or century of death, and locality of the individual's primary activities.

The word “*tadhkirah*” means “a memorial.” *Tazkira* collections of the lives of poets, mystics, or scholars are common in later periods, especially in Iran and South Asia. *Tazkirāt* (Urdu “*tazkire*”) are similar to the Arabic *tabaqāt* genre in their presenting lives through anecdotes and offering further narrative biographical material on the subject of the notice. They do not, however, necessarily incorporate ranking systems as *tabaqāt* do, although in the Persianate/Urdu context, generational,

alphabetical, or other factors of ordering by affinity or family relationships may be used.

A distinctive biographical genre that developed in India within the Chishti order is the *malḥūzāt*, or collection of sessions of prominent Sufi masters as preserved and recorded by their disciples.¹⁸ Carl Ernst has made a useful distinction between the early *malḥūzāt* collections preserved for didactic purposes and later, often spurious, works that, through their reinforcing of the authoritativeness of the teachings and the order, became included in the canon of South Asian Sufi memory.¹⁹

In particular, I would like to focus on the themes of place and memory as shaping the structure and focus of saintly tazkiras and the tazkiras of poets in order to inscribe a Muslim presence in South Asia.

My argument is that while these works were, as their name suggests, primarily intended to memorialize individuals, they simultaneously located these individuals in imagined spaces, which enabled the sanctification of new soil. The trope of the city sanctified, ennobled, and defined by those who had passed there and especially those who were buried within its precincts was one form of inscription. In the case of the poetic tazkiras, the language and imagery of a city's poets inscribed another sort of privileged space and often set the scene for a particular "state of mind" associated with that place.²⁰ A further approach suggested by this study is the possibility of mapping the changing sense and shape of this inscribed space and identity in the pre-modern, colonial, and post-independence periods of South Asian history through tracing the spatial orientation and organization of memory in the contemporary tazkiras.

The title's theme of the "inscription" of memory has an obvious resonance with the loaded significance of the symbolism entailed in the construction and destruction of buildings in South Asia.²¹ "Erasure" can also serve as a metaphor appropriate to the predilection of some contemporary Islamist movements to destroy shrines and tombs as if the physical act of destruction could somehow efface local and diverse interpretations of the sacred.²²

Before proceeding to the body of this paper, which reviews a number of Sufi tazkiras, a brief note on the concept of memory is in order.

The Concept of Memory in Muslim South Asia

A study of memory in medieval European culture, *The Book of Memory* by Mary Carruthers,²³ suggests some interesting approaches to

looking at memorialization in pre-modern 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."²⁴ The "pen" which inscribes is also mentioned in the Qur'an,²⁵ and this imagery has been drawn upon throughout the interpretive tradition of Muslim neo-Platonic philosophy and in the philosophical and poetic tradition following Ibn 'Arabi's Sufi metaphysical system.²⁶ 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-lauh al-mahfūz*); note that "*mahfūz*" means both "preserved" and "memorized."

Schimmel, in her discussion of "the Pen" in a section on "letter symbolism in Sufi literature," notes that:

The mystics have dwelt on another aspect of pen symbolism as well. There is a famous ḥadīth: "The heart of the faithful is between the two fingers of the All-compassionate, and He turns it wherever He wants."

This ḥadīth 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 ḥadīth 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 Ghalib, the great poet of Muslim India (d. 1869), opened his Urdu *Dīwān* with a line that expresses the complaint of the letters against their inventor, for 'every letter has a paper shirt.'²⁷

The same Aristotelian categories of form and matter, which structured medieval European thinking about the process of creation, whether divine or human, were 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, which was understood to be possible only in the light of retrieved memory. Tracing the development of this model in Socrates and Plato, Carruthers observes that

In fact, Socrates is at some pains to say that his way of describing the memory as being like seals made by a signet

ring is not new but really is very old. This is important because it is a model based on how the eye sees in reading, not how the ear hears. In recollection, one looks at the contents of memory, rather than hearing or speaking them; the mediator is visual.²⁸

Coexisting with and sustaining this centrality of memory in classical Islamic civilization were the now almost forgotten technologies of the activity of memorizing and the rhetorical strategies that permitted the retrieval of memorized information in speech and writing.²⁹

