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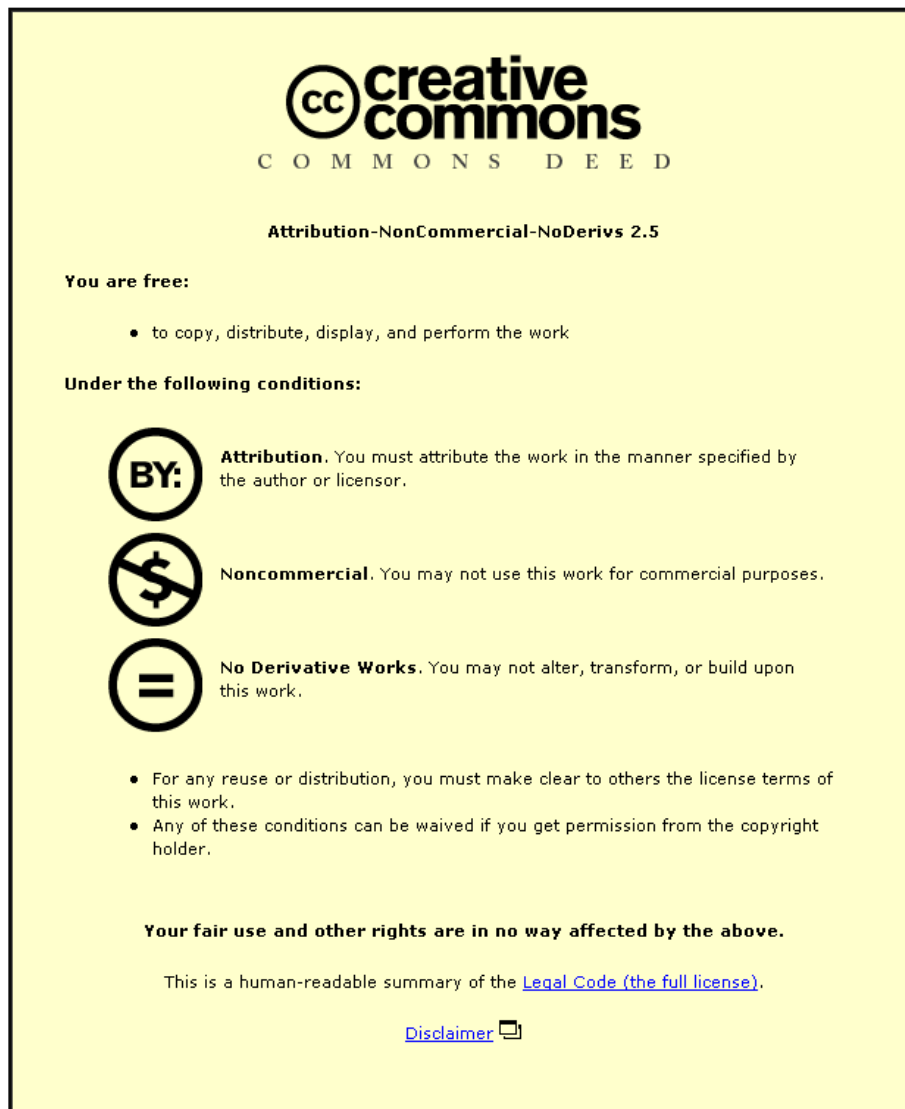
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LIFE/HISTORY/ARCHIVE

Identifying Autobiographical Writing by Muslim Women in South Asia

Siobhan Lambert-Hurley

For historians, the debates surrounding autobiography have focused on the question of reliability: can it be considered an appropriate historical source only when verified by “real” material from “real” archives? Scholars from other disciplines have been more interested in defining autobiography as a genre by asking if it can be distinguished from other literary forms. Far from hypothetical, these questions about where to draw the line are pertinent to the historian in the field faced with the very real problem of identifying materials. The problem seems compounded when the historian’s subject is Muslim women in South Asia, a group often characterized as silent and secluded and thus presumed not to write autobiography at all. As part of the task of “defining the genre,” this article considers the range of possibilities to be included under the labels of personal narratives, life histories, or, ultimately, autobiographical writing—from autobiographical biographies and biographical autobiographies to travelogues, reformist literature, novels, devotionism, letters, diaries, interviews, and ghosted narratives. It raises questions about the nature of archives and the distinctiveness of women’s writing as these relate to nomenclature, structure, chronology, language, voice, and regional specificity.

Introduction

In autumn 2005, I began researching the purposefully amorphous topic of “personal narratives of Muslim women in South Asia.”¹ My intention was to look at ways women reconstructed their life stories in written sources. I thus placed myself, I thought, on solid historical ground—the written word—while still defining “personal narratives” broadly to include autobiographies, memoirs, journal articles, and travel narratives. I began by compiling a list of primarily published autobiographical writing; my starting point was memoirs produced by women at the Bhopal royal court that I had consulted for my doctoral research on the last of the state’s four female rulers, Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam.² The project looked viable, but I remained uncertain about what was out there to be found. When I mentioned my plans to fellow academics of Muslim or women’s history in South Asia, many looked skeptical. “Is there any material?” they asked.

"I mean, did Muslim women write memoirs?" This, it turned out, was a question I would face continuously. The general assumption seemed to be that these silent and secluded creatures would not deign, or perhaps dare, to participate in a genre that required them, in popular parlance, to "lift the veil," revealing something of their inner self or even the "private" world of the *zenana*, or women's quarters.

Other historians greeted my project with even greater suspicion. Interdisciplinarity may have inspired challenges to traditional historical methods on the pages of *Rethinking History*, but notions of Rankean objectivity clearly remain alive and well. More times than I can count, working on this project, questions have been raised of "reliability, validity and authentication."³ This response was all the more surprising to me, as a historian of women and gender, because feminist scholars have been at the forefront of borrowing disciplinary techniques and seeking out new sources: ethnographies, oral traditions, life writing. These materials have transformed history by recovering voices of women and other marginalized groups whose pasts may have been unwritten or unrecorded.⁴ And yet still these materials, reliant on memory, can be deemed fickle and limited, if not unreliable, by history's establishment: suitable to supplementing history, but not actually making it. As literary theorist Rajeswari Sunder Rajan writes in *Real and Imagined Women*, "Women's voices from the past come to us only as ghostly visitations, not with the materiality of 'evidence.'"⁵ Many historians still think of autobiography as an appropriate historical source only if it can be verified by "real" material from a "real" archive. Like Antoinette Burton in her excellent *Dwelling in the Archive*, we are left asking: "who counts as a historical subject and what counts as an archive?"⁶

Scholars from other disciplines have asked rather different questions of autobiography. For literary theorists, debate has often focused on defining autobiography as a genre by asking if it is distinguishable from other literary forms. As author Jill Ker Conway asks, "Is autobiography just another form of fiction? A bastard form of the novel or of biography?"⁷ Historian and literary critic Hayden White's persuasive interventions from *Metahistory* onwards have encouraged scholars to ask if life writers are so different from historians: are both not just aiming to "tell a story" about the past?⁸ Others have looked inward, seeking to differentiate forms of personal narrative within the autobiographical genre. In *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (first published in 1959 and still widely consulted), literary theorist Roy Pascal seeks to separate *memoir*—only sometimes introspective—from *autobiography* with its necessary "driving force."⁹ Both terms, significantly, have been abandoned fairly recently in favor of the more inclusive *life writing* and *life narrative* by postmodern and postcolonial theorists attempting to recognize the "heterogeneity of self-referential practices."¹⁰ And yet for gender

specialists, the question remains of whether women of all nationalities can even participate in a genre that, to borrow another of Conway's phrases, "celebrates the experiences of the atomistic Western male hero?"¹¹

