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Individualism within conformity:
A brief history of *Waz'dārī*
in Delhi and Lucknow

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Islamicate societies produced an abundance of texts laying down Adab or rules for correct/ ideal behaviour in professional and personal life. That literature, avidly read and invoked in South Asia too, gives one an impression that conformity must have been the rule. One must then ask: were there any efforts to not conform, and be more individualistic? And if there were, how did the society at large respond? This article traces a brief history of one form of acceptable individualism called waz'dari, which was for a while in the nineteenth century a notable feature of the Islamicate elite society at Delhi and Lucknow, and is still considered a cherished value by many. From it we learn that minor breaches in the observance of normative protocols were not only considered acceptable but were in fact admired if they were committed with elaborate consistency, instead of randomly or at whim. In other words, 'consistency in non-conformity' was also a cherished value for the civilised men of Delhi and Lucknow, though it may not have been an ideal for all. In fact, for some, it was seen as an obstacle in the path of the same elite's progress.

Barbara Daly Metcalf, in the introduction to the book, *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, writes: '*Adab* in all its uses reflects a high valuation of the employment of the will in proper discrimination of correct order, behavior, and taste. It implicitly or explicitly distinguishes cultivated behavior from that deemed vulgar, often defined as pre-Islamic custom.'[1] But, contrary to what now Muslims overwhelmingly believe, even the pre-Islamic 'Jahiliyya' had not been devoid of its protocols of civility. In fact, their disappearance was noticed and bemoaned just a few centuries later.

Al-Hujwiri, the eleventh century Sufi known in South Asia as the Data Sahib of Lahore, is the acclaimed author of *Kashf-al-Mahjūb*, the earliest known Persian text on Sufism. At the start of the book, he deplores the sad state of human society in his days, then quotes with approval an earlier Sufi as declaring: 'We are afflicted with a time in which there are neither the manners (*ādāb*) of Islam nor the morals (*akhlāq*) of Paganism (*jāhiliyya*), nor the virtues (*ahlām*) of Chivalry (*muruwwa*).'[2]

As is well known, elite cultures in most Islamicate lands have diligently produced considerable bodies of *adab* (manners) and *akhlāq* (ethics) texts, laying out protocols that, ideally speaking, were expected to govern the members of those cultures in practically all aspects of their lives. Many such texts were an integral part of the education of young elite males, and several gained recognition and readership far beyond their own time and place. Books such as *Majmu'-al-Nawādir* better known as *Qābūs Nāma* (eleventh century), *Chahār Maqāla* (twelfth century), *Akhlāq-i-Nāsirī* (thirteenth century), *Akhlāq-i-Muhsinī* (fifteenth century), and *Akhlāq-i-Jalālī* (sixteenth century) were extensively read and admired in pre-Modern Persianate communities from Anatolia to India and Central Asia.[3] In the nineteenth century, when litho-printing became available in India, both *Akhlāq-i-Nāsirī* and *Akhlāq-i-Muhsinī* were among the earliest printed books, and remained a fixture in school and college curricula for Persian language.

If the desire to delineate and also seek to follow protocols was so obsessive, then a question must follow: what about those individuals in the same elite groups who wished to be different; who, in other words, felt that the societal clamoring for *adab* forced them into unhappy conformity? What could such a person do in that *adab*-governed society to assert his individuality, while not losing—*in his own eyes*—his claim to be fully 'civil'?

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[1] Barbara D. Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority*, pp. 3–4.

[2] Ali bin Uthman Al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf Al-Mahjub*, p. 8. Translation slightly modified for clarification.

[3] The popularity of these texts in South Asia is evident from the number of their manuscripts still preserved in archival collections and the mention they receive in biographical accounts. Both *Akhlāq-i-Nāsirī* and *Qābūs Nama*, for example, were among Emperor Akbar's favourite books—'were continually read out to him'—as reported by Abulfazl in *Ā'īn-i-Akbarī* (I, p. 110). For more on *Adab* and *Akhlāq* literature in South Asia, see various essays in Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority* and Muzaffar Alam's *The Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200–1800*.

Here again I found Sufi literature helpful in identifying cases where someone, even at the risk of being misperceived, asserted an ethical principle of his own choosing. The first example comes from Al-Hujwiri's section on the Sufi practice called *malāmat* (reproach or blaming), one of whose notable practitioners was the ninth century Sufi, Abu Yazid of Bistam. Al Hujwiri writes, '[Once when Abu Yazid] was entering Rayy on his way from the Hijaz, the people of that city ran to meet him in order that they might show him honour. Their attention distracted him and turned his thoughts away from God. When he came to the bazaar, he took a loaf from his sleeve and began to eat. They all departed, for it was the month of Ramadan. He said to a disciple who was traveling with him: "You see, as soon as I perform a single article of the law, they all reject me."' [4]

Abu Yazid had not violated the rules for the month of fasting. As a traveler, he was not obliged to fast and his act of eating indicated he was following the ethical injunction to abstain from extremes in religious matters. Further, in terms of that overarching binary of *zāhir/bātin* (external/internal) that permeated ethical discourse in pre-modern Islam, Abu Yazid heeded what was 'internal', and showed no concern for the 'external'. The denizens of Rayy, however, saw only what was externally on view, and immediately rejected him.

The second example refers to the Quranic story of God's command to angels to prostrate themselves before the newly-created Adam. Some Sufis have looked at Satan, the fallen angel, as the greatest of monotheists, for he refused, though ordered by God Himself, to bow before anyone other than God. Annemarie Schimmel writes, '... Ahmad Ghazali (d. 1126), the classical representative of Satan's rehabilitation . . . dared to say, "Who does not learn *tauhīd* [Unitarianism?] from Satan is an infidel"—a remark that infuriated the orthodox but found an echo in many later Sufi writings'.[5]

As I understand the two anecdotes, Abu Yazid, preserved his selfhood by rejecting ostentatious piety and openly doing what was proper for him even if it angered the more orthodox. Satan, on the other hand, asserted his selfhood, by making incumbent upon himself what was no longer obligatory, even though it brought him eternal damnation. In the first instance, the required *adab* was made more relative— i.e., made more sensitive to time and place—while in the second case the *adab* in question was made immutable, regardless of the circumstance. While the actions of the two protagonists were questionable in their 'external appearance' (*zāhir*), the cognoscenti perceived both acts as virtuous, and held them as exceptional in their 'internal' quality (*bātin*).

