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**TO WRITE OF THE CONJUGAL ACT: INTIMACY AND SEXUALITY IN MUSLIM
WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING IN SOUTH ASIA¹**

Siobhan Lambert-Hurley

When I visited Karachi for my doctoral research in the mid-1990s, my hostess, Princess Abida Sultaan of Bhopal, then in her early 80s, was writing her memoirs, later to be entitled Memoirs of a Rebel Princess. In them, she spoke frankly of the first night of her brief married life with her childhood friend, Nawab Sarwar Ali Khan of Kurwai:

Immediately after my wedding, I entered the world of conjugal trauma. I had not realized that the consummation that followed would leave me so horrified, numbed and feeling unchaste. The fact that this trauma was being perpetuated by a person whom I genuinely cared for filled me with greater revulsion. Due to our pristine, religious upbringing I could not bring myself to accept marital relations between husband and wife and considered the conjugal act unchaste, dirty and vulgar. My revulsion for marital sex produced an equally frustrating and damning reaction from my husband. He soon showed his bitterness and insensitivity towards me by doing what I despised most in men: he became slothful, gambling with his own domestic servants and leading a life of idle leisure. We soon had separate bedrooms and within a few weeks, our marriage was on the rocks, existing only on paper and for the sake of appearances.²

Reflecting on this passage on the occasion of the memoirs' publication in Pakistan in 2004 – sadly, after the author's death – I interpreted this emotional disclosure as evidence of the memoirs' location “only on the periphery of the long tradition of biography and autobiography in Islam.”³ Islamic life stories, other scholars had argued, would not reveal an

author's feelings so completely, particularly on a sexual theme.⁴ Introspection and individuality were the purview of the Western autobiographical tradition.

My intellectual response to these intimacies was, I would expect, not entirely surprising. Popular perception would suggest that, beyond the “kiss and tell” memoirs of the super-rich, Muslim women simply do not write about intimate relations, nor express their sexuality in an explicit way. In South Asia especially, the cultural codes of modesty defined by sharam and 'izzat [ayn], shame and honor, may be presumed to militate against such public revelations of love, lust and the conjugal act. Indeed, a recent article in the popular Indian press, revealingly entitled “Internal Affairs,” seemed to suggest that this reticence to “confess” all was not something particularly female or Muslim, but actually a feature of Indian memoir generally, even in the contemporary context.⁵ In support, several authors were quoted who had recounted some deeply personal moments in their life histories, but not those connected with an “ex-husband” or a “girl he loved.”⁶ As one author justified his omissions, “I have been selective in terms of ethics here.”⁷ Notably, the only exception to this sexual silencing mentioned in the article was Padma Desai's Breaking Out, then still expected, in which she was said to recount her “violation by a man following a deliberate seduction” and the way in which “marital relations had infected (her) with venereal disease.”⁸ But it seems significant that Desai, a Professor of Economics at Columbia University, has been living and writing in the United States since the 1950s, and thus constructs herself, even in the title, as being on an “American Journey.” Americans, this would seem to suggest, not only tolerate sexual revelation, but seem to expect it, while Indians, in the main, remain deeply uncomfortable with the “confessional” – the unmentionable “C word,” according to the article.⁹

Of course, the idea of Muslim women – to return to my specific subject – being desexualized in public discourse is not one that has always held true. Scholars of Orientalism

have written at length on the centrality of the sexualized “Oriental woman” – beautiful, sensuous, but captured in the gilded cage of her harem – to Western conceptions of “the Orient” from the eighteenth century onwards.¹⁰ For evidence, one need look no further than those highly celebrated paintings by European artists of the nineteenth century, a prime example being Eugène Delacroix’s “The Women of Algiers (in Their Apartment)” (1834) with its languorous concubines reclining with their opium pipes.¹¹ The political purpose of these eroticized images, whether visual or literary, is captured by Reina Lewis when she writes: “For men, the harem woman trapped in a cruel polygamous sexual prison was a titillating but pitiful emblem of the aberrant sexuality and despotic power that characterized all that was wrong with the non-Christian Orient.”¹² According to Billie Melman, Western women’s writings about the harem – from Lady Mary Wortley Montague’s Constantinople letters onwards – tended to be more heterogeneous than those of their male contemporaries. Specifically, they underlined the privileged access of the female observer and varied with their own social concerns.¹³ And yet, as Lewis puts it so evocatively, they still did not “evacuate the sexual and the fantastical” from their writings, often following their menfolk to construct women’s spaces as a “voyeuristic sexual sphere” characterized by “sexual depravity and random cruelty.”¹⁴

As to how Muslim subjects themselves construed sexuality, the evidence is far more scant. While there is some analysis of Islam and sexuality in current contexts, particularly with reference to religious customs and reproductive health, only a few scholars have sought to apply the conceptual lens of gender and sexuality to the Muslim past – and much of that writing, thanks to the pioneering work of Afsaneh Najmabadi, Janet Afary and Kathryn Babayan, focuses on Iran.¹⁵ A book promisingly entitled Sex and Society in Islam actually proves to be a study of birth control in pre-modern Arab societies, and thus more concerned with demographics and medical history. Still, the author, B.F. Musallam, begins by making

the important point of just how different notions of sexual morality were in classical Islam than in medieval European Christianity. While Christianity was associated with “restraint and postponement,” considering sex only appropriate for procreation within monogamous and permanent marriage, Islam recognized intercourse as a “legitimate” activity, including for “sexual fulfilment.” The potential for multiple partners was, moreover, facilitated by such practices as polygamy, concubinage and divorce.¹⁶ In his important Producing Desire, Dror Ze’evi [hamza] has explored how this moral code – by which sex was treated as a “natural human pursuit” – remained prevalent in Ottoman discourses from the sixteenth century up until the nineteenth. At this point, he argues (in a point very relevant to this paper as well), western influences played a role to inhibit male sexual expression especially.¹⁷