Far from hypothetical, these questions about where to draw the line seem all the more pertinent to the historian in the field faced with the very real problem of identifying and collecting materials—for whatever the attempts on the part of academics to define and categorize, historical sources rarely sit comfortably in one theoretical box or another. The problem seems compounded when the historian's subject is Muslim women in South Asia, a group often presumed not to write autobiography at all. What I offer here is an autobiographical narrative in itself—though, inevitably for a historian, grounded in appropriate academic literature. I recount my experience of trying to find, choose, and label sources for a project on "personal narratives of Muslim women in South Asia." In doing so, I highlight methodological and theoretical questions that this process raised in relation to the categories of gender, autobiography, and history itself: questions about the nature of archives and the distinctiveness of women's writing as they relate to nomenclature, structure, chronology, language, voice, and regional specificity. To justify my title, this is an article about *life*, *history*, and the *archive*, as well as a *life history archive*.

A necessary first stage was exploration of the colonial archive *par excellence*, the British Library in London. In tribute to the philosopher Jacques Derrida, I entitle this stage "Beginnings." For Derrida, the *arkhe* was, to quote historian Carolyn Steedman, "a place where things begin, where power originates."¹² This statement had resonance when working in the Oriental and India Office Collections with their historical associations with an imperial state's glory and authority.¹³ But my beginnings here were two-fold. On one hand, my forays into the British Library marked the (frustrating, unsatisfactory) beginnings of my research process. On the other, they led to a realization that the material I uncovered here—biographies, reformist writings, and travelogues, but little identifiable autobiography—marked a kind of beginning for South Asian Muslim women writing lives, whether lives of others, their own or both. The second section acts as an antidote to the "archive fever" of the first by charting my subsequent experience of seeking a new collection of sources outside the conventional archive. Yet this process led to problems of categorization: to "Blurrings," as I title the section. I consider the range of possibilities under the label of "personal narratives": novels, devotional literature, letters, diaries, journal articles, oral sources, biographies, memoirs, and ghosted narratives. I conclude by reflecting on the issue of "Labeling" itself.

Beginnings

As a trained historian, I was used to thinking of the archive as a physical location: as historian Antoinette Burton summarizes, "an institutional site in a faraway place that requires hotel accommodation and a grueling nine-to-five workday."¹⁴ Admittedly, the latter had rarely been possible in the provincial Indian archive in Bhopal—with its truncated opening hours and extended tea breaks—where I had apprenticed as a historian. But still this description was familiar enough to my experience. The cultural turn has been interpreted by some imperial historians as dealing a near-fatal blow to the archive—such that, by the end of the twentieth century, it was "hardly dead but dissected into unrecognizability and memorialized as the victim of a veritable academic epidemic."¹⁵ But really, the hysteria seems ill-founded. Those "swirling intellectual currents" defined by the "post" prefix—"post-colonial, post-modern, post-Orientalist and post-structural historical perspectives," to borrow an unwieldy section title from historians Bose and Jalal's *Modern South Asia*—may have involved a robust critique of the colonial archive, but not an attempt to get rid of it entirely.¹⁶ Most often, the British Library is still the first stop for British-based scholars of South Asia. As such, it is hardly surprising that I began my research by perusing bibliographical records there, ultimately interrogating the colonial archive for South Asian Muslim women's writings.

Starting with the electronic catalogue, I came across a number of well-known historical examples of Muslim women's autobiographical writing, many of which were already in my collection. From the Mughal period was Gulbadan Banu Begam's *Ahval-i Humayun Badshah*, usually referred to, as in educationalist and translator Annette Beveridge's early twentieth-century translation, as the *Humayun-nama*, and probed by historian Ruby Lal as a source for domestic life at the early Mughal court.¹⁷ There was a rather dubious little volume published in 1931 by a German linguist claiming to be the translation of a handwritten memoir by the Mughal princess, Jahanara, stumbled upon behind a marble slab at the Agra Fort.¹⁸ Even if not authentic, it pointed to Jahanara's actual first-person narrative, *Risala-i-Sahibiyya* (1640), or "The Madam's Treatise," then being examined by art historian Afshan Bokhari for her doctoral research and soon to be republished in English translation.¹⁹ Most familiar to me in that they related to the colonial period were Shaista Ikramullah's *From Purdah to Parliament* (1963) and Jahanara Shah Nawaz's *Father and Daughter* (1971), recounting the political careers of well-known female activists in the All-India Muslim League who later became Pakistani parliamentarians.²⁰ There were also a few contemporary autobiographies from Pakistan—most of the sensationalist variety charting

untold sorrows and political melodramas, but also a couple by feminist poets and even one by a blind social worker.²¹

As a historian with some facility in South Asian languages, I thought there must be more: more from the colonial period and soon after, more in Urdu. In the Asian and African Studies Reading Room I scrutinized Blumhardt's original 1900 catalogue of Hindustani books and manuscripts and, with archivist Leena Mitford's generous assistance, Quraishi's more recent Urdu catalogues, published and unpublished. I searched broadly—entry by entry—my eyes attuned to anything related to auto/biography and/or women (by, for, about). The findings were revealing, if not necessarily of what I thought I was looking for. What was most plentiful—with twenty-eight pages of entries in Quraishi's 1991 catalogue—was biography, primarily of saints, scholars, and poets, with some princely rulers and a few reformers thrown in. Scholars of the Muslim world know that life history has long been a staple of Islamic scholarship, the earliest biography, or *sira*, of the Prophet Muhammad being compiled within a century of his death.²² This early example set a precedent: to narrate an exemplary life, whether of one of the Prophet's Companions, a Sufi Shaikh or a notable '*alim*, was to offer a model of Islamic practice for every "ordinary" Muslim—to allow them to become, in historian Barbara Metcalf's phrase, "living hadith."²³ No wonder that biography and its related genre, the biographical dictionary, flourished as the key mode of historical writing in the Arab world and beyond at least from the eleventh century onwards.²⁴

The focus on biography in the India Office collections then was not entirely surprising, reflecting as it did these "enduring Islamic patterns."²⁵ But a seeming proliferation in nineteenth-century South Asia also appeared indicative of a modern trend: the spread of print culture and the religious change accompanying it in the colonial era. Historian Francis Robinson indicates how the acceptance of print among South Asian Muslims initiated a "process of interiorization" reflected in "the expression of a growing sense of self" or, as he puts it more poetically, "the manifold nature of the human individual."²⁶ As individuals became more important, so biography flourished—with the effect that, as scholar of comparative religion W.C. Smith observed, "more lives of Muhammad appeared between the two World Wars than in any one of the centuries between the twelfth and the nineteenth."²⁷ Yet the effect was not just more biographies, but also different biographies. On one hand, this meant the same lives told differently. To paraphrase Robinson again, even the Prophet Muhammad metamorphosed from the "Perfect Man" of the Sufi tradition to the good middle-class family man identifiable to the era's Muslim reformers.²⁸ On the other hand, it meant different lives told. Among the many biographies listed in the British