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[4] al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf*, p. 64.

[5] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 195. She also quotes two lines from the seventeenth century Sufi martyr, Sarmad, whose tomb is still revered in Delhi: 'Go, learn the method of servantship from Satan; // Choose one *qibla* and do not prostrate yourself before anything else.'

That desire to be different, to get away from the uniformities imposed by some overarching, impersonal *adab* while remaining true to a more personal *adab* of one's own choosing, must have found expression in all Islamicate elite cultures, and not just among the Sufis. In the rest of my article I present one such case from the north Indian Muslim culture of Lucknow in the nineteenth century, where that impulse found expression under the label of *waz'dārī*.

Waz'dārī, an abstract noun, is derived from the adjective, *waz'dār*, which literally means: one who possesses a *waz'*, that is, a manner, style, shape, or form. In other words, a *waz'dār* person displays or embodies some distinct form or manner. In the Lucknow culture of the nineteenth century, however, *waz'dār* meant much more. Here is an anecdote from a book published in 1908:

> During the reign of the last king of Avadh, a time when Lucknow's glory was fading, Mirza Ali Raza Beg, the city's *Kotwāl* (Chief of the Police) was an extremely *waz'dār* person. There was also in the city a certain Mir Sahib, a soldier by profession but living in poverty. One day his wife said to him, 'How long must you suffer at home? You are a soldier. You should go out and try your luck some place'. 'But no one these days appreciates a *sharīf* person', the Mir Sahib replied.[6] 'I hear the *Kotwāl* is an exception,' said his wife, and when she persisted the Mir Sahib put on his arms and went to the *Kotwāl*'s audience hall. Arriving there he right away sat down next to him. The assembled people did not like it.... The *Kotwāl*, however, asked the Mir Sahib his name and background, and then jokingly enquired, 'What is your wife's name?' The Mir Sahib was enraged. 'I can't recall her name,' he retorted, 'but my *sālā* (brother-in-law) is known as Ali Raza Beg.'[7] He then strode out of the hall. The *Kotwāl*'s attendants wanted to go after him, but he intervened. 'Too bad you don't see the man's mettle,' he said. 'Look at his *waz'dārī* and courage. He not only kept secret his wife's name, he also called me a *sālā* to my face. Now I should show him my *waz'dārī*, and make truth of what for him was mere words.'

> The next day, the *Kotwāl* took several trays filled with pieces of fine cloth and five hundred silver rupees to the Mir Sahib's house. At his knock, the Mir Sahib asked from inside, 'Who is there?' 'Your *sālā*, Ali Raza Beg,' the *Kotwāl* replied. The Mir Sahib realized that the *Kotwāl* had turned his insult into a fact; now, as a *waz'dār* person, he could not let it become a lie. 'Come right in,' he shouted back, '*Purdah* rules don't apply to a *sālā*.' As the *Kotwāl* stepped through the door, the Mir Sahib's wife hurried to hide, but the Mir Sahib stopped her: 'Why hide? He is only your brother.' The *Kotwāl* had his servants place

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[6] *Sharīf*: a person of good breeding; lit. noble; civil.

[7] *Sālā* is also a common term of abuse, insinuating the speaker's carnal relations with the addressee's sister.

the trays before the lady, and said, 'Please accept this humble gift from your brother.' [From then on] he made it a habit to call upon his 'sister' frequently, and also fixed her a monthly allowance....

Some months later the *Kotwāl* was charged with a special task: the king ordered him to bring him the head of a rebellious rajah. The *Kotwāl* set out with his troops, but deliberately did not inform the Mir Sahib. He believed the Mir Sahib possessed the needed courage and *waz'dārī*, and would never stay behind on hearing the news. On the march, the *Kotwāl* frequently turned and looked back. A soldier who was free with him asked, 'Sir, who are you looking for?' 'The Mir Sahib,' the *Kotwāl* replied. 'You were hasty, sir,' the soldier responded, 'in praising his bravery and *waz'dārī*. It takes a rare person to come to aid in the kind of dangerous task you face now.'

The *Kotwāl*, however, felt sure of his judgment, and so, even when they arrived under the rajah's fort, he kept looking for the Mir Sahib. Then the news came: someone had slain the rajah in his sleep the previous night and taken away his head. Proudly smiling, the *Kotwāl* turned to his soldiers: 'Let's go back. The Mir Sahib has taken care of the matter.'

On reaching Lucknow, the *Kotwāl* directly went to the Mir Sahib's house. He was not there, but his wife gave the *Kotwāl* a package wrapped in cloth that the Mir Sahib had left for him. The *Kotwāl* showed the contents to his troops: it was the rajah's head.[8]

That anecdote comes from a book by Syed Muhammad Hadi of Lucknow on the *waz'dār* men of that city. Within his narration, the author adds two personal comments: in one he praises the *Kotwāl* for displaying utmost *waz'dārī* by making the words of another person a reality, and in the other he praises the Mir Sahib for being 'genuinely' *waz'dār* and remaining faithful to a 'friend' in a time of crisis. Interestingly, for Hadi, the later *waz'dārī* of the two protagonists is of such importance that he overlooks their initial breaches of ordinary *adab*: the Mir Sahib should have sat down at the margin of the assembly, and come closer only when asked, and the *Kotwāl* should never have asked the name of someone's wife in public.