While a detailed consideration of the madrasa educational system and the role of classical Muslim rhetoric in structuring literacy is beyond the scope of the present study, it is intriguing to suggest the effects of certain features of the experience of madrasa study, the visual arrangement of text and commentary on the written or printed page, and the tradition of transforming essential texts or principles into rhyme. Examples can be found in al-Suyūṭī's *Alfiyya*,³⁰ which was composed incorporating the rules of Ḥadīth criticism, and in Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi's undertaking a rhyming translation into Persian of the standard manual of rhetoric, the *Ṣarf-i Mīr*.³¹

Memory itself was understood in Muslim South Asia as including various acts or practices such as *dhikr* (ritualized recitation of pious phrases that are sanctioned by Qur'anic injunctions to remember God in all situations),³² *yād dāsht*,³³ *taṣawwur*,³⁴ and *hifẓ*. In Sufi practice, for example, memory was ritualized in the recitation of *shajaras* or *khaṭms*,³⁵ in which the lineage of a Sufi order would be ritually recited and the spirits of the departed saints were believed to present themselves and bestow blessings on those assembled.

Sufi *dhikr* is a more ritualized form of basic Islamic practice of the remembrance of God through recitation and repetition, and *ghaflat*, i.e., "forgetting" or "negligence," is both a moral shortcoming in terms of religious piety and a personal affront to the beloved in the tradition of poetic love.

This pre-modern sense of memory in Islamic civilization included an appreciation both of memory as "recollection," which constituted a powerful tool for self-awareness and creativity, and memory as nostalgia, which incorporated the emotional dimension of the act of memorialization. Thus, the inscription of memory as a cultural activity involved both an appropriation of power over a space and the creation of an emotional investment in it.

ham parvarish-i lauh-o-qalam karte rahenge
jo dil pe guzartī hai raqam karte rahenge
We will safeguard the tablet and the pen,
We will record whatever the heart experiences.

Faiz Ahmad Faiz³⁶

Language and writing, then, both inscribe and preserve what is essential. “Literature was thought to contribute to the ethical life of the individual and the public memory of society,” writes Carruthers in reference to medieval Europe. The case of writing South Asian Muslim tazkiras suggests the further intention and effect of “making Muslim space” through the appropriation of place and the inscription of memory.

In his study of the Chishtī shrine complex at Khuladabad, *Eternal Garden*, Ernst recounts two stories connected with memory that link the classical Islamic tradition with South Asian hagiographic practices such as tazkira composition. The Chishtī saint Nizām al-Dīn Auliya’ (1325), in commending the efforts of the compiler of his *malfūzāt*, Ḥasan Sijzī, suggests a parallel to Abū Hurayra (ca. 678), the most prolific transmitter of Prophetic *ḥadīth* according to the Sunni tradition. “Nizam al-Dīn said that the Prophet told Abu Hurayra to extend the skirt of his garment whenever the Prophet spoke, then slowly gather in the garment when the words were finished, and place his hand upon his breast; this routine would enable him to memorize Muḥammad’s words.”³⁷ Ernst finds the same motif of extending the skirt of the garment to collect words of wisdom and guidance echoed in the *Khayr al-Majālis*, where Hamid Qalandar speaks of the method for recording the sessions of the Chishtī saint, Chirāgh-i-Dihlī.³⁸

The symbolism of extending and pulling in the skirt of a garment in terms of a literate tradition evokes the process of interpretation through reading inward from the commentaries on the margins of texts. This also sets up a resonance with the emotional quality of memorizing and preserving the words of an individual and the importance of personal devotion. Grasping the daman or skirt of a garment is, in fact, the gesture of the petitioner or supplicant, resonant with the paper shirt worn by the complainant of Ghalib's couplet cited at the outset of this paper.