Library catalogues were some recounting lives of women. Favored were exemplars from early Islamic history—Khadijah, Aisha, Fatima—though Mughal queens and princesses, maharanis, and begams, a poetess and even a schoolteacher were also deemed appropriate subjects from the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁹

So, Muslim women's lives were certainly being written in South Asia at least from the late nineteenth century, but primarily, if catalogues of Hindustani books in the British Library were indicative, in biographical format by male authors. That is not to say that there were no female biographers. As I already knew well, the last Begam of Bhopal, Sultan Jahan, had written book-length accounts of the life of her mother, Shah Jahan, and her great-grandmother, Qudsia.³⁰ The life of Ashraf un-Nisa Begam, a teacher at Victoria Girls' School in Lahore, was also prepared by her close friend, Muhammadi Begam.³¹ Drawing on feminist studies of auto/biography, the Arabic Studies scholar Marilyn Booth makes the point that "biography is always autobiography."³² What is reflected here is a charge often leveled at biography by its detractors: the idea that biography actually tells the reader more about the author than the subject.³³ According to this approach, by the very act of writing, the biographer projects himself—or, in our case, herself—into the subject with the effect of an "interweaving of lives." As Booth explicates: "the authorial 'I' links the act of writing biography to individual and collective identity."³⁴

The question is thus raised of whether these biographies by women authors were appropriate material for my study of autobiography. At the time I did not consider them—though, as we will see, I was forced to return to the knotty problem of auto/biography. What I did instead was to note what else in the British Library catalogues was written by or for women. It is worth noting that an underlying reason for embarking on a project on women's personal narratives was because, after years of studying highly moralistic and often dry reformist literature (necessary for a book on women's participation in socio-religious reform movements), I wanted to read something different. Yet that very reformist literature kept reappearing now, making it the second most inhabited of my broad categories: advice manuals for women on correct Islamic practice, home economics, housekeeping, childcare, and personal hygiene. Like the biographies, most of it was written by men, but there were a few female authors: most prolifically, the Begams of Bhopal again, but also some unknown. One of these manualists was described only as "the mother of M. Abd al-Aziz," while another, Amat al-Nasir, had to be justified as the "daughter of Sardar Ahmed"—apparently a Deputy Collector, who also took responsibility for editing and publishing her text—and the "wife of Sardar Faqir Allah BA."³⁵ It made me consider the possibility that perhaps most women's identities

were simply too relational to others in this period to participate in a genre, like autobiography, supposedly defined by its emphasis on self.

Only much later, revisiting Shah Jahan Begam's *Tahzib un-Niswan wa Tarbiyat ul-Insan* (1889) for a different purpose, did I consider the manuals themselves as a form of self-representation or even life writing. Did they not contain a woman's own rules for running a household and sometimes even incidents from the author's life used to explain a particular point or justify a specific reformist stance? A revealing example of the latter was in a passage on sexual intercourse in the above text. The reigning nawab asserted a woman's right to carnal pleasure using her own experiences as illustration. She felt unfulfilled, apparently, by her first husband, the older and already married Baqi Muhammad Khan, thus her youth had been lost in "*ranj o gham*," suffering and sadness. Her second husband, Siddiq Hasan, changed all that, provoking her to affirm that she had never been so happy.³⁶ Her daughter, Sultan Jahan, was too circumspect to discuss sexual matters in her own reformist writings (though not too circumspect to conceive five children). And yet she too used her life to illustrate her reformist stance. When discussing polygamy in her widely-circulated advice manual for married couples, she suggested that women could follow her example in adding an extra clause to their marriage contract to protect them financially should their husband ever exercise his right to take another wife.³⁷ Surely, there was much to be mined from reformist literature in terms of autobiographical fragments, if not more.

Yet the question remained: was there any autobiography proper in the British Library's Hindustani catalogues? Well, yes, a couple—but all by men.³⁸ What I also found was a goodly selection of another type of personal narrative on my list of potential sources: travel writing. Academic interest has followed this literary form recently as, on the back of the theorist Edward Said, scholars have sought to make explicit the links between physical travel and imaginative journey.³⁹ These analyses take as starting point the idea that travel writing is not a "literal and objective record of journeys undertaken" so much as an "ideological" undertaking that "draws on the conventions of other literary genres."⁴⁰ In a South Asian context, Barbara Metcalf has shown how even accounts of the quintessential Muslim journey, the *hajj* pilgrimage, became "modes of self-presentation" in the modern period—thus suggesting the crossover between travel writing and autobiography.⁴¹ And so it felt quite a coup to come across this stash of travelogues, several of which were written by Muslim women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Including an Indian tour diary, pilgrimage narratives, and a European travel account, they proved to be merely representative: as my research progressed to and across the Indian sub-continent, these travel accounts accrued.⁴² Many women employed the regular Persian term for

a book of travels, *safarnama*; others preferred to evoke the idea of a travel diary, using *roznamchah*. Either way, by purporting to describe objective reality the travel narrative seemed to provide women with a useful cover for writing of personal experience, if only when in motion, in the colonial period and beyond.

And so I ended my time in the British Library with a handful of materials, most of which I had already known about. Still I was beginning to have a sense of how Muslim women could have gained access to the world of life writing in colonial South Asia, how they may have found their autobiographical beginnings. I began to conjecture that the socio-cultural and technological changes of the nineteenth century enabled India's Muslim women to be recognized, particularly within the Islamic reform context, as appropriate subjects for *biography*, which might have *autobiographical* content. Thus established, a few exemplars began making use of other literary genres—*reformist texts*, *travel literature*—to speak of the self. Good beginnings, for sure; but, like many feminist scholars, I still had a sense that the colonial archive had failed me. I should note here that my experience of libraries and archives in South Asia—whether national, formerly princely, or university-based—were more fruitful from the perspective of conventional women's autobiography, but only partially so. The Maulana Azad Library at Aligarh Muslim University gave access to a few fairly well-known Urdu texts, but the Raza Rampur Library—that “treasure house of Indo-Islamic learning and art”—yielded almost nothing.⁴³ This project required a different tack.

Blurrings

When I arrived in Delhi in autumn 2005, I had only a few leads—a reference to a manuscript in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the possibility of an article in an early Urdu women's magazine, a name or two of people who might be able to help. Yet before long, I found myself doing historical research as I had never done it before. Whether in Delhi, Bhopal, Dhaka, Hyderabad, or Bombay, each morning saw me exploring another previously unfamiliar corner of the city. Each tangled journey took me into a different woman's home or office or favorite cafe where they might hand over a scribbled manuscript, an old journal or a rare publication: maybe their own or that of a grandmother, a famous aunt, or an admired teacher. And then, over innumerable cups of tea, too many sweets, or an impromptu meal, I sat and listened to the stories behind the words on the page. My research notebooks are revealing of the time and patience required for this kind of research, as well as the pleasures: relationships made, trust gained, goodwill shown. They also suggest what would emerge as the main source base

for my project: the home, the market, and the street. To borrow Antoinette Burton's phrase, the people I met were literally "dwelling in the archive."⁴⁴

But the problem with using the world *outside* the archive *as* an archive was that there were *blurrings*: blurrings by genre and blurrings by terminology, blurrings by others and blurrings by me. To return to the questions raised by literary theorists: how was autobiography to be identified, and how was it to be defined? Let me take readers to a bright day in Dhaka in January 2006. With a friend from the Dhaka University history department, I went to a book fair. "Do you have any Muslim women's memoirs," she asked in Bengali. We might note the specific phrase she employed to denote the type of writing I was looking for: *atma jibani*, one's own story. We were inevitably greeted with a slow shake of the head to the negative. Yet a scan of what was actually on the table often did turn up something I thought I was looking for—perhaps a piece of fiction with a lengthy autobiographical introduction or a personal travel account given the title of guide.⁴⁵ There were even two women's accounts of their experiences of Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971.⁴⁶ My friend would check, "No memoirs? Are you sure?" Then perhaps we would be presented with a novel written by a woman—perhaps Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Padmarag* (1924), described by its recent translator, Barnita Bagchi, as "resonant with autobiographical undertones."⁴⁷ I'd shake my head in refusal: "No, that's not a memoir; it's a novel, a piece of fiction." Maybe, the bookseller would shrug, but it's based on "real life."