But what of female sexual expression? Since writing on Abida Sultaan’s memoir, I have been engaged in a broad survey of autobiographical writings composed by Muslim women in various South Asian languages, including Urdu, English, Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi and Malayalam, mostly from the nineteenth century onwards. This survey has led to some perhaps surprising findings, one of which is that those popular presumptions about Muslim women’s silence on intimate matters do not always hold true – in other words, Abida Sultaan is not just an exception. The aim of this paper then is to explore when and in what contexts South Asian Muslim women have, or have not, expressed a sexualized self in their autobiographical writings in an attempt to interrogate the cultural norms that allow intimate revelation. The phrase “intimate revelation” is used very purposefully here to reflect that this paper is about intimacy beyond just sex per se. Indeed, as my examples will attest, the “intimacy and sexuality” to which I refer in my title generally applies to heterosexual relationships within the framework of love or marriage – though not necessarily both. It is sometimes about desire then, but not always. Furthermore, it only rarely addresses, for instance, sexual violence or single-sex encounters. In this way, my discussion perhaps differs

from some other academic writing on the history of sexuality with its leaning, in the South Asian context anyway, towards “deviant” or “dissident” sexualities.¹⁸ Still, it builds in many ways on those historical studies of love that seek to understand the way in which this “universal feeling” is translated into a set of discourses contingent on gender, culture and time.¹⁹

The sources employed come from all parts of the Indian subcontinent – or at least those that have sported a substantial Muslim population: not just those areas that now make up Pakistan in the west and Bangladesh in the east, but also Delhi, Bombay, Rampur, Bhopal, Hyderabad and elsewhere. They also include a number of different types of autobiographical writing – from memoirs and travel narratives to poems, religious treatises and novels. Not all of these sources may be identified immediately as autobiographical, but an attempt has been made to stretch the rubric in order to consider, not just the silences and the explicit, but also more oblique reflections on female sexuality.²⁰ Still, the material used is necessarily selective. A focus on the historical, for instance, means that a number of more contemporary examples relevant to the paper’s themes – I think of Taslima Nasrin’s controversial four-part autobiography²¹ or Nalim Jameela’s best-selling account of her life as a sex worker, Om Laingikatozhilaliyude Atmakatha²² – have been left to others for further analysis. There is also no assumption that the sample is somehow representative of Muslim women or South Asian society as a whole. It probably goes without saying that, especially in a context of low literacy (just 0.9% among Indian women in 1901 and still only 18.4% in 1971)²³, it has been primarily elite women with a unique experience to share – like the “rebel princess” with whom I started – who write autobiography. Nevertheless, as the examples will make clear, certainly by the second half of the twentieth century, more “ordinary” women and even the illiterate were choosing to record their life stories and finding ways to do so.

In the sections that follow then, female authors are categorized into three main groupings that are discussed in turn: those who silenced their sexualities, those who expressed their sexualities in an oblique fashion, and those who shared their intimacies quite freely. Not only will I examine the form and content of the relevant autobiographical extracts, but I will also consider the identity markers of these women in terms of social standing, education, family background and geographical location in order to position them in cultural terms. The examples employed will also be considered roughly in terms of temporal sequence – though sometimes that will mean starting in the near present and working backwards – in order to make clear the significance of historical moment. From this analysis, the paper seeks to show that, perhaps contrary to conjecture, it was those women who were most closely connected to the colonial state that failed to reveal on a sexual theme or did so obliquely. The concluding section will develop this point, while also assessing the importance of zenana culture especially to these distinctions in order to break down the simple dichotomies often made, especially with reference to autobiographical writing, between a “West” that reveals all and Islamicate societies that do not.

Sexual Silences

The aim of this first section is to identify gaps and omissions: female autobiographers who did not write about their sexual experiences or intimacies. To interrogate a text for silences is one of those tasks to be expected of every careful scholar, and yet it can be marked by serious challenges. How exactly do we identify and then write about something that is not actually there in the script? Of course, no autobiography can actually claim to be total or complete; as literary theorists often make the point, every life story is inherently selective and thus constructed, regardless of the length or detail.²⁴ As such, we can assume that every autobiography has its omissions and silences, whether these are left out unintentionally or

with purpose. This point must be especially true of intimacy and sexuality, which, it seems fair to assume, is a part of every life, if not every life story. To identify these gaps should be easier where we have additional sources on an author's life – by themselves or others, contemporaneous or retrospective. Then, we may plot one set of evidence against another to at least start disentangling what an autobiographer chooses to tell about herself, as well as what she does not. And yet “private” matters do not often find their way into the public record, especially in Muslim societies – which is why we tend to rely so heavily on autobiographical materials to uncover them. The analyst of intimacy and sexuality in Muslim women's autobiography can thus be faced a kind of double silencing without ever knowing what is being silenced. And yet there are some exceptions: cases where we do know enough of an author's private life to know what they have not made public in their autobiographies.