Patterns in Sufi Tazkiras

In the case of the Sufi tazkira tradition, as in the poetic one, inspiration was drawn from Persian models, in this case, ‘Attar’s famous

Tadhkirāt al-Auliya, as well as from the Naqshbandī-inspired models, Jāmī's *Nafahat al-Uns*³⁹ and Kāshifī's *Rashahāt*.⁴⁰

A kind of partial tazkira is suggested by a section of the earlier *Kashf al-Mahjūb* of Hujwērī, which establishes the idea of *ṭarīqa*, or Sufi order. This schema of fourteen Sufi lineages or families became the organizing feature for many later tazkiras despite its often poor fit, which generated many anomalous categories.⁴¹ An interesting suggestion is to contrast the *ṭarīqa*-based tazkiras with those that catalogue all orders, since by the 16th century multiple affiliations had become common.⁴²

Speaking of the Mughal period, Ernst notes of its hagiographies that the period of imperial expansion made possible the concept of a pan-Indian scope in historical writing.⁴³ We may argue that in general, tazkiras have tended to have a more limited scope, and that the readership issue of tazkiras is subordinate because of the fact that it is primarily the act of writing in order to record and memorialize, which is of importance. This, in turn, has often made the analytical study of tazkiras difficult in the sense that one rarely gets beyond a replication of the genre and ends up creating yet another tazkira of tazkiras.

In the colonial period the idea of the comprehensive or cataloging tazkira became prevalent with the influence of maps and census taking.⁴⁴ Examples are the *Masālik al-Salikīn: Tazkira al-Wāṣilīn* (Paths of the Spiritual Travellers; Tazkira of those who have Achieved Union) of Mirza Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Saṭṭār Baig⁴⁵ (Urdu) and *Ḥadīqat al-Asrār fī Akhbār al-Abrār* (Enclosed Garden of the Secrets of the Pious Ones) of Imam Bakhsh.⁴⁶

From an early period, cities played a role in defining the scope of tazkiras. This reflects the impulse to create “new” sacred spaces. For example, Ajmer was recast as Madina⁴⁷ in the biography of Mu’in al-Dīn Chishtī. A further example of South Asian centers as the “new holy cities” is to be found in *Kalimāt al-Ṣādiqīn* of Muḥammad Ṣādiq Dihlavī Kashmīrī Hamadānī.⁴⁸ The work is a tazkira of the Sufis buried in Delhi up to the year 1023/1614. The author was a student of Baqī b-illāh, Naqshbandi shaykh of Aḥmad Sirhindī, and the work is said to be modeled on the *Rashahāt* of Kāshifī.

This passage from the author’s preface about the city of Delhi serves as an example of the sanctification of the city as a Muslim “sacred space”:

Preface in the description of Delhi,

May God protect it from calamities.

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 (umma) 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 Medina], 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 (*buldān*) 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 ‘*ulamā* among the people of certainty, the great shaykhs, 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....

Since one of the people of mystical intuition said in elaboration, “All of Delhi is declared to be a mosque,” all of this city, according to some esteemed personages, is distinguished from other places by its greatness and nobility. In summary, these verses of *Khawāja Khusrāu* 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 earthy Paradise in all its qualities
May Allāh protect it from calamities.
If it had heard the tale of this garden,
Mecca would make the pilgrimage to Hindustan.⁴⁹

The city-centered tazkira continues into the post-colonial period and acquires a renewed importance with the creation of Pakistani sacred space. With the allocation of Ajmer to India, the role of Lahore and its “patron,” ‘Ali Hujwīrī, whose tomb, the Data Darbār, was increasingly celebrated.

As Bruce Lawrence notes, “Even more than the *Akḥbār al-Akhyār*; which is a Delhi-oriented work, *Khazīna al-Asfīya* (Treasury of the Pure

Ones) is Lahore-directed, but by extension it includes the entire region to the North and North west of Delhi.”⁵⁰ Mufti Ghulām Sarwar Lāhorī in the late 1800s had written *Khazīna al-Aṣfiya* as an essentially Lahore-centered tazkira. More recently Muḥammad al-Dīn Kalīm (d. 1989)⁵¹ and Mian Aḳhlāq Aḥmad (d. 1987) have been prominent in this endeavor of memorializing Lahore through chronicling its saints.