This slippage between novel and memoir in popular parlance was raised in academic forums too. Would I, one of my audience asked at a seminar at the lively Sarai Initiative in Delhi months later, be using what he termed so nicely "disguised autobiographical writing"? The reference was to the collected works of outstanding literary figures like Qurratulain Hyder and "partition novels" like Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961)—the latter, ironically, one of the first things I ever read by a South Asian Muslim woman as a student. Perhaps it is right that these materials be considered for a historical study of women's personal narratives. Qurratulain Hyder's two volume *Kar-e-Jahan Daraz Hai*, usually translated as "The Work of the World Goes On," is sometimes described as a "family chronicle" but more often as an "autobiographical novel." Its interweaving of individual and family, past and present, and fact and fiction is evoked by Ali Jawad Zaidi in his history of Urdu literature—significantly, in the section on "autobiography" under "literary miscellany," not in "modern fiction," where the book is only listed as one of Hyder's novels. This book, he writes, "weaves autobiographical reality into the fictional stretch of centuries to show the present as an inseparable part of the past inherited through historical present."⁴⁸

Hosain's *Sunlight*, on the other hand, was hailed by historian Mushirul Hasan as "one of the most compelling archives of Muslim experience before, during, and after partition" before being "counterread as a history" of house and home in Burton's aforementioned *Dwelling in the Archive*.⁴⁹ These descriptions seek to make the book admissible to history, while again raising the question of genre: that fuzzy line between novel and autobiography. On this theme, Burton points to novelist Mulk Raj Anand's attempt to "rescue *Sunlight* from the category of autobiography" in order to give Hosain "what he viewed as the exalted and more legitimate status of novelist"—thus implying that *Sunlight* needed to be rescued.⁵⁰ Burton records Hosain's own assertion, made in an interview late in life, that *Sunlight* was "like an autobiography, but it is not one"—and yet "it's not purely fictional" either.⁵¹

These examples raise the important question of whether, in a cultural context like South Asia where women's voices are so often silenced, the novel becomes a preferred, if not necessary, form of self-expression. We may consider what literary critic Sukrita Paul Kumar has written of the eminent and often controversial Urdu writer, Ismat Chughtai: "There is virtually no distinction between the actual life experience of Ismat Chughtai and the fiction she created. The members of her family, the servants of her household, and her friends, became the characters of her stories, sometimes with the same names. The episodes and relationships that she went through became the content of her fiction and the society in which she lived, the context."⁵² And yet Ismat Chughtai did also write an autobiography—alluringly entitled not "reminiscences" or "her life" as in the selective translations, but instead *Kāghazī hai pairāhan*. The title, usually translated as "My clothes are made of paper," was borrowed from one of the great Urdu poet Ghalib's couplets, apparently making reference to the legend of the paper clothes worn by petitioners in Iran and thus the transience of human life as we stand before the Creator.⁵³ Such a title would not seem out of place as the header to one of her identifiably fictional writings. And so it is perhaps appropriate that, as critics have pointed out, not all of what she writes in her autobiography actually corroborates the known "facts of her life." As Kumar explains: "Ismat's real life gets carried into her fiction just as easily as fiction slips into the text of her life."⁵⁴

Kumar goes on to say that we should not discount Ismat Chughtai's autobiography just because it does not appear all to be "true." As she writes: "I believe what is important is how she perceives the fact of her life, however imaginary it may be. After all, truth is what is realized, not what may get projected superficially as action. And imagination too is founded in some truth."⁵⁵ Her statement points to important questions debated routinely by literary theorists under the title of "autobiographical truth": how far may we assume that the life writer is telling the truth? And the truth of

what and for whom? As literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson summarize: "Are we expecting fidelity to the facts of their biographies, to lived experience, to self-understanding, to the historical moment, to social community, to prevailing beliefs about diverse identities, to the norms of autobiography as a literary genre itself?"⁵⁶ Whatever I presumed to be the answers to these questions were challenged further when, at the home of another gracious hostess in Delhi, I was presented with a small book entitled *The Heart of a Gopi* by one of Gandhi's closest Muslim disciples, Raihana Tyabji. According to its introduction, this piece of bhakti devotionism was composed when, over three days in 1924, the author was "possessed" by the spirit of Sharmila, a gopi, or milkmaid, enraptured by Krishna in his guise as the cowherd at Vrindavan, and compelled to write her story.⁵⁷ How to interpret this narration? Should we, in the tradition of Islamic life writing, breach the gap between "the miraculous and the mundane" to understand the mystical experience charted here as a kind of life writing?⁵⁸

Other attempts to use the home as an archive were fraught with similar problems of identification. Just a week after I arrived in Delhi, a fellow researcher from Britain kindly offered to take me into the winding lanes of old Delhi to meet her Persian tutor. He responded generously to my request for help in finding "Muslim women's memoirs" by presenting me with a large box of dusty papers in handwritten Urdu long kept in his family's rambling *haveli*. In them, he explained, I would find his sister's "life story." What the box actually contained was the steady exchange of letters between this brother in India and his sister in Pakistan over the sixty-odd years since Partition.⁵⁹ Feminist historians especially have made excellent use of these kinds of materials to chart "changing life styles, expectations and aspirations" from the late nineteenth century—when letter-writing became "increasingly common" among South Asia's elite—to the present.⁶⁰ And yet from the perspective of a study of life writing as a genre, they seemed too immediate, not constructed enough. Like diaries and journals, they offered "raw data" instead of "synthesized memory," to quote scholar of education Joanne Cooper.⁶¹ But what if those letters were then edited for publication and even synthesized into a coherent narrative? I think here of two other sources: travelogues composed by Atiya Fyzee and her sister Nazli, the Begam of Janjira, during trips to Europe in 1906–7 and 1908. Both began life as regular letters to relatives in India before they were, in one case, edited by another sister, Zehra, for publication in serial form in an Urdu women's journal and, in both cases, assembled in book form as a *roznamchah*.⁶²