A good example is the twin travelogues of the Fyzee sisters, Atiya (1877-1967) and Nazli (1874-1938), written on consecutive trips to Europe in 1906-7 and 1908. If Atiya Fyzee is remembered today for anything at all, it is usually for her “friendship” with the poet, politician and philosopher, Muhammad Iqbal, which still attracts attention in the popular press.²⁵ While much of the gossip is based on rumor and supposition, certain basic facts about their relationship are well known, among them that Atiya and Iqbal first met when they were both students in London in 1907. In Atiya's daily account of this time, however – first published contemporaneously in the Urdu women's magazine, Tahzib un-Niswan (The Women's Reformer), and then later in book form – she hardly mentions Iqbal. Indeed, he is only referred to in passing on two occasions and, even then, very formally as “a very learned scholar and also a philosopher and poet.”²⁶ That this meager description represented a silencing of possible intimacies is suggested by her much later account of that same period in a published book of correspondence entitled Iqbal (1947). Here, she recounted how they met, not just twice in London, but instead very regularly and often privately, including for

discussions, dinners and picnics. By the time of this later publication, the aging Atiya was living on dwindling resources as she prepared to leave India for the newly-formed Pakistan, while Iqbal was several years dead and ever more venerated – so there was good reason for Atiya to perhaps exaggerate her ties with the deceased poet. And yet still she retained a sense of propriety, describing their relationship almost as disciple to teacher.²⁷

Atiya's sister, Nazli, was equally conspicuous. In 1886, she was married at the age of just twelve to Sidi Ahmad Khan Sidi Ibrahim Khan, the nawab of Janjira, apparently with the aim of raising her newly-moneyed family's status.²⁸ The nawab's territory was a princely state on India's west coast, also known as Jazira or Habshan in reflection of its Abyssinian roots. Yet no children were born to the couple to continue the royal line – and thus, in 1913, the couple ultimately separated when the nawab decided to take another wife to beget an heir. Whatever the state of their relationship by this point, the hurt that Nazli must have experienced when her husband of nearly three decades decided to leave her for another woman is palpable. Knowing this back story, one can almost feel the sadness that permeates her travelogue, written during a royal tour to Britain, the Continent and Istanbul with her husband and Atiya in accompaniment just a few years before. Perhaps this is why she described herself as so “depressed” that, even on her first exciting days in London, she refused her sister's offer to take her out sightseeing in favor of lying alone in her room?²⁹ And yet, despite her willingness to speak openly of her emotions, she never made reference to her marriage's disintegration or the reasons why, only referring to her husband in a rather perfunctory and formal way in terms of his royal duties. Her brother-in-law, Samuel Fyzee-Rahamin, later wrote a rather melodramatic novel describing the lonely and loveless life of a nawab's wife, seemingly based at least thinly on Nazli's experiences.³⁰ But Nazli did not talk.

So, why did the Fyzee sisters choose to mask these intimacies? The simple answer would be that, in South Asia's conservative Muslim society, to reveal a close relationship with a young poet or to speak of a failed marriage caused by possible impotency or barrenness would have been damaging to a woman's reputation: a challenge to her 'izzat [ayn]. But equally important here seems to be the context of publication. Both of these travelogues were published nearly contemporaneously with the events that they described, and so there was none of the distancing that can facilitate revelation in the more usual "end of life" autobiography. The people of whom they wrote were still alive and the events still unfolding – indeed, Atiya continued a spirited correspondence with Iqbal right up until 1911.³¹ Both of these texts were also composed in Urdu – and a simple, colloquial Urdu at that – with a clear awareness of their reform-oriented, South Asian audience. While Atiya's text was addressed explicitly to her Tahzibi behen, or reformist sisters, Nazli wrote that she intended her book to give her "Indian brothers and sisters" something to "think about."³² Their emphasis on using their experiences in Europe and the Middle East to identify possible solutions to the problem of India's "backwardness," as they saw it, was reflective of their own extended family's reformist bent and modernist identity. Best known in this context is their great uncle, Badruddin Tyabji, who, having been educated in Britain, became the first Indian barrister and later first Muslim judge at the Bombay high court. From this impressive position in the colonial hierarchy, he promoted social and educational reform to his fellow Indian Muslims through such organizations as the Anjuman-i-Islam and the Muhammadan Educational Conference.³³

Significantly, it was also under Badruddin's influence that Atiya and Nazli became two of the first elite Muslim women in India to appear in public unveiled – a social positioning that allowed them not only to circulate in mixed society, but also, as we have seen, to write for it as well. Did this awareness of writing for men as well as women –

whether Muslim, Hindu or British – impact on what they considered appropriate for autobiographical revelation? To probe this question further, let us consider another author belonging to this early coterie of unveiled women closely associated through their families with Muslim reform and colonial politics: Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah (1915-2000). She wrote one of the best known autobiographies by South Asian Muslim women, namely, From Purdah to Parliament (first published in 1963).³⁴ In it, she documented her experience of being related to prominent male politicians, participating in the Pakistan movement, and, after 1947, joining Pakistan’s first Constituent Assembly as one of only two women members. There was also some discussion of more private, family matters, but never in the context of sexual relations or even intimacies. Begum Ikramullah, for instance, includes two full chapters on her marriage and the “adjustment” afterwards, but, in them, there is almost no mention of her husband. Instead, the focus is on rituals, food, dress and her early experience of living with her in-laws.³⁵ Glossing over the wedding night, she writes, “The greatest change that marriage brings into the life of a girl in our society is that she has to adjust herself to the way of life of a completely new family.”³⁶

Interestingly, other Muslim women who wrote or published English accounts of their public lives also failed to address intimate matters. Is language thus important too? Consider Jahanara Habibullah (1915-2001), author of Remembrance of Days Past (2001), who was also part of South Asia’s first generation of unveiled Muslim woman, having left purdah in 1931 at the age of just fifteen to travel first to the hill station of Dehra Dun and then to Europe on account of her sister’s poor health.³⁷ She wrote in a very similar style to her “very respected and dear friend,” Begum Ikramullah – identified in the acknowledgements – when, at the latter’s encouragement, she began to record some “glimpses” of her life around 1980.³⁸ Focusing on her early life in the princely state of Rampur (where her father was Chief Minister and her sister married the Nawab), her memoir is organized primarily around the

festivities and rituals that ordered her youthful existence – particularly weddings, though also Eid, Muharram and royal investitures. Only the final chapter offers a “few words” about her married life with Isha’at [hamza] Habibullah, ultimately chairman and managing director of the Pakistan Tobacco Company – and, even here, the focus is mostly on their children.³⁹ Her cousin, Hamida Saiduzzafar (1921-88) – actually raised out of purdah after her Edinburgh-educated father encouraged her mother to discard the veil in 1911 – offered even fewer personal details. Instead, her autobiography charts the path by which she became a doctor and, ultimately, Professor in Ophthalmology and Director of the Institute of Ophthalmology at Aligarh Muslim University without ever considering the difficulties and perhaps heartache that must have accompanied her decision to remain unmarried.⁴⁰