The titles of many tazkira works, for example, *Ḥadīqat al-Auliya* (Enclosed Garden of the Saints)⁵² and *Madīnat al-Auliya*⁵³ (City of Saints), also provide a direct association with the sanctifying motifs of the holy city/Medina, the city of saints, and the paradisiacal garden. In turn, the tazkiras often evoke paradisiacal utopian spaces of cities as gardens, which in turn are set off against the heterotopias of the city as cemetery.⁵⁴ The symbolic resonance of the cemetery in South Asian Islam is both as a transitional space between the higher world and this one and as a symbol of distinctive 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.⁵⁵

“The dominant Islamic vision of the afterlife was not so much a vision of *civitas dei*, but rather of a *hortus dei*, not the city of God but the garden of God, meaning not in a perfect community but in a perfect nature.”⁵⁶ The historian Qazwīnī writes how the Sufis shunned city life, preferring life among the ruins—but Ibn ‘Asākir and al-Khaṭīb al-Baḡhdādī wanted to warn off conquerors by listing the tombs and shrines of their native cities, Damascus and Baghdad, thus emphasizing their sacred character.⁵⁷

Conclusions

Space, Inscription, 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. 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 from being direct initiation to contiguity in space and time to a sense of “imagined community,” as suggested by Benedict Anderson’s study of the construction of nationalist identities.⁵⁸

The production of books, according to Carruthers, generally functioned as mnemonic since “medieval culture was fundamentally memorial.”⁵⁹ The tazkira genre is explicitly so. The scope of this memorializing was both concrete inscription in writing and a nostalgic evocation in mood of what had been. The early tazkiras laid a claim to Muslim space in South Asia by Islamicizing the soil and by creating a “new” home, configuring “new” spiritual and intellectual centers, and laying out “new” circuits of pilgrimage.⁶⁰

The celebrations of cities and the urge to memorialization are felt both in times of expansion and times of crisis or despair, as reflected in the laments over chaos in the poetic “shahr āshob” tradition, for example, Mir’s verses:⁶¹

is ‘ahd ko na jāne aglā sa ‘ahd Mīr
voh daur ab nahīn, voh zamīn āsmān nahīn
These times are nothing compared to the old days,
Mir That age has passed, that heaven and earth is no longer.

The modern/postmodern space is both one of aggressive retrieval of memory, for example, the proliferation of translations of old tazkiras from Persian into Urdu in Pakistan, and attempts to erase it. In the case of the poetic tazkiras, new canons of literary appreciations⁶² and even an altered mode of eloquent expression has rendered them obsolete. In *Āb-i Hayāt*, Muḥammad Husain Āzād (d. 1910) 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.”⁶³ As Frances Pritchett observes, “the critical attitudes and vocabulary used by the tazkiras are all but unintelligible to most scholars—and in fact arose considerable disdain.”⁶⁴

The threat of chaos⁶⁵ looms in the remarks of the late tazkira compiler, Muḥammad al-Dīn Kalīm, commenting on the contemporary situation in Lahore:

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, “Only God knows who is really buried there.”]

Nowadays the style of constructing new tombs has incorporated a lot of use of marble and other expensive stones and even the use of in- laid mirrors in some, so that you don’t feel that you are in a grave- yard but rather in a Shish 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 dissolute persons have pitched tents in the public graveyards out of which they deal in drugs.⁶⁶

In response, Kalīm writes of the special features of his work in that he personally visited the shrines he writes about, investigated the accurate names of the persons whom he mentions, and reported the names of pirs falsely attributed to shrines when no such individuals were ever known to exist.⁶⁷

I believe that this well illustrates one impulse to memorialize on the part of today’s tazkira writers. In this case the response to the contemporary threat of chaos is the quest for a recovery of history. This may occur in response to developments arising both from rapid social and cultural change and from resistance to deliberate ideological projects of erasure in order to institute new counter-memories.

yā rab zamāna mujh ko miṭātā hai kis liye
lauḥ-i jahān pe ḥarf-i mukarrar nahīn hun main
O Lord, why is time erasing me,
I am not a repeated letter on the tablet of this world.



¹ Schimmel, Annemarie. *Classical Urdu Literature from the Beginning to Iqbāl*. Wiesbaden, 1975.

Sindhi Literature. Harrasowitz, 1974.

² Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islamic Literatures of India*. Harrasowitz, 1972.

³ Ahmad, M. G. Zubaid. *The Contribution of Indo-Pakistan to Arabic Literature*. Lahore: Ashraf, 1968.