We might also consider a set of unusual family diaries produced by the same historically-conscious extended family and known variously as the *Akhbar ki Kitab*, *Kitab-i-Akhbar*, or *Akhbarnama*. Meaning literally "news books," they were a kind of glorified guest book kept in various homes of

different branches of Bombay's Tyabji clan (after which they were named) from as early as the 1860s. They record the family's daily routines—from badminton matches and sports tournaments to picnics, club meetings, and visits to the dentist—alongside notable public events in which leading lights, like Badruddin Tyabji himself, took part.⁶³ Certain Tyabjis also contributed literary pieces, including poetry, extracts from speeches, travel narratives, and obituaries—many of which were written by women after they were encouraged to participate by the family matriarchs.⁶⁴ In most cases, these scattered entries have the same immediate, uncrafted quality of letters and diaries, though one might say less so of the travel accounts composed after long journeys and the occasional retrospectives written on individual lives. Some of the latter even found their way into mainstream women's journals for which other Tyabji women, having cut their authorial milk teeth writing manuscripts for family circulation, also wrote short travel pieces and autobiographical fragments.⁶⁵

My experience of perusing women's journals brought the question of oral sources to the foreground. An early task I set myself in Delhi was to survey the back issues of the feminist periodical *Manushi* (dating from 1978) for autobiographical fragments in the form of journal articles. There was a little of that—and in time, I would find more in other women's magazines from Lahore, Delhi, and Dhaka.⁶⁶ But what stood out more in terms of "life history" were the regular interviews, many of which were conducted by *Manushi's* founding editors, Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, before perhaps being translated and then extracted in article form. Readers will remember that, from the outset of my project, I had been clear about excluding life histories extracted through interview, considering this material the purview of the anthropologist, not the historian. Yet what of the interview written down? Among the interviewed telling about their family histories, professional experiences, and political ideologies were musician Asghari Begum Sagarwali, writer Ismat Chughtai, and actress Shabana Azmi.⁶⁷ Well-wishers directed me to other examples profiling well-known South Asian women—an important example being a lengthy interview with Attia Hosain from May 1991, published in 2004 on Harappa.com, a Pakistani website promising "glimpses of South Asia before 1947."⁶⁸

These published interviews certainly provided a type of personal narrative, but was it the type of narrative to be included in my study of autobiographical writing? Two things made me think not. The first was their basis in conversation, a fairly unstructured medium even when punctuated by the interviewer's questions. Was it not the *constructed* life that I was interested in? But then, as those who use oral narratives know well, a story told can be as constructed as a story written, especially if it is oft-repeated.⁶⁹ And a written autobiography may well be characterized as

conversational. Let us consider a text I would certainly include in my study: Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri's *Humsafar*, published in Urdu in 1992, translated into English in 2006 as *My Fellow Traveller*.⁷⁰ The author explains that she was encouraged to write her memoir by her deceased husband's friend, no less than the renowned Pakistani scholar of Urdu language and literature, Jamil Jalibi. Providing her with pens and notebooks he advised her to "write down what you see in those films running before your mind's eye"—all those memories of the past that come to one in old age.⁷¹ He went on: "I am not asking you to do something that is impracticable for you. All I am suggesting is to say with your pen whatever you say in your speech. Imagine when you are writing that I am sitting before you, and you are speaking to me."⁷² And she does. The book is in the form of an extended conversation with "Jamil Bhai"—to whom she directs her remarks and reflections in a voice that could as easily be spoken as written. For its "chatty, conversational style," it is celebrated.⁷³

To return to the published interviews, a second concern was the presence of the interviewer, setting questions and conditioning answers. Is not the crucial role played by the interviewer in shaping the story one of the "pitfalls of oral history," to quote historian John Tosh, against which university students are routinely warned?⁷⁴ And yet as I aim to explore in the longer project, few memoirs are untouched by outside interference. Readers, editors, and publishers—to list only usual players—all take roles in crafting a memoir for public consumption. And what if the interviewer is still there, but just not so present? One of the bestselling recent autobiographies in Kerala—in its sixth edition when I visited in December 2005—is Nalim Jameela's account of her life as a sex worker, *Om Laingikatozhilaliyude Atmakatha*.⁷⁵ Again it is worth noting the word used in the local vernacular, this time Malayalam, to denote autobiography: *atmakatha*, or one's own story. Yet while the narrative reads fluidly (at least in the English translation kindly provided to me by J. Devika), the book was put together by a male reformer on the basis of taped interviews. The careful reader (like my own interlocutor, Devika) may be able to discern "two voices talking"—Nalim Jameela and the interviewer—in the first editions (before the supposed author demanded that the text be rewritten to prevent "misrepresentation"), but this nuance was most probably lost on those that devoured the startling 13,000 copies sold in the first four months after publication.⁷⁶

I suggested earlier that some materials I collected unquestioningly were not an individual's memoir so much as the interwoven life stories of a woman and a man with whom she was close. I think of Shahnawaz's *Father and Daughter* or Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri's *Humsafar*, two examples mentioned already. Far more were projected as biographies of close male relatives—husband, father, or son.⁷⁷ Yet in charting a relation-

ship, they were often as revealing of the female author as the male subject. Examining women's accounts of social reform campaigns in Maharashtra, sociologist Jyotsna Kapur includes a section on this kind of "biography as autobiography." She points out that many "biographies" that women wrote about reforming husbands—often at their husband's request—had a special emphasis on their wedding and married life. Ramabai Ranade, in her "biography" of her famed husband, talks not of his "public role as a social reformer," but instead: "her relationship with him, how this affected her relationship with others in the family, and her own opinions about some of the public decisions that he took which affected her." Such examples lead Kapur to conclude: "The accounts, then, describe women's experiences in great detail and are really autobiographical."⁷⁸ These examples set alongside my own seemed to suggest that, for women in South Asia, writing biography—or a travelogue or a novel—was another necessary strategy for writing about the self in a cultural context where women's voices were not meant to be heard.

The line between these autobiographical biographies and autobiography proper was especially blurred because many of the latter that I consulted seemed to be more about others in a woman's life. Just as the biographies appeared to be autobiographical (about the self), so some autobiographies appeared more as collections of biography (about others). Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri's aforementioned *Humsafar* is presented from the outset as being more about the author's more famous husband, the acclaimed Urdu writer Akhtar Husain Raipuri, than herself. The memoir begins not with the author's birth as one might expect but with the moment she meets her husband.⁷⁹ Yet it is not just about him—or her relationship with him—but also all the "great personalities" the couple had met.⁸⁰ Her focus on others is reinforced by a survey of the table of contents: many chapters are named after individuals Hameeda knew: Maulvi Abdul Haq, Munir Bano, Prem Bada Devi, Khalida Adib Khanum, and "My Father."⁸¹ Other female writers proved even more explicit in focusing on others. As Hamida Rahman, a writer and educator in Bangladesh, wrote of her autobiography (*Jibon Smriti*, "memories of my life"): "[This title] does not mean writing only about my own life. While walking in this event-filled world, one meets so many people. Their memories peep into the pages of one's life. I cannot but describe them."⁸²

These authors' approach may be seen to reflect some generic features of women's autobiography. As I have summarized elsewhere, women's autobiographical writings are often characterized—almost exclusively on a reading of those produced in Europe and North America—as being "more collective than individual, more about relationships than accomplishments."⁸³ What is reflected here is that, while a man may find it easy to write

a “coherent, linear, narrative describing an individualized self,” women are more likely to root their life stories in collective identities associated with the family, friendships, or kinship networks—though, naturally in making this statement, one should be careful of generalizations that overwrite difference of class, race, and sexual orientation.⁸⁴ The inclination to collectivity may be accentuated in a society, like South Asia, which is often presumed to “privilege the social and communal over the individual.”⁸⁵ But, just as important in the cases I discuss here, seems to be the model of Islamic life story. As Metcalf writes of an autobiographical narrative composed within that tradition by Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya, a Muslim scholar from the Islamic *madrassa* at Deoband in northwest India in the 1970s: “The material is not presented as Muhammad Zakariyya’s exclusive story at all, but, throughout, as the story of his relations with other people. He counts, as part of *his* life, stories of the elders he has interacted with or whom he, in turn, knows from stories recounted by others. Indeed, one might say that the ‘autobiography’ is not much about Muhammad Zakariyya at all.”⁸⁶ No wonder I was experiencing a sense of genre instability.

