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In the history of India the late Mughal and post-Mughal times are usually described as an era of decline and decay: the fall of former empires (Mughal and then Maratha), constant rivalry for power and influence among local rulers both in the North and in the South of the Subcontinent, social revolts, foreign invasions and, finally, transfer of power into the hands of the British — all these historical facts strongly support such an opinion. However, what might be true from the political or economic point of view is not necessarily so when we take into consideration the various aspects of culture. To prove this assumption on the ground of Indo-Muslim culture turns out to be the main goal of the book edited by Alka Patel and Karen Leonard.

The nine essays included in the volume under review focus on circulation and the exchange of ideas within South Asia in modern times (from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries), a process described by the editors in their "Introduction" (pp. 1–16) as "the movement across time and across space of styles and practices of architecture, literature, poetry, and painting ..." (p. 4). Patel and Leonard opt for calling this process a transition rather than a decline, arguing that the transformed features of Indo-Muslim culture can be traced even today in slightly unstable, but still recognisable forms. As for the term "Indo-Muslim", it has been chosen by the editors mainly to accentuate the secular, non-Islamic aspect of cultural tradition, a "civilizational rather than a religious culture" (p. 2) that remains the centre of attention of all the contributing authors. And although this editorial decision has not been explained anywhere in the book, the editors' general use (including in the title of the volume) of the plural "cultures" is probably meant to underline the diversity and multidimensionality of this tradition manifesting itself in various geographical and social strata, in different ways. Also, by relinquishing such designations as "Indo-Persian" or "Islamicate", the emphasis has been put on the exclusively South Asian location of the transformative processes analysed and described in the consecutive essays.

The texts in the book are ordered chronologically, and the themes discussed in them cover a span of nearly half a millennium. Sunil Sharma's "Representation of Social Groups in Mughal Art and Literature: Ethnography or

Trope?" (pp. 17–36) opens the volume with an analysis of chosen Mughal textual and visual sources from the late 16th and 17th centuries which can serve as early 'ethnographic' representations of individual social types. The essay is a continuation of Sharma's earlier research on Indo-Persian poetic and historical texts, which go beyond the mere descriptions of persons, places, facts and events by containing also their cultural interpretation, and thus may be perceived as proto-ethnographic accounts in the South Asian social context. In this article Sharma focuses on the figure of the holy man (dervish or yogi), frequently depicted in both art and literature of the Mughal period, with special emphasis on two pieces of art which combine the visual and the textual. Like many other works from the Mughal milieu, he argues, these aim to promote and propagate the imperial vision of a multi-ethnic environment characterised by multiplicity and comprising diverse types of peoples. For the Mughal rulers, knowledge of the categories of individuals making up South Asian society, varied and full of divisions, was a necessary tool to guarantee the success of their imperial policy. Thus their approach and achievements in this matter preceded by nearly two centuries the modern ethnographic surveys of indigenous societies conducted by the Europeans.

In the following essay, "'Maid Killing a Snake" and "Dervish Receiving a Visitor": A Re-Examination of Bijapuri Masterpieces through the Lens of the Lucknow Copy" (pp. 37–60), Keelan Overton discusses the journey in time (mid-17th to 18th centuries) and space (from the Sultanate of Bijapur to Nawwabi Lucknow) of two well-known paintings originating at the court of Ibrahim Adil Shah.<sup>1</sup> In both cases she compares the existing originals and their respective copies, and the meticulous analysis leads her to raise several important questions concerning technical issues (the long-fixed and rigid distinction between Deccani and Mughal painting) as well as ideological ones (sectarian or religious divisions between Sunni and Shi'i or Hindu and Muslim). Moreover, the text deliberates on the nature of authenticity, and challenges the usually preconceived supremacy of originals over copies. For copies, as Overton shows in the course of her argumentation, are not only valuable sources of information but, at the same time, may serve as instruments for researching and explaining the originals.

Heidi Pauwels has devoted her essay "Literary Moments of Exchange in the 18th Century: The New Urdu Vogue Meets Krishna Bhakti" (pp. 61–85) to the question of circulation of ideas and texts in the 18th century. The

<sup>1</sup> All personal names in this review are in their common anglicised forms.

background for her considerations is the poetical work and patronage activity of Savant Singh, the crown prince of the Rajasthani state Kishangarh, known also under his pen-name Nagridas. Pauwels reveals how this recognised poet of Braj started experimenting with Urdu verse as soon as the new poetic idiom began to flourish in Delhi after the collection of Wali Dakkani's Urdu ghazals was brought to the Mughal capital from the Deccan in 1720/21. Savant Singh deliberately opted for vocabulary and poetic means taken from the literary source that was "alien" to the Sanskritised Krishnaite tradition, and in this way created Indo-Muslim hybrid works that remain far from the later canonical tendency of associating Urdu with Muslims and Hindi with Hindus. Apart from that, his example and patronage helped the new trends to find their way to other literary centres in Rajasthan, thus contributing to the spread of Deccani artistic influences far away from the South of the Subcontinent.