⁴ Eaton, Richard. *Sufis of Bijapur: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Bilgrāmī, Āzād. *Suḥbat ul-Marjān*. Bombay, 1886.

- ⁷ See also, Hermansen, Marcia. "The Evolution of South Asian Muslim *Tazkiras* as Memorials of Places and Persons" *Urdu Studies* 5 (1, 2025), 69-93 and Kia, Mana. *Persianate selves: memories of place and origin before nationalism*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford. 2020.
- ⁸ Shackle, Christopher. "Punjabi in Lahore" in *Modern Asian Studies* 4 (1970): 239-67, and "Rival Linguistic Identities in Pakistan Punjab" in *Rule, Protest, Identity—Aspects of Modern South Asia*, eds. Peter Robb and David Taylor. London: Curzon Press, 1978, Pp 213-34.
- ⁹ For example, see Kabir, M. G. "Religion, Language and Nationalism in Bangladesh" in *Religion, Nationalism, and Politics in Bangladesh*, ed. Rafiuddin Ahmed (New Delhi: South Asian Publications, 1990), 35-49.
- ¹⁰ A brief introduction is Thomas F. Mayer and D.R. Woolf, eds., *The Rhetorics of Life Writing in Early Modern Europe*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995, 1-19.
- ¹¹ Schimmel comments on this and other couplets of Ghalib which are apposite to the present topic in her chapter "Poetry and Calligraphy" in *A Dance of Sparks: Imagery of Fire in Ghalib's Poetry*. Delhi: Vikas, 1979, 112-36.
- ¹² Morrison, George. *Persian Literature from the Earliest Times to the Time of Jāmī*. Leiden: E. J. Brill. 1980. P.14.
- ¹³ Tassy, M. Garcin De. *Histoire de la littérature hindouie et hindoustanie*. Paris; A. Labitte, 1870-1871.
Fatehpūrī, Farmān. (Ed.) *Nigār-i Pakistān: Tazkiron ka tazkira number*, May/June 1964.
- ¹⁴ Discussed, for example, in Stetkevych, Jaroslav. *The Zephyrs of Nejd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabian Nasib*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993, and Sells, Michael. *Desert Tracings: Six Classical Arabian Odes*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989.
- ¹⁵ We note here H.A.R. Gibb's statement that "the biographical dictionary is a wholly indigenous creation of the Islamic community." "Islamic Biographical Literature" in B. Lewis and P.M. Holt, *Historians of the Middle East*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968, 54. Reflecting on the inclusion of very ordinary persons in the biographical dictionaries *tabaqāt*, Gibb further observes (pp. 54-8) 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.
- ¹⁶ "Urdu literature, almost from its very beginnings, has been concerned with city life. The language has functioned for a long time as an urban-centered, but non-regional language." Leslie Fleming, "Two Pakistani Women Writers View the City: The Short Stories of Bano Qudsiyya and Farkhandah Lodhi" in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 25/1:1, quoting A.K. Ramanujan "Towards an Anthology of City Images" in Richard G. *The Tazkira Tradition in Muslim South Asia...*