Also blurring the lines between biography and autobiography was my growing realization—fostered by my informal conversations with those surrounding memoirs—that not all my sources were written by their proclaimed author. Returning to Delhi from Aligarh one evening, I was chatting with Lubna Kazim, the daughter of actress and later memoirist Begum Khurshid Mirza. She made what I thought a surprising admission: faced with a publisher’s charge that her mother’s memoir was too “sketchy,” she had filled in some bits that her mother had “left unsaid” so as to “bring things to a close.” The memoir was thus written, as she put it, “as a family thing.”⁸⁷ Later I realized that Lubna had been forthright about her contribution in print, noting in her preface to the Indian edition: “the informative chapters two, four, and five are largely mine. For reasons of preserving the continuity of the narrative, they have been included in the main text and not moved to the appendix.”⁸⁸ Yet they were written in first person. I had come across an even more extreme example of this “ghosting” once before in Bilkees Latif’s *Her India*. The preface made clear that what followed was, in effect, a biography of the author’s French-born mother, Alys Iffrig—later Begam Ali Yar Khan and later still Begam Ali Hydari—written on the basis of conversations with her aged mother supplemented by family papers and archival research. Yet it, too, was composed in first person: “in her own words,” as the named author explained, as if this was sufficient to distinguish them from her own “author’s words” that resurfaced in the final chapter to recount her mother’s death and draw the narrative to a close.⁸⁹ So what makes a biography and what an autobiography? Let us consider this issue of labeling further.

Conclusions: Labeling

In Metcalf's study of Muhammad Zakariyya's autobiographical writings she notes that the Deobandi 'alim shunned "more elevated terms" used for autobiography in favor of calling his work *Aap Biittii*: the "ordinary" Hindi term for a written or spoken life story. The implication, Metcalf points out, was of "having his own say"—perhaps appropriate since much of this "modest, incomplete, sometimes repetitive document" was transcribed from speech.⁹⁰ But the booksellers I encountered in Delhi's Urdu Bazaar only really responded to the Persianized *khud navisht*: "self-writing," or "that which is written about oneself." Their informal lessons in nomenclature suggested that this term is the more accepted one now for autobiography in Urdu. This phrase is not found in Platt's classic dictionary (1884), though it appears in certain Urdu publications by the early twentieth century.⁹¹ Its growing use among South Asian Muslims is also implicit in the titles given to a text composed by Princess Shahr Bano Begam of Pataudi between 1885 and 1887. The manuscript was originally called *Biṭṭi Kahāni*, which could be translated rather indelicately as a "story of incidents that one has experienced." When it was finally published in Pakistan in 1995, it also boasted a (not necessarily accurate) subtitle: *Urdu ki awwālin niswānī khud navisht*, or "the first autobiography by a woman in the Urdu language."⁹² Recently published again in Pakistan, in an English translation by Tahera Aftab, it is simply an "autobiography."⁹³

I initially identified my study as being about *personal narratives*. I chose this phrase in tribute to feminist scholar Malavika Karlekar's groundbreaking study of "early personal narratives" produced by (Hindu) women in Bengal, *Voices from Within*. As Karlekar noted, she too faced difficulties over the "choice of texts, their availability and relevance," but settled on those "autobiographical writings" either published or available in Calcutta's main libraries. Her sources thus included not just "the more formal, full-length, structured autobiography," but also diaries, letters, newspaper and journal articles, poems, stories, and essays.⁹⁴ Nearly two decades later, she and co-editor Aparna Basu stood by this label, while also expressing a preference for the term *life experiences* in their compendium, *In So Many Words*. Yet they expanded their source base to include "portraits from memory" and an oral interview.⁹⁵ Others working with this kind of material in the context of South Asia have preferred the term *life histories*.⁹⁶ According to historian David Arnold and literary scholar Stuart Blackburn, this terminology allows contributors to their important volume, *Telling Lives in India*, to go beyond "clearly biographical or autobiographical texts" that could "privilege print over orality" to also include folktales, legends, and "spoken lives." Attractive in this broad definition is its attempt to avoid "artificial boundaries" that

can hide the “often fragmentary or allusive nature of many life-historical forms.”⁹⁷ By settling on the term *autobiographical writing* instead, I hope to recognize this instability of genre while evoking my focus on the written life. My hope too is that by employing a derivative of the term *autobiography*—with its resonance on a global scale—my work will help disrupt the established western canon by asserting the place of South Asian Muslim women’s writings in what Smith and Watson refer to as a “new, globalized history of the field.”⁹⁸

So what is to be included in my life history archive? I started my field-work wondering if there was anything out there to be found. Throughout I faced skepticism at the idea of Muslim women writing memoirs. Without doubt, these sources can be difficult to find. While the colonial archive and its successors yielded some material, much more fruitful was the experience of getting out onto the streets and into people’s homes and lives. Through this more holistic approach to research, I collected literally hundreds of books, manuscripts, articles, and words relevant to this study of autobiographical writing—whether called autobiography or memoir, *aap biitii*, *biittii kahani* or *khud navisht*, *atmakatha* or *atma jibani*, or, in more specific forms, *roznamchah* or *safarnamah*. Yet as I have sought to show, a constant problem was how to fit these real-life historical sources into the theoretical boxes dreamt up by academics usually within the context of a Euro-American literary tradition. In the course of this article, I have traversed from autobiographical biographies and biographical autobiographies to travelogues, reformist literature, novels, devotionism, letters, diaries, interviews, speeches, and ghosted narratives. In the end, I draw a line—if a hazy and traversable line—at the constructed life: no novels, but the more autobiographical biographies and the biographical autobiographies; the autobiographical fragment; the written-made-oral, but not the oral-made-written; the published “diary book,” but not diaries or letters; the spiritual, but not the ghosted; and the travelogue where relevant.

I am under no illusion that this source base is complete, or even as comprehensive as it ought to be. Because of ongoing political instability in Pakistan, I was never able to do research “on the ground” there as I did in Delhi and other historically-important Muslim centers in India and Bangladesh—though I did seek to take full advantage of existing contacts and the internet to access as much as I could from that region. Like all history then, this one is “partial,” and “unfinished”; to think otherwise would require us, as Burton asserts, to buy in to the “total vision” of the Benthamite panopticon.⁹⁹ And yet I am sure that it is representative enough to at least begin answering some of the questions that I want to take up in the bigger project: who writes, when, where, and for whom? In what ways does the context of production—historical, geographical, literary—shape the con-

struction of lives? Do the form and content of these narratives change over time? How do women's writings differ from the autobiographical writings of men in similar contexts? And how do Muslim women's writings in South Asia compare with those of Muslim women elsewhere and non-Muslim women in South Asia? How do Muslim women especially reflect on the broader historical trends of socio-religious reform, nationalism, communalism, and independence, while also developing themes unique to their own experience? And in what ways do they continue the tradition of Islamic life writing, while also accepting or adapting western models with which they may have come in contact in a colonial or postcolonial environment? For these purposes at least, I have evolved a definition for *autobiographical writing* that emerges from the specific experience of a historian crafting a unique archive from which to study Muslim women in South Asia.