As this last example suggests, what most of these women had in common too – besides a connection with one another – was a link to the socio-religious reform movement based at Aligarh in north India. Spearheaded by the renowned Muslim educationalist, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, in the late nineteenth century, it represented what Kenneth Jones has characterized as an “acculturative movement”: one that “originated within the colonial milieu and was led by individuals who were products of cultural interaction.”⁴¹ Sir Syed himself had a long and successful career as a colonial civil servant before traveling to Europe in 1869-70 to take example from British educational prototypes for his Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College established at Aligarh in 1875.⁴² His idealizing of British society is nowhere more evident than in one of his letters back to India quoted in the Aligarh Institute Gazette: “I can truly say that the natives of India, high and low, merchants and petty shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners and uprightness are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man.”⁴³ While not all of the women quoted here would have agreed with his sentiments, their own experiences of foreign travel, mastery of English and relative freedom of movement point to European influence both in

their lives and life stories.⁴⁴ I conjecture that Victorian notions of bourgeois sexuality, so identified with prudishness and restraint, must have permeated this strata of Indian society most closely associated with the colonial project, thus encouraging women authors to remain stubbornly silent on sexual matters in their autobiographies. This point will be explored further in the Conclusion, but let us turn first to those who did write about sexuality, if obliquely.

Oblique Sexualities

To identify more oblique forms of sexuality in autobiographical writing is perhaps even more difficult than recognizing sexual silences. How to tell if an author is writing autobiographically on a sexual theme if she does not actually make it explicit? Seeking to answer this question, a number of scholars have pointed to different narrative strategies employed by authors to write about feelings and experiences that may not be considered acceptable within a particular cultural context. In South Asia, a main method has been the use of epic, which can offer a “means of drawing a metaphorical veil over women’s voices,” while, at the same time, “endowing their individual experiences with a kind of validity not achievable otherwise.”⁴⁵ Hence, as Velcheru N. Rao has argued, women throughout South Asian history have used the afflicted figure of Sita in the Ramayana to narrate their own suffering.⁴⁶ An example appropriate to this essay’s subject is that of Peero, a Muslim low-caste prostitute from Punjab who joined a marginal Sikh sect led by Guru Gulab Das, also to become her lover, sometime in the 1830s. To justify her move from “brothel” to “religious establishment,” she composed an autobiographical narrative in poetic form under the title Ik Sau Sath Kafian, or 160 Kafis. As Anshu Malhotra has explored in some depth, in this poem, the prostitute Peero fashioned herself as Sita – that symbol of “wifely devotion and chastity”

– in order to imbue herself with an “ethical righteousness” as the “wronged” party in the story she narrates.⁴⁷

Another author employing a similar metaphorical strategy was Raihana Tyabji (1901-75). As her name perhaps suggests, she too belonged to the extended Tyabji clan of Bombay associated with the reformist Badruddin, though she was actually raised in the princely state of Baroda where her father, Abbas Tyabji, served in the maharaja’s judicial service. She is best known though as a devotee of India’s preeminent nationalist leader, Mohandas K. Gandhi, having committed herself to becoming, in her own words, one of “Bapu’s brahmachari soldiers” – a celibate devotee to the cause of India’s freedom – sometime in the late 1910s or early 1920s.⁴⁸ Soon after, in 1924, she composed a small book of bhakti devotionalism, The Heart of a Gopi, in which she narrated her experience of having being “possessed” by the “soul” of Sharmila, a gopi, or milkmaid, enraptured by Krishna in his guise as the cowherd at Vrindavan.⁴⁹ In many ways, this account follows a familiar narrative form in that it employs the devotional mode of bhakti associated with the gopi tradition. And yet, in its divergence from literary convention, we are able to see how Raihana used this tradition in order to narrate her own self – in particular, a sexualized self that was struggling to resolve an innate desire for sexual indulgence with her vow of celibacy. Of this struggle she was explicit in her private letters to Gandhi and later interviews, but, at the time at least, she seemed unable to articulate it in a more unambiguously autobiographical form.⁵⁰ By taking on the gopi persona then, Raihana could express a highly eroticized, earthly passion – specifically for Krishna who, we may even conjecture, represented Gandhi – as a means of achieving spiritual fulfillment, but without any actual indulgence.⁵¹

Writing about Middle Eastern travel writing, Reina Lewis suggests that another narrative strategy that women may employ to discuss “unrepresentable subjects, such as female sexuality or the author’s own sexual desires” is to “code” them as “detailed

description of physical type and costume.”⁵² She offers the example of Demetra Vaka Brown (1877-1946), who, in her Unveiled Ladies of Stamboul (1923), offered a “sexualised description” of her childhood friend, Djimlah, by posing her as an odalisque.⁵³ A parallel could be drawn here with the close attention to women’s bodies in the travel writing of South Asian Muslim women, particularly those hajj narratives produced from the late nineteenth century. An early example is Nawab Sikandar Begam’s A Pilgrimage to Mecca (1870), composed in Urdu, but published only in English translation, by the female ruler of the princely state of Bhopal in central India. Here, Sikandar (1818-68) commented in some detail on the physical form of the women she encountered.⁵⁴ She thus offered her own representation of Orientalized female beauty, aligning herself, at least to a degree, with those Western travel writers who, as seen in the Introduction, eroticized the harem woman. Most evocative was her description of the Sherif of Mecca’s two Georgian wives, a passage thus worth quoting at length:

The Sherif has seven wives, four of whom I saw. Of these, two were Georgians, very handsome and beautifully dressed, being, one might say, literally covered with diamonds from head to foot. Their heads were encircled with a wreath, composed of jewels, and when the ladies moved or talked, the sparkling effect of these was very pretty. Underneath this diadem, they wore on their heads very small, fine handkerchiefs, such as English ladies carry in their hands; these were thickly embroidered with jewels, and tied in a coquettish way. From their neck to their waist, they were adorned with gems in the same fashion. Altogether, in face, height, and beauty of limbs, these two Georgians were as perfect women as one could wish to see.⁵⁵

Of the other two, she only commented: “The third wife was an Arabian, and had regular features. The fourth was an Abyssinian.”⁵⁶ Her frank description here is actually more

characteristic of the narrative as a whole, and thus heightens the suggestiveness of the preceding passage. The unveiled woman who, in her youth, had fought her own estranged husband in mounted combat in order to gain control of her own territory may have been expressing her own distinct sexuality.⁵⁷

A third method that Muslim women may employ to write about female sexuality is to root their autobiography in fiction. Nawar al-Hassan Golley points to this strategy in her discussion of Arab women's autobiography when she highlights a number of authors who have used the form of the novel to write about "censored" subjects, like premarital sex, lesbianism and a woman's right to sexual pleasure.⁵⁸ An appropriate example to explore here from the South Asian context is that of the celebrated author, Ismat Chughtai (1915-91), in that the distinction in her writing between life and fiction appears to be particularly hazy. As Sukrita Paul Kumar writes, "characters... simply walk across from her life into her fiction and become public."⁵⁹ Appropriately, Chughtai is best known for her short story, Lihaaf (The Quilt, 1942), in which she narrated, through the eyes of a feisty eight-year-old girl seemingly intended to represent herself, a sexual exchange between an elite woman, Begum Jaan – who, as a "protagonist," was immediately identifiable to her sister-in-law on first reading⁶⁰ – and her maid, Rabbu.⁶¹ The significance of the quilt of the story's title comes in terms of what emerges when the two women are beneath it: "the sound of someone smacking her lips, as though savouring a tasty pickle."⁶² For her frankness, Chughtai was charged with obscenity, targeted in the press, and besieged by a letter campaign. More recently, however, the story has been celebrated for its brave portrayal of lesbianism "behind the veil."⁶³

Interestingly, Chughtai also wrote an autobiography in Urdu, Kaghazi hai Pairahan (My Clothes are Made of Paper), in which she dedicated a chapter to the Lihaaf trial.⁶⁴ Here, she defended her decision to write the story on the basis that similarly "frank matters" were discussed in the popular advice manual for women, Bihishti Zewar (Heavenly Ornaments),

first published by the Deobandi 'alim [ayn], or religious scholar, Maulana Ashraf 'Ali [ayn] Thanawi, in 1905. As she explained: "When I read those things as a child my heart suffered a jolt. I thought they were filthy. Then I read the book again when I was in B.A. and discovered those things were not filthy at all. They were matters every intelligent person should be aware of."⁶⁵ It is perhaps of no surprise then that she was equally open about intimacy and sexuality in the rest of her autobiography – to the point that the very recent translation by M. Asaduddin has been described as "almost racy."⁶⁶ Perhaps the reviewer thinks of the chapter in which Chughtai narrates her flirtation with Zafar Quraishi Zia, mostly in the form of a dialogue that would seem as appropriate in one of her short stories and, as such, seems to free any limits on her expression.⁶⁷ As Zia interrogates her on "passionate love, heartbreak, heartache," she is able to write of her love for an adored cousin, her thoughts on "physical love," and even her feelings on being kissed on the lips for the first time by a "mischievous cousin."⁶⁸ Her writing thus provides an appropriate bridge to the next section in which the more explicit sharing of intimacies in autobiographical writing will be explored in more depth.

Sharing Intimacies

I recognized in the Introduction that one context in which Muslim women may be more expected to reveal on sexual subjects was in the "kiss and tell" memoirs of the super-rich. The assumption may be that these authors, cushioned from society's censure by their wealth and often writing for an international audience, are able to ignore culturally-defined sexual norms in a way that less elite women are not. A pertinent example would be My Feudal Lord by Tehmina Durrani (b. 1953), first published in 1991. According to the author, her aim in writing this book was to uncover women's abuse in Pakistan's "feudal" society by recording her own maltreatment at the hands of her "violently possessive and pathologically

jealous” husband, Ghulam Mustafa Khar, himself one of Pakistan’s most eminent politicians as Chief Minister and later Governor of Punjab.⁶⁹ She thus employed a confessional mode to speak candidly of performing her “duties as a sexual object.”⁷⁰ I offer, as just one example of many, a short passage from the fifth chapter:

[My husband] continued to use my first marriage as a stick to beat me with; my divorce and remarriage had proved to him that I was capable of adultery. This produced complete sexual confusion in me. I was afraid that my slightest response to his advances would reinforce his image of me as a common slut. This was a feudal hang-up: his class believed that a woman was an instrument of a man’s carnal pleasure. If the woman ever indicated that she felt pleasure, she was a potential adulteress, not to be trusted. Mustafa did not even realize that he had crushed my sensuality. His attitudes were contradictory: he expected response, yet disallowed it. I was on automatic pilot, responding as much as was important for him, but never feeling anything myself. If he was satisfied, there was a chance that he would be in better humour. It was at these times that I realized that prostitution must be a most difficult profession.⁷¹