- Fox, ed., *Urban India: Society, Space and Images*. Winston-Salem, NC: Duke University Press, 1970, 224-44.
- ¹⁷ An extensive review article on the “ṭabaqāt” genre is Ibrahim Hafsi’s “Recherches sur le genre “Ṭabaqāt’ dans la littérature arabe.” *Arabica* 23 (1976), 227-265 and 24 (Feb. 1977), 1-41. (Hafsi, 1976, 77). Hafsi lists and classifies the major ṭabaqāt according to types of persons included (i.e., ḥadīth transmitters, mystics, or poets), and century of composition. Hafsi then formulates his own classification of ṭabaqāt compilers as initiators, innovators, or imitators. Under principles of ranking or classifying Hafsi cites some basic examples of schemata for arranging Sunni ṭabaqāt such as the ordering of Companions of the Prophet, Followers, Successors to the Followers, and later generations. This is, of course, a common way of thinking of merit and authority in early Islam. Parallel Shī‘i ranking systems are also cited including: Companions of the Prophet, Companions of ‘Alī, then Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn or alternatively the Pure Ones (*asfīya*), Saints (*awliyā*), Ones Promised Paradise by ‘Alī, and his Companions. *Arabica* 23 (1976): 227-65 and 24 (1977): 1-41.
- ¹⁸ Lawrence, Bruce B. *Notes from a Distant Flute. Sufi Literature in Pre-Mughal India*. Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978; and Ernst, Carl. *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1992. Pp. 62-84.
- ¹⁹ Ernst, Carl W. *Eternal Garden*, 82-3. See also “The Textual Formation of Oral Teachings in Early Chishti Sufism,” in *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, ed. Jeffrey R. Timm. Albany: State University of New York, 1992, 271-97; as well as Fārūqī, Nisār Aḥmad. *Naud-i Malfūzāt*. Delhi: Maktabah-i Jimi’ah, 1989.
- ²⁰ The phrase was used by Jaroslav Stekevych in *The Zephyrs of Nejd*, 121.
- ²¹ On the religious symbolism (Hindu) of recent architecture in India see Lewandowski, Susan J. “The Built Environment and Cultural Symbolism in Post-Colonial Madras,” in *The City in Cultural Context*, eds. John Agnew, John Mercer, and David Sopher. Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984. Pp. 237-52.
- ²² This is true of the Wahhabis who destroyed tombs, including that of the Prophet, in eighteenth century Arabia, as well as more recent leveling of Sufi shrines in Algeria and Malaysia and in Syria and other locations by factions such as Daesh (Isis).
- ²³ Carruthers, Mary. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- ²⁴ S. 85:22. Annemarie Schimmel’s discussion of tablet and pen imagery in the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth and poetic tradition is quite helpful here. Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. University of North Carolina, 1975.
- ²⁵ S. 68:1.

- ²⁶ For Ibn ‘Arabī’s influence in South Asia see William Chittick, “Notes on Ibn ‘Arabi’s Influence in the Indian Sub-Continent,” *Muslim World* 82 (1992): 218-41.
- ²⁷ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 415. This is the very couplet cited at the outset of the current paper.
- ²⁸ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 21.
- ²⁹ A work which stimulated scholarly awareness of technologies of memory was Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966). On the role of memory in a world of few books and the relationship of trained memory or “memoria” to literacy, see Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 7-15, passim.
- ³⁰ al-Suyūṭī, *Alfiyya fī ‘ilm al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1934).
- ³¹ Cited in J.M.S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shāh Wali ‘Allāh of Delhi 1703-1762* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 12.
- ³² S. 3:191.
- ³³ Literally, “keeping in mind”, or as one Sūfī puts it, keeping the heart in the presence of God in all situations. Yād, memory, refers technically to one of the steps of practice in the Naqshbandiyya Sūfī order which might be summarized as remaining aware at all times. See Fritz Meier, *Zwei Abhandlungen über die Naqshbandiyya* (Istanbul: Franz Steiner, 1994), 44- 6.
- ³⁴ *Ṭasawwur* evokes an element of visual memory. For example, *ṭasawwur-i shaykh*, the calling to mind of the image of a person’s spiritual master is a practice of some Sūfī orders, particularly the version of Naqshbandi practice known as “rābiṭa” or developing a spiritual bond with the spiritual preceptor. Hamid Algar, “Devotional Practices of the Khalidi Naqshbandis of Ottoman Turkey” in Lifchez, Raymond. (Ed.) *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. Pp. 209-27. *Ṭasawwur* also refers to formulating a proposition. See Mottahedeh, Roy. *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985, Ch. 3 for a discussion of this system.
- ³⁵ These consist of ritualized recitations of rhymed spiritual genealogies of previous saints in a particular Sūfī lineage.
- ³⁶ Cited in Kiernan, V.G. *Poems by Faiz*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971. Pp. 128-9.
- ³⁷ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 67. *Nizam ad-Din Awliya: Morals for the Heart*, trans. Bruce B. Lawrence (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 214.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.
- ³⁹ *Nafahāt al-uns min ḥazarat al-quḍs* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i ittila’āt, 1994).
- ⁴⁰ Jo-Ann Gross discusses this tazkira in “Khoja Ahrār: A Study of the Perceptions of Religious Power and Prestige in the Late Timurid Period” (unpublished Ph.D. diss. New York University, 1982). See also ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Kāshifī, *Rashahāt* (Lukhnow: Nawal Kishore, 1890).