When I was growing up in the 1940s in Barabanki, a small town close to Lucknow, the words *waz'dārī* and *waz'dār* were still much in vogue. Mostly, however, it was with reference to actions or behaviour of the sort depicted in the following anecdote from the same book:

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[8] Syed Muhammad Hadi, *Waz'dārān-i-Lakhna'ū*, part I, pp. 37–40. The book, in the main, consists of anecdotes of the above kind involving Muslim men of the author's immediate past. Hadi had planned to write four separate volumes, but apparently managed to publish only the first. The other proposed volumes were to describe the Hindu *waz'dār* gentlemen of the author's past, and the Muslim and Hindu *waz'dār* gentlemen of his own days. I am indebted to Prof. Naiyer Masud for bringing the book to my attention and then providing me with a photocopy.

> Mir Syed Husain ... lived in the neighbourhood called Nawaz Gunj. Every day, he would visit a friend in another part of the city, and spend hours with him. One day the friend said, 'I hear they make very good *bālā'ī* in Nawaz Gunj.[9] Why don't you bring some one day?' The Mir Sahib, somehow, paid no attention. It happened a few more times. Finally, one day, the Mir Sahib responded, 'Starting tomorrow, I'll bring you some every day.' And that is exactly what he did the rest of his life. The friend repeatedly asked him to stop, but the Mir Sahib always replied, 'It has now become my *waz'*.'[10]

As I was made to understand then, and also as I now make sense of the above story, the Mir Sahib made permanently obligatory upon himself something that, under the accepted rules of civility, was not required of him beyond the first instance. In traditional terminology, the Mir Sahib turned what was only *wājib*—necessary and befitting—into a *farz*—an obligatory action that must be performed, for any lapse in it would be deemed very grave. It was *wājib* for the Mir Sahib to bring the delicacy to his friend when he was first requested; it would have been equally proper had he continued to do so intermittently. He made it, however, a self-imposed obligation, and called it his *waz'*. That in doing so he failed to respect his friend's repeated requests to desist only underscores the trumping power of *waz'dārī* over the rules of common *adab*.

Lest, we think he was merely a crank, here is another anecdote about Mir Syed Husain:

> During the Mutiny, the nursemaid of a Sahib's daughter, fearing for her life, took her ward and hid in some basement in the compound of the [the Residency], from where she was then not able to escape. The poor [parents] were distraught with grief. Then their Khansaman (housekeeper) said, 'Please don't worry. I shall find them.' He went out and asked around, and eventually learned that the maid had been seen going toward the Residency. The Khansaman, in the past, had often come to the Mir Sahib to pay his respects, and knew well of his courage and *waz'dārī*. It was past midnight when he knocked on his door. The Mir Sahib immediately came out, and asked if all was well. The Khansaman said, 'I need your help, sir. My Sahib's daughter and her nurse cannot be found. I'm told they had gone toward the Residency, but I am scared to go there alone....'[11]

To make it brief, the Mir Sahib immediately went with him to the Residency, located the missing pair, and safely brought them to the Sahib's residence, where

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[9] *Bālā'ī* is a dense condensation of milk; in Lucknow, also uniquely layered.
[10] Hadi, *Waz'dārān-i-Lakhna'ū*, p. 29.
[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31.

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he did not himself go in. When peace returned, the Sahib sent for the Mir Sahib and informed him that the government had rewarded him with some land. The Mir Sahib, however, insisted that the land should be given to the Khansaman. The author then adds: 'Now that is what truly deserves to be called *waz'dārī*. An insignificant man, merely on the basis of a few visits, comes to believe that he had a friend's claim on the Mir Sahib. And so he arrives at his door late at night. The Mir Sahib not only comes out to see him, but also instantly offers his help in a perilous task, which he then accomplishes perfectly. By God, what a *waz'dār* person!'

Here we may turn to Hadi's own statement, written a century ago, of what *waz'dārī* meant to him. In his Introduction, he first asks, 'What is *waz'dārī*?' then continues:

It means steadfastness in good words and deeds (*acche qaul aur fi'l kī pābandī*). Presently found only in a rare few, it was earlier as integral to a *sharīf* person as a man's soul is to his body. Those men's motto was: '*sir jāe, saudā na jāe* (Lose your head, but not the obsession).' They lived by the principle that a man's word was his life (*qaul-i-mardāN jān dārad*). Some ignorant people think that being steadfast in every action—good or bad—is called *waz'dārī*. One person, addicted to gambling, gambles lifelong, while another, with a habit of lying, constantly tells lies—an ignorant person might call them *waz'dār*. But what they do is *bad-waz'ī*, [and not *waz'dārī*]. If a man reaches for his sword every moment he is not called *shujā'* (valorous); people call him *bigRe dil* (headstrong). But drawing one's sword to protect one's honor or property, or when facing an enemy, is indeed an act of *shujā'at* (valor). Similarly, steadfastness in acts and words that are good is called *waz'dārī*, but steadfastness in bad actions is called *bad-waz'ī*.

He then provides some interesting details:

The person we would credit with *waz'dārī* would possess so many qualities as would be impossible to find simultaneously in anyone credited with another attribute. Love (*muhabbat*), frugality (*kifāyat-shi'ārī*), loyalty (*wafādārī*), readiness for any challenge (*musta'idī*), attention to time (*auqāt kī pābandī*), self-respect (*khuddārī*), modesty (*hayā*), religiosity (*dīndārī*)—these are only so many manifestations (*jalwe*) of *waz'dārī*. When a *waz'dār* employs the word love concerning someone he lives by it his entire life. A *waz'dār* adopts the style (*waz'*) of living that he can maintain throughout his life. If suddenly become rich, he does not turn ostentatious; instead, he uses foresight, and bears in mind the worst that Time could bring him. A *waz'dār* never transgresses the parameters of his adopted style. He is never overzealous in making promises; but once a promise is made, he employs even his last breath to keep it. He is

always well prepared (*musta'id*) and punctual, for otherwise he would not be able to keep his word, and consequently lose his *waz'dārī*. And he would never be well prepared if he does not pay attention to Time and its proper use. A *waz'dār* will always treat someone the same way he treated him the first time. A *waz'dār* will also be modest (*bā-hayā*) to the extreme, for his sense of modesty (*hayā*) will keep him away from actions that go against his *waz'*. Lastly, a *waz'dār* will be so firm of faith (*rāsikẖ-al-'aqīda*) that once he accepts a religious creed he would live and die with it, and even be raised as its votary on the Day of Judgment.[12]

Waz'dārī, in the light of the above, would seem to mean a 'lifestyle' that an individual chooses for himself. Strictly speaking, the deliberate act of choosing would make the person *waz'dār*, but in order to be 'genuinely' so the individual must display one paramount attribute: steadfastness. His *waz'dār* behaviour must never vary; it should be disengaged from any compromise dictated by situational changes.