NOTES

¹The British Academy and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded the project (2005–6); I acknowledge this support with gratitude.

²See, as example, Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women, Reform and Princely Patronage: Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal* (London: Routledge, 2007).

³I quote a review of Suvir Kaul's *The Partitions of Memory*, cited in Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21.

⁴Sylvia Vatuk usefully summarizes these developments in "Hamara Daur-i Hayat: An Indian Muslim Woman Writes Her Life" in *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History*, ed., David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 147.

⁵Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Post-colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 91.

⁶Burton, *Dwelling*, 141.

⁷Jill Ker Conway, *When Memory Speaks: Exploring the Art of Autobiography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 3. A fuller discussion appears in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 5–12.

⁸Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 13–15.

⁹Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 5.

¹⁰Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 4.

¹¹Conway, *When Memory Speaks*, 3.

¹²Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 1.

¹³On a related theme, see Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (March 2002): 87–109.

¹⁴Burton, *Dwelling*, 139.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁶Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 7. See, for example, Gayatri Spivak's "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (1985): 247–72.

¹⁷Gulbadan Begam, *The History of Humāyūn-Humāyūn-nāma*, trans. Annette S. Beveridge (London, 1902). For the Persian original, see MS.Or 166. Ruby Lal, "Historicizing the harem: The Challenge of a Princess's Memoir," *Feminist Studies* 30, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 2004), 590–616.

¹⁸Andrea Butenschon, *The Life of a Mogul Princess* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1931), reprinted by Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore (2004). Contemporary reviewers apparently take Butenschon's claim at face value. See Mohsin Maqbool Elahi, "Review: A Princess with Taste," *Dawn* (Karachi), 18 July 2004.

¹⁹A. Bokhari, S. Sharma, and S. Gandhi, *Mughals and Mystics: The Sufi-Sovereign Embrace, Jahan Ara Begam's (1614–1681) Mystical Articulations* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, forthcoming). Bokhari's dissertation will appear as *Jahan Ara Begam (1614–1681): A Princess and her Piety, Poetry and Patronage in 17th Century Mughal India* (London: I.B. Tauris, forthcoming).

²⁰Shaista Ikramullah, *From Purdah to Parliament* (London: Cressat Press, 1963); Jahan Ara Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter: a Political Autobiography* (Lahore: Nigarishat, 1971).

²¹Tehmina Durrani, *My Feudal Lord* (London: Bantam Press, 1994); Salma Ahmed, *Cutting Free* (Karachi: Sama, 2002); Kishwar Naheed, *Buri 'aurat ki katha: Khoud navisht* (New Delhi: Adab Publications, 1995); Fatima Shah, *Sunshine & Shadows: the Autobiography of Dr. Fatima Shah* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1999).

²²Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22.

²³Barbara D. Metcalf, "The Past in the Present: Instruction, Pleasure, and Blessing in Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya's *Aap Biitii*" in Arnold and Blackburn, *Telling Lives*, 119.

²⁴On the relationship between biography and history in the Arab world, see Judith E. Tucker, "Biography as History: The Exemplary Life of Khayr al-Din al-Ramli" in *Auto/Biography and the Construction of Identity and Community in the Middle East*, ed., Mary Ann Fay (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 9–10.

²⁵Metcalf, "The Past in the Present," 119.

²⁶Francis Robinson, "Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia" in *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 95.

²⁷W.C. Smith quoted in *ibid.*, 95.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 96.

²⁹See, as examples, Sayyid Asghar Husain, *Nurjahan Badshah Begam ki savanilh umri* (Agra: Agra Akhbar, 1903); Inayat Allah, *Panc mashhur begamat* (Lahore: Nur Illahi, 1928).

³⁰Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hayat-i-Shahjahani* (Agra: Mufid-i 'Amm Press, 1914) and *Hayat-i-Qudsi* (Bhopal: Matba'-i-Sultani, 1917).

³¹Muhammadi Begam, *Hayat-i Ashraf* (Lahore: Rifah-i 'Amm Press, 1904).

³²Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), xvi.

³³See Michael Holroyd, "Our Friends the Dead," *The Guardian*. 1 Jun. 2002.

³⁴Booth, *May Her Likes*, xvi.

³⁵The mother of M. Abd al-Aziz, *Mu'avvin-i Mashurat* (Hardoi: Matba'-i Muraqqa'i 'Alam, 1905).

³⁶Shah Jahan Begam, *Tahzib un-Niswan wa Tarbiyat ul-Insan* (Delhi: Matba'-i-Ansari, 1889). I developed this in a paper entitled "To Write of the Conjugal Act: Intimacy and Sexuality in Muslim Women's Autobiographical Writing," first presented at the 40th Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 21–23 October 2011, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, forthcoming.

³⁷Sultan Jahan Begam, *Hadiyat ul-Zaujain* (Madras: Weekly Newspaper Press, 1917), 22–25.

³⁸M. 'Abd al-Qadir, *Sirat al-mamduh*, ed. Maulavi Hidayat Muhayy al-Din (Agra: Mufid-i Amm, 1906); Khwaja Altaf Husain Hali, *Bayan-i Hali* (Panipat: Shaikh M. Ismail Panipati, 1939).

³⁹A useful compendium is Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁰Tim Youngs, "Introduction: Filling the Blank Spaces" in *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces*, ed., Tim Youngs (London: Anthem, 2006), 2–3.

⁴¹Barbara Metcalf, "The Pilgrimage Remembered: South Asian Accounts of the Hajj" in *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, ed., Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori (London: Routledge, 1990), 85.

⁴²See Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, "Muslim Women Write Their Journeys Abroad: A Bibliographical Essay" in *Travel Writing in India*, ed., Shobhana Bhat-tacharji (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2008). Dedicated studies of this material, spun

off the larger project, are: Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, *A Princess's Pilgrimage: Nawab Sikandar Begam's A Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2007); and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley and Sunil Sharma, *Atiya's Journeys: A Muslim Woman from Colonial Bombay to Edwardian Britain* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴³See the Raza Rampur library website: <http://razalibrary.gov.in/index.asp> [Accessed 29 June 2011]

⁴⁴Burton, *Dwelling*.

⁴⁵Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani, *Rupjalal*, ed. Mohammad Abdul Kudus (originally published Dhaka, 1876; reprint Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2004); Dr. Sabrina Q. Rashid, *Hajj: A Wonderful Experience: With a Guide to Hajj* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2005). Bangladesh proved to be a mine of resources; this multitude of Bengali-language materials will be discussed in future work.

⁴⁶Jahanara Imam, *Of Blood and Fire: The Untold Story of Bangladesh's War of Independence*, trans. Mustafizur Rahman (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1998); Farida Huq, *Journey Through 1971: My Story* (Dhaka: Academic Press and Publishers Limited, 2004)

⁴⁷Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, *Sultana's Dream and Padmarag*, trans. Barnita Bagchi (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005), back cover.