The matter touched upon in the next two essays is the transformative manner in which Mughal court gatherings and the Mughal capital were shown in late (18th–19th centuries) Mughal paintings. Laura Parodi in "Darbārs in Transition: The Many Facets of the Mughal Imperial Image after Shah Jahan as Seen in the Ex-Binney Collection in the San Diego Museum of Art" (pp. 87–110) examines depictions of formal court audiences (*darbārs*) and discusses how the perception of imperial authority varied over the decades, while, at the same time, the official court ceremonial remained unchanged, even at the time when the vastly reduced imperial authority was gradually superseded by the British. According to her, the revival of the public audience visible in late Mughal iconography may suggest "an intention to present the dynasty in its undiminished dignity" and "to affirm the respective places of the Mughals [en]face the British colonialists" (p. 108). "From Miniatures to Monuments Picturing Shah Alam's Delhi (1771–1806)" (pp. 111–138) by Yuthika Sharma concentrates, in turn, on pictorial modes of representing the Mughal capital city of Delhi (or, more precisely, the Red Fort of Shahjahanabad) and its vicinities from the late 18th to the early 19th centuries, i. e. in the time when European military experts, engineers, and cartographers began to exert more and more influence on local painters and their artistic perception and works. The effect of this encounter was the transformed method of projecting in the paintings the capital's excellence as the seat of Mughal imperial authority — a method that employed both European and the local conventions of cartography.

Both the contributions of the editors of the volume shift the attention farther south, to the Indo-Muslim culture flourishing in the princely state of Hyderabad

from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries. Alka Patel, in "Mercantile Architectural Patronage in Hyderabad, Late 18th–19th Centuries" (pp. 139–164), ponders mercantile patronage of architecture and the arts, with particular emphasis on residences and temples. She appreciates this kind of research as a valuable source of information (often more substantial than the textual ones) concerning not only the mere fact of existence of merchant-bankers' patronage, but also of the nature of their relationship with their usually new (most of the Hyderabad mercantile elite came from northern India) sites of residence. Patel's essay reveals also how the architectural canons from the North and the South met and mixed in the works produced by artisans operating in various parts of the Subcontinent, in great part thanks to the significant influence and patronage of the merchant-banker elites.

In the following essay, "Indo-Muslim Culture in Hyderabad: Old City Neighbourhoods in the Nineteenth Century" (pp. 165–188), Karen Leonard carries out a thorough analysis of the dynamic interaction between Hyderabad Hindu and Muslims that took place on a daily basis at the neighbourhood and even the household level, and was fuelled by the influence of Indo-Muslim (or Mughlai) culture — the dominant public culture that developed at the Nizam's court and in his administration and was shared by the elites as well as by the common people regardless of their religious affiliations. Just like in her other works, Leonard stresses that she does not perceive the Indo-Muslim culture in Hyderabad as a manifestation of 'cultural synthesis', 'syncretism' or 'hybridity', the models often proposed or looked for by those who try to analyse the encounter between Hindu and Muslim traditions. Rather, she reads this culture as "evidence of a successful plural society with an elite or ruling culture that powerfully shaped the lives of people throughout the city" (p. 166). She argues also that in contemporary India the ability to understand the former Indo-Muslim culture, once prevailing and modelling for centuries everyday customs and practices in many parts of the Subcontinent, has been lost by most of its inhabitants, mostly due to the pre-assumed incompatibility and imposed delimitations between the 'Hindu' and the 'Muslim' milieus.

The *Guzaštah Lakhna'ū*, the outstanding study of Lucknow's lost and gone art and culture by Sharar (ʿAbdu 'l-Ḥalīm Šarar), known widely under its English title *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*,<sup>2</sup> remains the background of reflection for C. M. Naim, who in his essay "Interrogating "The East", "Culture", and "Loss" in

<sup>2</sup> Translated and edited by E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain. London: Paul Elek 1975.

Abdul Halim Sharar's *Guzashta Lakhna'u*" (pp. 189–204) explores Sharar's terminological choices. Naim focuses on those Urdu terms and their English equivalents which have been burdened with a wide cultural and historical significance — Hindustan/Hindustani, *mašriqi*/Eastern/Oriental, *tamaddun*/urban (culture), *tahzib*/civilisation/culture/refinement —, providing, apart from detailed exploration of their linguistic and cultural context, also a true intellectual feast for lovers of discovering hidden semantic senses.

Finally, in "Zaheer v Ali: Dissenting Views on the Early Years of the Progressive Movement in Urdu Literature" (pp. 205–218), Carlo Coppola comments on works of Marxism-influenced early Progressive writers, especially Sajjad Zaheer (Sağğād Zāhīr) and Ahmad Ali (Aḥmad ʿAlī), and their immense impact on Urdu literature, and with that on Indo-Muslim culture of North India in the 1930s and after. Telling the story of *Angārē* (*Embers*), at the time of its publication a highly controversial prose collection that actually marks the beginning of the Urdu Progressive Movement, and its authors, Coppola argues that at least some of their views and ideas, commonly attributed to the fascination with Marxism (like, for example, the message of social justice) can be traced back to Indo-Muslim literature and even to the Koran itself — a fact that none of them would have been willing to admit in their striving to omit traditional models of morality with a God at its epicentre. Thus, the author of the essay resumes, the early Progressive writers did influence the course of twentieth-century Indo-Muslim culture, but in a transgressive rather than transitional way.

The nine analytical case studies collected in the volume offer an interesting insight into various aspects of Indo-Muslim material culture: literature, painting, architecture, as well as more abstract trends and ideas. By tracing the changes and developments that shaped this diverse and complex tradition from pre-Mughal times to the postcolonial present, the authors have made a noteworthy contribution to the growing volume of studies aimed at finding answers to the important question of the essence and position of Indo-Muslim culture in contemporary South Asia. Without a doubt, *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition* will remain informative and absorbing reading for researchers on the Subcontinent and its *tamaddun-i tahzib*.