Mirza Ja'far Husain's *Qadīm Lakhna'ū kī Āk̲ẖirī Bahār* (The Last Spring of Old Lucknow), is invaluable for information on the elite culture of Lucknow between 1880s and 1930s, and contains an entire section on *waz'dārī* and its varied manifestations that the author witnessed or heard about.[13] Husain writes: '*Waz'* means practice (*dastūr*) and organization (*tartīb*).[14] Hence, we should call that person *waz'dār* who displays an "organization" in his actions in life—the way he lives and the way he interacts with others—who spends his days in a balanced way (*taur*), and who invariably acts in his adopted manner (*tarz*).' According to Husain, *waz'dārī* could be found in people of all classes. A *waz'dār* specialty cook (*rakābdār*) would prepare his special dish only for particular patrons, never offering it indiscriminately for more money, and a *waz'dār* shopkeeper would never sell something to another customer if he knew that a regular patron of his shop fancied it.[15] Husain then recounts an incident in detail, adding some revealing comments:

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[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9. The final statement is extraordinary. By going against prevalent Islamic piety that everyone's end should be in Islam, the one 'true' faith, it underscores the primary status of 'constancy' within the concept of *waz'dārī*. It is remarkably similar to what Ghalib (d. 1869) had stated in a couplet some five decades earlier: *wafādārī ba-shart-i-ustuwārī asl-i-īmāN hai + mare butk̲ẖāne meN to ka'be meN gāRo birahman ko*, 'Fidelity is the core of Faith, but only if paired with constancy. The Brahmin who lives and dies in a temple deserves to be buried in the Ka'ba.'

[13] Mirza Ja'far Husain, *Qadīm Lakhna'ū kī Āk̲ẖirī Bahār*, pp. 97–104. The author was born in 1898 and died a few years after 1978.

[14] The printed text (p. 97) has *tarbiyat* (instruction), but the subsequent text makes it clear it is a misprint.

[15] For Husain, the entire Lucknow society was permeated with *waz'dārī*, but the incidents with the *rakābdār* and other members of the service class could also have been cases of a necessity become a virtue. A *rakābdār* would have lost his richer patrons had he offered his services indiscriminately.

The lifestyle of the notables of Lucknow was basically moulded in a particular pattern (*tartīb*), but every once in a while some accident, unusual occurrence, or chance would disturb the pattern. Then the same notables would adopt [the disturbed pattern] as their particular *waz'dārī*. I am reminded of an incident, or rather a sad accident (*sāniha*). Once Nawab Haidar Husain Khan . . . set out for an evening drive in his carriage. An older acquaintance, coming from the opposite direction, greeted him appropriately but with a slight smile. The late Nawab returned the greeting suitably, but the smile bothered him. He then took a close look at himself and discovered that one of the strings that tied the flaps of his *angarkhā* had [somehow] been left untied....[16] He felt extremely embarrassed, and relieved (*izāla*) his distress by always leaving that particular string untied. The *angarkhā* with an open neck became his *waz'dārī*. The incident tells us that accidents too had a role in constructing culture. An accident could cause some 'disorganisation' (*be-tartībī*) to become at first acceptable and then a new 'organization' (*tartīb*) in its own right.[17]

In my limited reading of *adab* texts I never found 'consistency' so fore-grounded. Nor did I come across in them the word, *waz'dārī*. In order to discover some history of the concept I next turned to Persian and Urdu dictionaries produced in South Asia.[18]

A search through some of the most important Persian dictionaries compiled in India—the earliest, *Muntakhab-al-Lughāt* (seventeenth century), and the latest, *Farhang-i-Ānand Rāj* (1888)—showed that though the basic word *waz'* was always included, the derived adjective, *waz'dār*, was not noticed in any, even though other words containing the suffix,—*dār* (possessor of), were noted.[19] The various meanings for *waz'* they provided were: 'The act of placing or putting something; the act of making or inventing something; the act of deducting something; the act of dropping or casting down something; the external state or appearance of a person; the behaviour or manners of a person; shape; style; manner or habit.' As its synonyms, the Persian dictionaries listed such words as *tarz* (style) or *ravish* (habit, manner). The Persianists in India had apparently felt no need to treat *waz'dār* as an independent, idiomatic expression.[20] They, however, made me take notice of the word *wazī'* (lowly, vulgar, plebian), listed close to *waz'* and sharing its

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[16] *Angarkhā*, an upper garment usually made of fine muslin.

[17] Husain, *Qadīm Lakhna'ū*, p. 102.

[18] *Waz'*, an Arabic word, was first naturalised in Persian and then, through Persian, into all Islamicate languages of South Asia.

[19] The other dictionaries I consulted were:*Ghiyas-al-Lughāt*, *Charāgh-i-Hidāyat*, *Bahār-i-'Ajam*, and *Mustalahāt-al-Shu'arā*.

[20] The same turned out to be the case in such comprehensive modern Iranian dictionaries as *Farhang-i-Nafīsī* and the *Lughatnāma* of Dihkhuda. It was true also for F. Steingass's *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (1892).

Arabic root. *Wazī'* is commonly used in both Persian and Urdu as the opposite of *sharīf* (highborn; genteel). It alerted me to the possibility that 'having a distinctive *waz''* could also mean in some contexts 'having a questionable *waz'*.'