- ⁴¹ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 90.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 89.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 90.
- ⁴⁴ For example, the extensive tradition of compiling gazetteers of regions under British control. Scholberg, Henry. *The District Gazetteers of British India*. Zug: Inter Documentation Co., 1970. See also Barrier, N. Gerald. *The Census in British India: New Perspectives*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1981.
- ⁴⁵ Agrā: Matba' Faiz, n. d.
- ⁴⁶ Lahore, 1364/1944.
- ⁴⁷ Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute*, 20.
- ⁴⁸ Muḥammad Ṣādiq Dihlavī Kashmīrī Hamadānī, *Kalimāt al-ṣādiqīn*, ed. Muhammad Saleem Akhtar. Islamabad: Iran Pakistan Research Center, 1988.
- ⁴⁹ *Kalimāt al-ṣādiqīn*, 5. Amīr Khusrau, *Qirān al-Sa'adāy* (Lukhnow: Nawal Kishore, 1875), 22-23, is the *Mathnavi* from which these verses are taken. Other features of Delhi such as the Friday Mosque and minaret are praised in the same section.
- ⁵⁰ Lawrence, Bruce. "Biography and the 17th Century Qādiriyya of North India," in *Islam and Indian Regions*, eds. Anna Libera Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zengel-Ave Lallemand (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993), 402.
- ⁵¹ Naṣr Iqbal Qureishi, "Mu'arrikh-i Lāhor Mian Muḥammad Dīn Kalīm Qādirī," in *'Arafāt*, Lahore (November/ December 1989): 128-38.
- ⁵² *Ḥadīqat al-Auliya'* by Maulānā Ḥakīm Muftī Ghulām Sarwar Lahori (1837/ 1244 A.H.- 1890).
- ⁵³ By Muḥammad Dīn Kalīm, *Madīnat al-Auliya'* is about 636 saints buried in Lahore. It is about 700 pages long.
- ⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, "In Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22-7.
- ⁵⁵ A further dimension of the relationship between gardens, tombs, and Islamic cosmology has been explored by the art historian Wayne Begley, in "The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of its Symbolic Meaning," *The Art Bulletin* 61 (March 1979): 7-37.
- ⁵⁶ Tarif Khalidi, "Some Classical Islamic Views of the City," in *Studia Arabica and Islamica: Festschrift for Iḥsān 'Abbās*, ed. Widad al-Qādī (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981), 271.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.
- ⁵⁸ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.
- ⁵⁹ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 8.
- ⁶⁰ The incorporation of such pilgrimage circuits into calendars of ritual observances of saints' anniversaries is discussed in. Ernst, Carl W. "An Indo-Persian Guide to Sufi Shrine Pilgrimage" in *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam*. Istanbul: Isis, 1993. Pp. 43-68. "Whenever one comes to a town, the first thing one has to accomplish is to kiss the feet of the saints who are full of life, and after that, the honor of pilgrimage to the
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- tombs of saints found there. If one's master's tomb is in that city, one first carries out the pilgrimage to him; otherwise, one visits the tomb of every saint shown him.", 61. Quoted from Simnānī, *Laṭā'if al-Ashrafi*.
- ⁶¹ Petievich, Carla. "Poetry of the Declining Mughals: The Shahr Āshob," in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 25, no. 1: 99-110.
- ⁶² On the influence of English literary canons on India and a post-colonial critique see Vishvanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. Suleri, Sara. *The Rhetoric of English India*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992.
- ⁶³ Pritchett, Frances. *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and its Critics*. Berkeley: University of California, 1994. Pp. 75
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith in his study of "place" in religion writes concerning the Jewish and Christian understandings of sacred centers in Jerusalem, "For each there was a triumphant, ideological literature that perceived in their construction a cosmogonic act. For each, there was a literature of indigenous lamentation ... that found, in the destruction or loss of the sites, a plunge into chaos." *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 3.
- ⁶⁶ Kalīm, Muḥammad Dīn. *Madīnat al-Auliya*. Lahore: Ma'arif, 1982. Pp. 78-79.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

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