Her awareness of the “perils of exposing the details of my private life to a male-dominated Muslim society” in this way is recognized at the outset in her author’s note. She thus apologized to her children in the dedication for having to “suffer the trials of a family exposed.”⁷²

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that My Feudal Lord was the subject of great controversy in Pakistan, even being banned initially. And yet it soon became a “sensational European bestseller” (to quote the book jacket), going into innumerable reprints and editions in its original English. This eager response seems to suggest that the appetite in “the West” for the downtrodden, but sexualized “Oriental” woman is far from satiated. It was also

translated into a number of other languages, including Urdu as Mainda Sain and Hindi as Mere Aaka.⁷³ Interestingly, very soon after I first read this book myself, I had the chance to eavesdrop on a conversation between a group of Pakistani and Indian Muslim women that I knew as they discussed it between themselves. While I make no claim that their views were necessarily representative or this form of research in any way scientific, their response still seems revealing of the current cultural attitudes to female sexual expression among some South Asian women at least. In sum, they referred to Durrani's sexual references as "filthy," "gross" and "a lot of rubbish," dismissing the Hindi reprints as "low sensationalism." Furthermore, they seemed to assume that Durrani had made the whole story up in order to benefit from it some way.⁷⁴ That the book is sometimes referred to elsewhere as an "autobiographical novel," rather than autobiography proper, indicates that others may be in agreement.⁷⁵ Still, a number of the reviews in Pakistani literary circles have been far more celebratory, applauding Durrani for "breaking the silence."⁷⁶

My own acquaintances, having warmed to their sexual theme, moved their conversation from My Feudal Lord to another "shocking" autobiography written by a South Asian Muslim woman in fairly recent years. The text was Cutting Free by Salma Ahmed, a renowned Pakistani businesswoman and politician, who, in 1997, was awarded the Priyadarshini award as Pakistan's most successful woman entrepreneur since independence in 1947. In the book, her "painful personal life," told in "graphic detail," is juxtaposed against her successful business and political career.⁷⁷ Drawing my friends' attention especially was the fourth chapter in which the author wrote candidly, like Abida Sultaan with whom I began, of the first night of married life: "The bridal suite awaited my husband and myself. Another drama, another nightmare – it was not me he was touching, it was not me he was undressing. It was so unreal, so painful, so shocking. Virginal blood gushed onto the sheets. It was a night of horror at the Beach Luxury Hotel. As is customary, my relatives came in the morning to

take me home. I had been outraged, I felt dirty, unclean, sore, and ashamed.”⁷⁸ The women described Salma Ahmed to me as one of the “richy rich,” noting that her sister, Najma, was actually married to Abida Sultaan’s son, Shaharyar Khan (of whom there is a photograph in the autobiography). This association suggested a class apart for whom sexual candidness was perhaps possible. But, while making this distinction, my acquaintances also recognized their shared educational background, noting that two of them had gone to school with Ahmed many years before. So, why had Ahmed, clearly not all that different in social background after all, considered it acceptable to reveal on a sexual theme, while her contemporaries did not? One of the women opined: “these kind of things sell or else why publish them.”

Her judgment was no doubt correct. But what also seemed significant to me was Ahmed’s connection to Bhopal. As indicated in the previous section, this princely state in central India was ruled by a dynasty of Muslim women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (1819-1926), nearly all of whom produced autobiographical writings of one sort or another. Most revealing of conjugal intimacy was the third Begam, Nawab Shah Jahan Begam (1838-1901). In her encyclopedic advice manual for women, Tahzib un-Niswan wa Tarbiyat ul-Insan (Women’s Reform and the Cultivation of Humanity), first published in 1889, she asserted a woman’s right to carnal pleasure using her own experiences as illustration. Specifically, she explained how she had not felt fulfilled by her first husband, the much older and already married Baqi Muhammad Khan, with a consequence that her whole youth had been lost in “ranj o gham,” suffering and sadness. After his death, however, things had improved dramatically thanks to her controversial remarriage in 1871 to her personal secretary, Siddiq Hasan Khan. The pleasure resulting from this sexual coupling led her to assert that she had never been so happy. Her comments are typical of a book that, in general terms, sought to give women some control over their own lives by teaching them about pregnancy and childrearing, as well as Islamic ritual.⁷⁹ And yet they are somewhat surprising

if one considers that her new husband was a leading figure in the reformist Ahl-i-hadith movement known, in Barbara Metcalf's words, for its "intensity and extremism."⁸⁰ Indeed, it was Khan's radical stance on jihad and confrontational style that brought Bhopal state, otherwise known for its conspicuous loyalty to the British crown, into conflict with the colonial government in the late nineteenth century. Clearly, sexual satisfaction and a happy marriage were, for Shah Jahan, an adequate trade-off for a damaged public reputation.⁸¹

Less revealing, though still germane if we consider intimacy beyond sex per se, were the writings of her daughter, the last ruling Begam of Bhopal, Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam (1868-1930). She composed her autobiography in Urdu in three parts in the 1910s, though it achieved greatest circulation in the English translations produced in the 1920s. In some of her reformist literature, she spoke out against explicit discussion of the sexual, berating Western authors for debating private matters that could only elicit "shame and disgust" in good Muslims.⁸² Appropriately then, she was rather too circumspect to describe sexual relations with her husband, Ahmad Ali Khan (though not, it should be noted, too prudish to conceive five children). And yet the occasion of his death in 1902 inspired a poignant rendering of their relationship from which there is little doubt of the affection and tenderness they shared. As she writes of her grief:

My pen may write the word "grief" and my tongue may utter it, but, the intensity of my feelings no words written or spoken can adequately express. ... To be deprived in the twinkling of an eye of one who had been my best friend and helpmate for twenty-seven years, whose advice and affection had been my best guide during my trials and anxieties, and whose sympathy and love my best support, was indeed a terrible affliction. To lose him now that a sea of difficulties confronted me and I needed the help of his wise counsel more than ever, was worse than an affliction-it was an unbearable calamity.⁸³