The earliest notable Urdu dictionary, John Shakespeare's *A Dictionary of Hindustani and English*, first came out in 1817. It was then revised, expanded, and reprinted several times during the compiler's life. Its third edition, published in 1834, offers the following glosses for *waz'*: 'Situation, state, condition, manner, mode, procedure, position, conduct, behaviour.' It does not mention the compound form, *waz'dār*. S.F. Fallon's *A New Hindustani-English Dictionary, with Illustrations from Hindustani Literature and Folklore* came out 1879. Its entry for *waz'* reads: '1. Nature; tenor. 2. Behaviour. 3. Mode; fashion; appearance. 4. Style. 5. Description; character; complexion. 6. Deduction; retrenchment.' It glosses *waz' badalnā* as 'to disguise oneself,' and though it lists both *waz'dār* and *waz'dārī*, it glosses them only as 'Stylish; elegant' and 'Style; manner; elegance,' respectively. Five years later came out John T. Platts' *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English*. On *waz'*, it greatly expanded on its predecessors, but glossed *waz'dār* as 'Of good appearance or form, &c.; stylish, elegant,' and *waz'dārī* as 'Goodness of form, &c., manner, style, elegance.'

It would appear from the above that even in Urdu throughout the nineteenth century the adjective, *waz'dār*, and the related abstract noun, *waz'dārī*, referred to nothing more than something or someone of a stylish appearance. A correction, however, is provided by Syed Ahmad Dihlavi (b. 1846) in his monumental *Farhang-i-Āsafiyya*.[21] He first gives the familiar glosses for *waz'*, then includes the two derived expressions, *waz'dār* and *waz'dārī*, and offers two separate sets of synonyms for each. The first set for *waz'dār* contains twelve glosses referring to external appearances, beginning with *sajīla* (attractively decorated), and including *tarahdār* (coquettish in appearance) and *bāNkā* (jaunty; dandy) as a pair. The second set begins with the expression, *pāband-i-waz'* (one who is bound to a *waz'*), followed by a long explanation: *apni cāl aur rawish par qā'im rahnewālā*, 'One who remains steadfast in his behavior and habits.' He then gives a verse of his own as an example: 'The *waz'dār* in love, how assiduous they are! They laugh as they walk to the scaffold.' Two similar sets of appropriate synonyms are also listed for *waz'dārī*. Interestingly, the three verses that Dihlavi uses as examples are exclusively from the later half of the nineteenth century.[22]

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[21] The *Farhang* was completed in 1892, but the concluding volume, containing *waz'*, came out in 1900. The author had assisted Fallon on his dictionary.

[22] Two of them are easier to quote here: (1) *Waz'dārī* is a terrible sickness; it persists though life departs. (Dagh, d. 1905); (2) You may give up loving my rival but you will never stop seeing him. My cruel love, that is how *waz'dārī* works. (Taswir, unknown). Surprisingly, Dihlavi also gives a third set of glosses: *salīqa* (skill or dexterity), *Dhang* (way of doing), and *sughaRāpā* (excellence in household tasks). But he gives no examples.

Evidently, some time in the nineteenth century, both *waz'dār* and *waz'dārī* came to be independent, idiomatic expressions in Urdu usage.[23] Each with two distinct sets of meanings, one reflecting the conventional understanding of *waz'*— i.e., 'external form or appearance'—the other expressing a social virtue newly made more significant: steadfastness or consistency in one's chosen behaviour. The entries in the *Farhang* also establish that *waz'dārī* as a behavioural virtue was as notable in the 'declining' Delhi as it was claimed to be in a 'rising' Lucknow by Hadi and other partisans of that city.

If there was any one group of people in nineteenth century Delhi and Lucknow that was exclusively distinguished by the twin attributes of its members adopting unusual, in fact questionable, external looks and simultaneously displaying stead-fastness in their individual ways, it was a cohort of men usually referred to as the *bāNke* (sing. *bāNkā*). Here I must make a sorry confession. What I shall claim below about the *bāNke* will be mainly based on memory. I grew up hearing about them from my elders, and as a child read many delightful descriptions of the *bāNke* of Lucknow. However, I have not been able now to locate any of those booklets and articles of my boyhood.[24]

The *bāNkā* in the anecdotes of my memory would display some peculiar feature in his appearance, something not quite acceptable to the polite society around him. He might dress in women's clothing. He might dress like a man, but wear a large nose-ring like a woman. He might grow an overly long mustache, or shave only half the face, leaving the other half gloriously hirsute. He might wear summer clothing in winter, and dress warmly in summer. Or he might just persist in behaving in some peculiar manner in everyone's sight. But the same *bāNkā*, at the slightest display of scorn from anyone, would swiftly put an end to it with his sword. On the other hand, in many a story, a similar *bāNkā* would show no hesitation in lay-ing down his life to protect some unfortunate person against a bully. The maxim quoted by Hadi—*sir jāe, saudā na jāe*—featured prominently in those anecdotes. It exactly described the moral position that the *bāNke* claimed was uniquely theirs. No *bāNkā*, as I recall, was ever a member of the upper echelons of the society, nor was any from among the very lowest. The questionable appearances of the *bāNke* appeared to me, and my peers, as an expression of contempt for the proper looks of the society's pillars, who in those stories were exposed as hypocrites and bullies.

Returning to the dictionaries, I found that the three British lexicographers— Fallon, Shakespeare and Platts—offered a range of glosses for *bāNkā*, but only

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[23] The British lexicographers understandably placed undue trust in Persian dictionaries, for most Indians at the time considered them equally authoritative for Urdu.

[24] Both Naiyer Masud and Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, my two most dependable sources in India, were also unable to direct me to any textual source now, though they had anecdotal memories similar to mine.

referred to features of appearance, and mostly with negative connotations. Their favorite glosses were: 'fop; coxcomb; bully; fashionable and stylish.' Syed Ahmad Dihlavi listed similar Urdu words as synonyms for *bāNkā*, but also included *waz'dār*, which he paired with *tarahdār*—the latter has only one meaning in Urdu: 'coquettish in looks and behaviour.' Dihlavi also added two new glosses—*diler*, 'bold,' and *bahādur*, 'brave'—which he then illustrated with the sentence: '*bānkā jawān hai*.' (He is a bold and brave youth.)