⁴⁸Ali Jawad Zaidi, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1993), 435.

⁴⁹Burton, *Dwelling*, 106

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 117.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²Sukrita Paul Kumar, "Introducing Ismat" in Sukrita Paul Kumar and Sadique, *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (Delhi: Katha, 2000), 9

⁵³*Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 15.

⁵⁷Raihana Tyabji, *The Heart of a Gopi* (Poona: Miss R. Tyabji, n.d.), v-vi.

⁵⁸For further explication, see Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, "The Heart of a Gopi: Raihana Tyabji's Bhakti Devotionalism as Self Representation," *Modern Asian Studies*, forthcoming.

⁵⁹This meeting occurred 21 November, 2005.

⁶⁰Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 19.

⁶¹Joanne E. Cooper, "Shaping Meaning: Women's Diaries, Journals and Letters—the Old and the New," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10, no. 1 (1987), 95–99.

⁶²Atiya Fyzee's *Zamana-i-tahsil* (Agra: Matba' Mufid-i-'Am, 1921), originally published in the Lahore women's weekly, *Tahzib un-niswan* (see issues dated 26 January 1907–30 November 1907); Nazli Rafia Sultan Nawab Begum Sahiba, *Sair-i-Yurop* (Lahore: Union Steam Press, n.d.). For detailed analysis of the first, see Lambert-Hurley and Sharma, *Atiya's Journeys*.

⁶³This summary is based on my consultation of the *Akhbar ki Kitab* from Matheran and Mahabaleshwar for 1894 to 1907 at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. Some notebooks, like the *Kitab-i-Akhbar-i-Kihim-Yali*, are kept in the University of Mumbai archives; others, labeled *Akhbarnama-i-qabila-i-Shujauddin Tyabji*, are in the Fyzee-Rahamin archives in Karachi. Still others remain in private collections of Tyabji descendants.

⁶⁴For example, Durrat al-Vali's entry for 1 June 1892, *Kitab-i-Akhbar-i-Kihim-Yali*, University of Mumbai.

⁶⁵For example, "A Page from the Past: Extracts from the Diary of Amina Binte Badruddin Tyabji," *Roshni*, Special number (1946): 69–73; and a series of articles by Shareefah Hamid Ali in the All India Women's Conference journal, *Roshni* 2, no. 6–9 (July–November 1947).

⁶⁶I consulted *Tahzib un-Niswan* and *Zebunnissa* (both from Lahore) at the Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, and/or the Sundarayya Vignana Kendram in Hyderabad, *Roshni* at the All India Women's Conference Library in Delhi, and *Begum* at the Bangla Academy in Dhaka. My thanks to my generous hostess, Asha Islam, for assistance with Bengali translation.

⁶⁷"A Grand Old Lady of Music—An Interview with Asghari Begum Sagarwali," *Manushi*, Mar–Apr 1983, 8–10; "An irrepressible spirit—an interview with Ismat Chughtai," *Manushi*, no. 19 (4:1), Nov–Dec 1983, 2–7; "The final goal is justice . . .," *Manushi*, 36 (6:6), Sept–Oct 1986, 2–6.

⁶⁸See "Attia Hosain—Interview" at <http://www.harappa.com/attia/growingup.html> [Accessed, 10 January 2010].

⁶⁹For a fascinating study of the "literary qualities" of Texan oral narratives, see Richard Bauman's *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁷⁰Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri, *Humsafar* (Karachi: Danyal, 1992); and *My Fellow Traveller: A Translation of Humsafar* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁷¹Husain, *Fellow Traveller*, xiii.

⁷²Quoted in Mushfiq Khwaja's "Foreword" in *ibid.*, ix–x.

⁷³Asif Farrukhi, "Introduction," *ibid.*, xxvii.

⁷⁴John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, fifth edition (Harlow: Pearson, 2010), 319.

⁷⁵Nalim Jameela, *Om Laingikatozhilaliyude Atmakatha* (Kottayam: DC Books, 2005).

⁷⁶This discussion is based on a wonderful conversation with J. Devika at her office at the Centre for Development Studies and elsewhere in Trivandrum, Christmas Eve 2005.

⁷⁷See, as examples, Sayeeda Khursheed Alam, *Zakir Sahib ki Kahani: ap ki beti ke zubaani* (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1975); Qamar Azad Hashmi, *Panchwan Chiraag* (New Delhi: Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, 1995); Zakia Sultana Nayyar, *Beete Lamhe: Yaadon ke Chiragh* [Past Moments: Lamps of Memory] (New Delhi: Modern Publishing House, 1995).

⁷⁸Jyotsna Kapur, "Putting Herself into the Picture: Women's Accounts of the Social Reform Campaign in Maharashtra, mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries," *Manushi* 56 (1990): 28-37.

⁷⁹Husain, *Fellow Traveller*, 1.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, xv.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, vii.

⁸²Hamida Rahman, *Jibon Smriti* (Dhaka: Naoroze Kitabistan, 1990), 84. I am grateful to Sarmistha Gupta, with whom I worked over several years, for her translations from Bengali.

⁸³Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, "Introduction: A Princess Revealed" in Abida Sultaan, *Memoirs*, xxiii.

⁸⁴Shirley Neuman, "Autobiography and Questions of Gender: An Introduction" in *Autobiography and Questions of Gender*, ed., Shirley Neuman (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 1-11.

⁸⁵Introduction to Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, eds., *Speaking of the Self: Gender, Performance and Autobiography in South Asia*, forthcoming.

⁸⁶Metcalf, "The Past in the Present," 116-17.

⁸⁷Conversation with Lubna Kazim, between Aligarh and Delhi, 28 November 2005.

⁸⁸Lubna Kazim, ed., *A Woman of Substance: The Memoirs of Begum Khurshid Mirza* (Delhi: Zubaan, 2005), viii.

⁸⁹Bilkees Latif, *Her India: The Fragrance of Forgotten Years* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann Publishers (India) Pvt. Ltd., 1984, especially 8, 254.

⁹⁰Metcalf, "The Past in the Present," 116-17.

⁹¹"Maulana Hali ki Khud-navisht Savanih-e-'Umri," *Ma'arif* XIX: 5 (May 1927): 344–51.

⁹²Shahr Bano Begam, *Biti Kahāni, Urdu ki awwālīn niswānī khud nawisht*, ed. Moinuddin Aqeel (Hyderabad, Pakistan: Allied Printing Corporation, 1995). My thanks to Barbara Metcalf for directing me to this text.

⁹³Tahera Aftab (trans. and ed.), *Biti Kahāni or Autobiography of Princess Shahr Bano Begam of Pataudi* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹⁴Karlekar, *Voices*, 2, 12, 18–19.

⁹⁵Aparna Basu and Malvika Karlekar, "Introduction," *In So Many Words: Women's Life Experiences from Western and Eastern India*, viii.

⁹⁶For a recent exploration of this term, see Judith M. Brown, "'Life Histories' and the History of Modern South Asia," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009): 587–95.

⁹⁷David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, "Introduction: Life Histories in India" in Arnold and Blackburn, *Telling Lives in India*, 9.

⁹⁸Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 5.

⁹⁹Burton, *Dwelling*, 144.