The Victorian ideal of companionate marriage – so apparent in her reformist writings in which growing emphasis was placed on the Quranic adage that the sexes should “be to each other as ornaments” (2:187) – is borne out in this account of her own life and love.⁸⁴

Could Bhopal’s unique dynasty, then, have fostered a cultural milieu that enabled some Muslim women at least to write about sexuality and intimacy? We have considered already the evidence of Abida Sultaan and Salma Ahmed, born of or married into the Bhopal royal family. But what of other, more ordinary women from the state? Relevant here is Saeeda Bano Ahmed’s *Dagar se hat kar* (Off the Beaten Path) – interestingly, published towards the end of her life in the 1990s against the wishes of her own sons, but then recognized with a book award from the Urdu Academy in Delhi.⁸⁵ The author is perhaps best known as the first woman news reader on All India Radio, having moved from Lucknow to Delhi in 1947 with only her youngest son in tow to live the life of a “single individual.”⁸⁶ Reflected in this description was her separation from her husband, Abbas Raza, after a stormy marriage told with great forthrightness in her autobiography. A parallel may again be drawn here with the writing of her contemporary, Abida Sultaan, with whom Saeeda Bano was, according to her niece, “very friendly” having also been born and raised in Bhopal around the same time. Like Abida, Saeeda Bano recounts her discomfort upon being expected to initiate an “intimate relationship” with her husband after their marriage in 1933, relating how, on their wedding night, she refused to even lie next to him on the basis that she had never met him before. Reflecting on this uncomfortable episode in her autobiography, she too attributed her youthful behavior to naiveté, writing: “I was completely unfamiliar with the carnal nature of men and its relevance for conjugal life.”⁸⁷

More unexpected in Saeeda Bano’s account is the second relationship that she narrates in the context of her life in Delhi after India’s Independence in 1947. Here, through a family friend, she met lawyer Nuruddin Khan, who, like herself, was married with children,

but to an English woman of Jewish descent who had converted to Islam on their marriage. Faced with Delhi's tumult during Partition, this woman and her children had returned to London in 1947 where they remained until 1955. It was during this period of separation that, according to her account, Saeeda established a friendship with Nuruddin that then developed into a passionate affair to last almost 27 years. While she portrays herself as at first resistant to Nuruddin's persistent advances, it is not long before she admits that she gave in fully to this man who made her heart "leap with joy" – and, thus when his wife, Bilqees, returned to Delhi and demanded the affair end, it was Saeeda who could not allow it to stop.⁸⁸ Instead, she and Nuruddin continued to meet at her home (though not in public), apparently at the knowledge of her friends, relatives and children who, according to her account, "kept the prestige of my lifestyle" by showing respect towards her and her lover.⁸⁹ Reflecting back on their taboo relationship, she wrote: "Today when I write this, it seems childish. But at that time, to see his gaze, to meet him for a few minutes was a matter of life and death... like the travelers of the last night, we played this youthful game until the age of 60, 65 and even 70. What strange proclivities are engendered by prohibition."⁹⁰ Clearly, as an educated and financially-independent woman in a new India – a positioning, I would conjecture, facilitated by her Bhopali upbringing – Saeeda Bano felt empowered not only to pursue this prohibited relationship, but also to write about it.

Her example is compelling. But it would be remiss to limit this analysis to women authors connected with Bhopal when comparable accounts of sex and love abound from other geographical contexts too – not least other "Muslim" princely states. We may consider Bilquis Jehan Khan from Hyderabad (b. 1930) and Princess Mehrunnissa of Rampur (b. 1933) who also wrote about that important "first night" of marriage, whether "traumatic" or just bewildering.⁹¹ Others, like Hameeda Husain Raipuri (1918-2009) – author of *Humsafar*, first published in Urdu in 1992, but translated fairly recently into English as *My Fellow*

Traveller – narrated with great intimacy a full life shared with a partner of distinction, often against a princely backdrop, in this case, Hyderabad.⁹² Pertinent too is the autobiography of well-known actress, Zohra Segal (b. 1912), originally from a land-owning family connected with Rampur’s princely state. She explicated how she broke with many traditions to marry Kameshwar Segal, a non-Muslim many years her junior with whom she worked at the Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre at Almora in the early 1940s.⁹³ Another actress, Shaukat Kaifi (b. 1928) – involved, like Segal, with the leftist theatre group, the Indian People’s Theatre Association – was even more protracted in her account, this time in Urdu, of the flirtations that led to her “love marriage” to poet and Communist Kaifi Azmi after their first meeting at a mushaira, or poetic symposium, in her native Hyderabad in 1947.⁹⁴ She goes so far as to reproduce her own love letters in which she wrote with “complete abandon”: “Kaifi, I love you boundlessly. No power in the world can stop me coming to you; no mountain, no river, no sea, no people, no sky, no angel, no God; and God alone knows what else.”⁹⁵ His own love letters, inscribed in blood in the original, are replicated too with the effect that the autobiography reads as one great love story.⁹⁶ The reference to the mushaira and the chosen language of correspondence suggests how Urdu – traditionally the registry of love in South Asian poetry – may have been used to express the kind of intimacies not always possible in prose.⁹⁷

Or was this actress, used to performing great love stories on the stage or screen, then performing them with comparable intimacy in her autobiography? We may think here too of Begum Khurshid Mirza (1918-89), one of Bombay’s early film stars under the “celluloid identity” of Renuka Devi, who invited her autobiography’s readers to eavesdrop on the most intimate moments of her courtship, just as they often were in the films in which she acted in her youth.⁹⁸ And yet one of the most evocative narrations of the closeness of marital relationship comes not from an actress, but from a farmer (of sorts), namely, Safia Jabir Ali