The earliest mention of the *bāNke*, to my knowledge, occurs in a book written in 1808. Inshaullah Khan Insha (1753–1817) was a most versatile poet in the final decades of the eighteenth century; his roots lay in Delhi but his talents blossomed in Lucknow. Besides much poetry in Urdu, Insha also wrote—in Persian—a pioneering work on Urdu language called *Daryā-i-Latāfat*. It includes a fascinating account of Urdu's regional and social varieties, where he briefly mentions the *bāNke* of Delhi, only to discount their role in the development of Urdu's primary form.[25] 'The *bāNke*,' he writes, 'are excluded from our discussion, for they are found in every city, be it Delhi or some city in Dakan, Bengal, or Punjab. Everywhere their appearance (*waz'*) and language are the same. They are quarrelsome by nature; they strut when they walk, and are always casting admiring glances at themselves. They treat every feminine noun as if it were masculine.'[26] The latter peculiarity immediately suggests that Urdu was not the native tongue of those men. Disappointingly, the three more useful sources for pre-modern Delhi's cultural life—Dargah Quli Khan's *Muraqqa'-i-Dihli* (eighteenth century), Mirza Sangin Beg's *Sair-al-Manāzil* (nineteenth century), and Syed Ahmad Khan's *Āsār-al-Sanādīd* (nineteenth century)—make no mention of these people.

Turning to Lucknow, two most important sources for its cultural life in the nineteenth century are the famous novel, *Umrā'o Jān Adā* (1899), written by Mirza Muhammad Hadi, 'Ruswa' (1857–1931), and *Hindustān MeN Mashriqī Tamaddun kā Ākhirī Namūna* (1913–1920), by Abdul Halim Sharar (1860–1926). The latter is now commonly known as *Guzashta Lakhna'ū* (The Lucknow of the Past).

Sharar tells us a bit more about the *bāNke*, surprisingly in his discussion of the pajamas worn by men in Lucknow in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Sharar, in the last decades of the eighteenth century, a great many men from Qandahar came and settled in Delhi. They wore extremely baggy pajamas that were made by sewing together smaller pieces of cloth (*kaliyāN*) in the manner of a skirt. He then adds:

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[25] The book consists of two parts, one, on language, written by Insha, the other, on rhetoric, written by his equally renowned friend, Mirza Muhammad Hasan Qatil.

[26] Inshaullah Khan Insha, *Daryā-i-Latāfat*, p. 123. Incidentally, the habit of using every Urdu noun as masculine was also common among the British colonial officers.

Those men from Qandahar were regarded extremely courageous. Consequently, the men-of-arms (*sipah-gar*) in Delhi took after them in clothes, looks, and habits. Thanks to the good graces (*barkat*) of these men and the influence of their company the *bāNke* in Delhi began to wear huge flaring (*kalyoNdār*) pajamas. Then, in the final days of Delhi—[i.e., the years before the British took over in 1803]—the jaunty appearance (*waz'dārī*) and boldness (*shujā'at*) of the *bāNke* became so popular that hundreds of youth of good families (*sharīfzāde*) entered their ranks, and adopted their looks and dress. When the latter migrated to Lucknow, some of the latter brought with them their original style while others arrived dressed like the *bāNke*.[27]

Sharar next discusses another style of pajamas that, according to him, had not existed earlier and must have been developed by the people of Lucknow by making suitable changes in the pajamas of the *bāNke* during the times of Ghaziuddin Haidar (r. 1814–1827) and his son, Nasiruddin Haidar (r. 1827–1837). He then continues:

The new pajamas were light and most comfortable for the heat of Hindustan. Soon their style became so popular with the nobility and the civilised (*muhazzab*) people that it became the favoured style for all men of good breeding (*shurafā*).... The men who claimed to be *bāNke* were the only exception.[28] So now Lucknow had two kinds of pajamas [for men]. One was the baggy kind (*kalyoNdār*) of the *bāNke*, the other the less wide kind (*'arz kā*) which had become a part of the *waz'* of all the civilised (*muhazzab*) people of the city.... [King] Nasiruddin Haidar made the pajamas of the *bāNke* a part of his particular style (*waz'*) ... and would wear only them or [Western style] trousers.... He even had his begums wear them—the King thought they looked like the gowns of English ladies.[29]

In summary, the baggy trousers of Afghan invaders, who could have attracted nothing but hatred and derision in Delhi in the 1770s, gradually became the stylish wear-of-choice for the nonconformist elite youth of Delhi. Next, the same jaunty men-of-arms brought the style to Lucknow, where it became the favourite of a foppish king and his admirers. However, a majority of the 'civilised' people of the city stayed away from it, but then developed something new inspired by that style.[30]

[27] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Guzashta Lakhna'ū*, p. 241. Were the pajamas baggy to enable filling them with plunder during a raid?

[28] Note that Sharar clearly considers the *bāNke* to be a part of the *shurafā*.

[29] Sharar, *Guzashta*, p. 242. Nasiruddin Haidar ruled from 1827 to 1837.

[30] The style eventually ended up becoming, under the name of *gharāra*, the favorite of *sharīf* Muslim women in the first half of the twentieth century, and presently often gets referred to in

A few years before Sharar, 'Ruswa' had published his eponymous novel about a courtesan of old Lucknow. In it he used the word *bāNkā* only once, with reference to a man who bought the favours of Umrao Jan and whom she initially found quite repelling. Here is the scene:

> One day a man whose appearance (*waz'*) was that of the city's *bāNke* . . . with one shawl tied around his waist and another around his head, barged into my room, and right away sat down on the edge of [my] carpet. It told me there was something base (*kamīna-pan*) about his nature, or else he had little experience of visiting courtesans.[31]

'Ruswa's' use of *waz'dār* and *waz'dārī* is also not without ambivalence. The concept is invoked with reference to such characters in the novel as the Maulvi Sahib who in his youth had a brief fling with the woman who now looked after Umrao Jan, but observed the obligations of that relationship all his life; or the friends of that uncouth lover—actually a robber—who refused to plunder the house where Umrao Jan happened to be a guest.[32] The same is true in 'his other famous book, *Sharīfzāda* (The Well Born), an edifying text that was for decades a required reading in Urdu courses in high schools. Though the book's protagonist is praised for his resolve and persistence in the face of adversity, the word *waz'dār* is never used to describe him; it occurs only once in the entire book, and then too concerning a harmless fop who possesses no will of his own.[33]

Returning to Sharar, I had expected to find him as rhapsodic on *waz'dārī* as was Hadi. I had also expected him to recount a few anecdotes concerning the *bāNke* of his beloved city. He surprised me on both counts. Though his book is filled with fascinating stories about many remarkable men of Lucknow, Sharar tells not a single *bāNkā* story. That could not have been by chance. Second, though Sharar uses both *waz'dār* and *waz'dārī* in the two distinct manners described

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fashion columns as a 'genuine statement' of Mughal elegance. Sharar also mentions another style—he calls it *ghuTanna*, but I learned to call it *cūRīdār*—that he claims emerged from the tighter pajamas worn by the Sikhs. It was brought back, Sharar writes, by the Oudh soldiers who fought in the British armies against the Sikhs in the 1840s, and, after it was made extremely tight, became the rage among the 'stylish' (*waz'dār*) people of Lucknow (Sharar, *Guzashta*, p. 242). It was also a rage among the dandies of Delhi in the 1860s, as described by Nazir Ahmad in his novel, *Taubatun-Nusūh*. In terms of social approval in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Sikhs were probably ranked much lower in Delhi than the Qandahari Afghans.

[31] Mirza Muhammad Hadi, 'Ruswa', *Umrā'o Jān Adā*, p. 139.

[32] In another incident, a different Maulvi Sahib, madly in love with a young coquette, suddenly comes face to face with his son in the salon of the woman. The son stops coming, but the father continues as before. The narrator comments: 'Yes, those men of yore were indeed so *waz'dār*.'

[33] Mirza Muhammad Hadi, 'Ruswa', *Sharīfzāda*, p. 131. He uses *waz'dārī* while describing the ways and manners of Fidwi Miyan, whom the protagonist rescues from debt.

earlier, he does not dwell much on *waz'dārī* in the sense of 'steadfastness,' suggesting that it was perhaps one cultural construct he did not wish to rhapsodise about.

In fact, it soon became apparent that Sharar could be archly ironic when using those words. Consider the following from his comments on the footwear popular in Lucknow in the nineteenth century. 'In Lucknow,' Sharar writes, 'after the Nawabs became Kings [i.e., after 1819], a new kind of shoe was invented that was called *khurd-noka* (Short-Pointed); it was highly liked at first by local dandies (*waz'dār*).' He next describes two other shoes, *ghetla* and *kafshain*, then continues:

> The manufacturing of the two shoes and the gold and silk embroidery done on them created two distinct occupational groups in Lucknow... The first consisted of Muslim cobblers. They formed a particular *qaum* and *birādarī*, and considered it beneath their dignity (*sharāfat*) to make any kind of shoes other than the *ghetla*. Large in number, devoutly Muslim, and middle class (*safedposh*, lit. wearing white clothes), they ranked above the lower classes, and lived in prosperity in those earlier days. Now, however, the fashion (*waz'*) has changed. Not only men but also women have stopped wearing *ghetla* shoes.... As a result, Muslim cobblers have been devastated.... But praised be their *waz'dārī*! They went to ruin, but could not bear to make boots and slippers . . . and thus make progress in step with Time, obtaining also greater gain than before.[34]

A similar tone of disapprobation appears in a significant section on social etiquette. Sharar begins with a flat assertion: 'The denizens of Lucknow achieved particular distinction in social etiquette and habits.' He then underscores the ideal civility of the *waz'dār* elite of Lucknow as displayed in their secretly providing for the needs of their less fortunate friends, without asking for anything in return. 'As a result', Sharar continues, 'a very large number of people in Lucknow had no visible source of livelihood.... And because their [actual] source was hidden they could publicly appear as well-to-do people, mingle with the rich, and in general hold their heads high.' Two paragraphs later, however, Sharar concludes:

> It cannot be denied that because in that time of prosperity most people in the city subsisted on secret support from the city's elite and from their own friends, they, the citizens of Lucknow, had in general lost the capacity to value time and hard work. They kept themselves busy with things that increasingly distanced them from the road of national progress.[35]

Evidently, for both Sharar and 'Ruswa', well known for their liberal views in politics and social debates, the virtue of unbending *waz'dārī* could become a

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[34] Sharar, *Guzashta*, pp. 245–46.
[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 262–63.

burdensome obstacle, if not an outright vice, once the circumstances changed. Even Husain, an ardent admirer of *waz'dārī*, conceded much the same in another book where he wrote: 'I told the above story [about a nawab's neglect of his debts] only to make it clear that the *waz'dārī* of the elite of Lucknow, their sense of pride, and their wrong notions of civility (*sharāfat*) and honesty (*dayānat*) indeed played a role in their ruination. They, however, always thought their weaknesses to be nothing but truth (*sadāqat*) and righteousness (*haq-parastī*).'[36]

Hadi, the champion of Lucknow's *waz'dārī*, would most likely have not disagreed with Sharar concerning the foolish stubbornness of the Muslim cobblers, but he would never have used *waz'dārī* to describe it. To him it was too sacred a word for irony. He might have also strongly reacted to Sharar's concluding observation about progress. Consider the following from Hadi's 'Introduction,' written not too long before Sharar:

> The people mentioned in the book lived during the glory days of Lucknow. Sadly, as that age of *waz'dāri* came to an end so did also the time of [Lucknow's] rising good fortune (*iqbāl*). The two were, as if, bound to each other. In the time of glory people took pride in possessing *waz'* and being *waz'dār*. But in present days of misfortune (*idbār*), people cherish *bad-waz'ī* (bad habits) and *tarahdārī* (coquettish ostentation).... *Waz'dārī* now means getting dressed to the nines and go strolling in markets. Earlier it meant resoluteness in word and action (*qaul aur fi'l ki pābandī*); now it defines cunning and deceit. The new generation uses the English word 'policy' to veil its deceitful ways.... They betray or deceive someone then declare, 'It was [a matter of] policy.'[37]

Hadi's remarks forcefully remind us of the larger context within which both he and Sharar were writing, i.e., the meta-narrative of *zawāl* (decline) that overwhelmingly influenced the thinking of the Muslim elite on all social and political issues after the debacle of 1857.[38] Hadi's championing of *waz'dārī* now becomes a conservative's attack on the ancillary narrative of 'Progress' favored by the 'Reformers' of the nineteenth century, who were all *sharīf* and male, and who urged their peers to pursue *maslahat* (prudent expedience) and march in step with Time. The

[36] Mirza Ja'far Husain, *Bīswīn Sadī ke Ba'z Lakhnawī Adīb: Apne Tahzībī Pas-manzar*, p. 22.

[37] Hadi, *Waz'dārān*, pp. 7–8. Hadi's remarks do not imply a critique of the colonial rule, for he adds, 'In the thinking [of the new generation], 'policy' makes any evil respectable. But not a whiff of that word's true meaning has reached these people's brains.... The glorious people, to whose language that word belongs, use it on occasions of great import, and only with reference to matters of state and governance.'

[38] That discourse of 'Decline' had actually started in the 1780s, with the successive plundering of Delhi by the Afghans, Jats, Rohillas, and Marathas, as is evident in the *Shahr Āshob* poems of the time. Its influence persisted through the first half of the last century, and still colours the thinking in many Muslim circles in South Asia.

most succinct statement of the latter sentiment was perhaps a line in what is arguably Urdu's most culturally influential poem, the '*Musaddas*' of Altaf Husain Hali—*chalo tum udhar ko hawā ho jidhar kī*, 'Move in the direction the wind blows.'[39]

To conclude, through most of the eighteenth century *waz'dāri*, in both Persian and Urdu, meant displaying in one's external appearance something unconventional and individualistic. The new element could be jaunty and attractive, but it could also be considered rather questionable by most 'civilised' people. If the majority always wore a cap or turban straight—never tilted—and considered it a mark of 'civility,' a *waz'dār* could do exactly the opposite, and express his individualism—though at some cost in public esteem. For most of that time, the Persian word, *waz'dār*, remained synonymous with the Indic word, *bāNkā*, the two considered interchangeable in Urdu usage. Neither implied any specific 'inner' attribute displayed in the person's behaviour. As such, therefore, the two terms carried little social significance.

Things seemingly began to change with the settlement in Delhi in the 1770s of a group of outsiders who could be doubly regarded by many as uncouth—(1) they were members of an invading army, and (2) their ways and costumes were unlike those of the Delhi urbanites. The same reasons, however, made them attractive to many of those who aspired to be different from their peers and elders. The outsiders did not consider themselves *waz'dār*, nor did they call themselves *bāNke*, but it is conceivable they were so named in derision by the pillars of the society. In addition to their distinct 'external' appearance, the outsiders no doubt brought with them some 'internal' attributes that they believed were integral to their tribal identity. There is no reason, however, to presume that the outsiders possessed a fiercer sense of honour, consistency and fidelity than the locals. We only know that the men who imitated the uncouth outsiders in 'external' aspects soon came to be believed, in popular imagining, to possess the above 'internal' virtues more abundantly than most.

By the time the eighteenth century ended and the nineteenth began, *waz'dār* and *bāNkā* were no longer absolute synonyms. Now the latter additionally defined a cohort of people who were distinctly individualistic, not just in appearance but also in habits and manners. Gradually, another semantic shift took place and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, *waz'dār* could be used in Urdu in two distinctly separate ways. One usage, referring to 'external' appearances, remained ambivalent in connotation—'jaunty' could also imply 'dandy'. The other, invoking 'internal' attributes, became solidly positive—'steadfast' could never be confused with 'stubborn'. Until, that is, the Muslim elite of North India suffered the trauma

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[39] Published in 1879, the poem's original title was *Madd-o-Jazr-i-Islām* (The Tide and Ebb of Islam). It is also telling that in *Sharīfzāda* (p. 105), 'Ruswa' translated the English maxim, 'Honesty is the Best Policy', as *Dayānat bihtarīn maslahat hai*.

of the Mutiny, and many among them set about creating ways to get over the loss and move ahead. Some of those 'Reformists' saw in *waz'dārī* an obstacle in the path of the desired collective progress, and ridiculed it. Their view was hotly contested. Their opponents saw in *waz'dārī* a cherished value that had to be preserved, instead of getting expediently swept away for the sake of some 'Progress'.

The reformists won in real life; the conservatives, however, triumphed in dictionaries. Their victory was unmistakably confirmed in 1925, when Maulvi Ferozuddin of Lahore published his *Fīroz-al-Lughāt*.[40] In the entry for *waz'dār*, he reversed the existing order, giving the pride of place to the word's 'internal' connotations instead of its 'external' attributes. The entry reads: '*Waz'dār*: (1) One who maintains or follows through on his *waz'*'; one who remains firm in his ways; one who feels bound to his *waz'*. (2) Attractive in form, attractive, *bāNkā*, *tarahdār*.'

I must, however, finish on a sartorial flourish. The 'Progressives' won a victory in pajamas. A new style was developed from Sharar's 'civilized' style. It was frugal in the use of cloth, less loose in the waist and thighs, and narrower, though never tight, over the calves. It soon became the preferred style for Muslim men, young and old, and is still known as the 'Aligarh Cut', emblematic of the great educational and social reform movement of the nineteenth century.[41]

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[40] With the support of the Department of Education, Govt. of India, it quickly became the most popular Urdu dictionary all over the country, and went through scores of printings in various versions. The full version alone went through twenty printings in 45 years.

[41] See Sharar, *Guzashta*, p. 242.

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