(1893-1962). Composed in Urdu at different moments in the 1920s and 1940s, her manuscript memoirs offer an intimate view of love in that she writes rather flirtatiously of her courtship and then marriage to her cousin, Jabir Ali: of “shared secrets” and covert letter-writing and even ogling him at family cricket matches! To get a sense of her tone, it is worth quoting one illustrative section at length:

I began to think like my dear brother Hattoo, that there was no-one to compare with Jabir. He was the King, the leader! I didn't notice or pay any attention to any of the others! We were of course on friendly terms with all the other boys in Hattoo's group, but Jabir was someone special. Slowly my dear Hattoo bhai started talking to me about other things too—not just games. And Jabir began to come more frequently, often on his own, without the others. And Hattoo bhai would tell me confidentially that Jabir liked me a lot, that he'd said this or that. I'd be secretly thrilled, but terrified in case anyone got to know, so I'd keep up a great pretence of being quite indifferent to Jabir in front of others and quarrel and fight with him, pull his hair (which was very curly), pinch him, smear his face or nose with soap—all that kind of thing. Then he came and spent the summer with us in Matheran. We'd be together all day, and keep on teasing each other. I'd begun to guess from Jabir's manner-his expression, how he'd begun to feel about me...⁹⁹

Important to recognize is that Safia Jabir Ali was of the same extended Tyabji family as the Fyzee sisters and the mystical Raihana discussed in the previous sections – indeed, her own father was the aforementioned reformer and colonial servant, Badruddin Tyabji. Still, as his youngest surviving daughter – only thirteen at the time of his death in 1906 – we may guess that she was perhaps not so inculcated with his Victorian-inspired reformist ideals as her older cousins. In fact, in a move indicative of their nationalist affiliations, she and her husband made a very conscious effort to put physical distance – and thus, we may conjecture,

intellectual distance too – between themselves and the British rulers so cultivated by her father. Thus, in the mid-1920s, they left their extended family in the great colonial city of Bombay to set up a farm in the then “completed isolated” area of Chembur: even the nearest railway station, that potent symbol of colonial influence, was several miles away. Her memoirs, though now preserved in a national archive, were also not intended for a public audience, like the writings of her cousins, but instead were addressed directly to “my dear Amir,” her only and much-loved son. Writing for this private audience in their own intimate setting, she could write of her husband’s love – and insinuate more – in a way that her cousins perhaps could not.

Other women on the physical and intellectual peripheries of empire were similarly emboldened – even to the point of narrating extramarital intimacies. Running through the life story of Hamida Rahman, a female educationalist and political activist from east Bengal born in the late 1920s, is the story of her relationship with Palash. Palash first appears in Jibon Smriti (Memories of My Life) in the first chapter as a student who came to lodge in her father’s home in the mid-1930s. He is attributed with having inspired her to study and having fostered her interest in nationalist politics through the auspices of the Indian National Congress.¹⁰⁰ When Palash goes away to further his studies, he still returns for holidays, occasions which inspired great excitement in the young Hamida. As she writes without inhibition: “That day on the night of Eid I would wait for him. It was a very important moment for my life. I would keep walking in front of my gate until he came that evening on his small bicycle. My heart would be beating fast in anticipation. I was afraid he would not turn up. But he never failed me. Just at nine his cycle would ring in front of our home and I would rush towards the gate. I would feel extremely happy.”¹⁰¹ She goes on to explain how letters began to be exchanged and the romance budded, leading the reader to perhaps assume that what was to follow was a marriage proposal and, ultimately, the fulfillment of the fairy

story in a happy home and children. Yet, while the marriage proposal is made, Palash's brother does not accept it on account of her father's refusal to pay a large dowry. Hamida states bluntly – without any further detail or explication of her feelings – that her father thus began searching for other bridegrooms, leading to her marriage to someone else in 1942.¹⁰²

But the story is not over. While studying at Campbell Medical College later during the Second World War, Hamida ran into Palash again in Calcutta and, before long, they were meeting regularly. Her description of this time gives a sense of their relationship's intimacy, as well as its illicitness in terms appropriate to the seventeen-year old girl that she was at the time: "Palash and me would go around together, we would work together in the community kitchens, and as a result of this we came closer to each other. At that time my husband was not in Calcutta so Palash and I became closer. If we did not meet each other we would miss each other immensely."¹⁰³ Writing her autobiography nearly fifty years later, she justified her behavior in terms of her youth and naivety, claiming (without being entirely convincing): "I was not aware of the fact that in a married woman's life another man's friendship is a crime. Palash was my childhood friend. It did not occur to me that it could be a crime to mix with him. I was really young then."¹⁰⁴ Not surprisingly, their relationship was soon found out after her elder brother-in-law spied them walking hand-in-hand along the Ganges, and, subsequently, Hamida offers an emotional account of how the incident led her, first, to consider suicide before, ultimately, devoting herself to an illustrious teaching career. Still, Palash appears once more in the narrative, by the 1960s a member of the state assembly, married and a father of four – and yet still anxious to meet her. She writes: "I did not like the idea of him coming to meet me. But I could not tell him not to come. I cannot deny that I had a fundamental weakness for him."¹⁰⁵ She was uncomfortable, but she still let him visit – and then, many years later, perhaps to assuage her conscience or perhaps to set the record straight, she wrote about it.

And so we have personal motivation, but what of the broader cultural context that facilitated intimate revelation? Notable here is that east Bengal – far from the centers of colonial power – also provided the backdrop for an earlier account of sexuality too. I point to Shah Jahan’s aristocratic contemporary, Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani (1834-1903), a zamindar from Comilla. Though best known for her patronage of female education, she was equally open about love and heartache in her own writing.¹⁰⁶ The autobiographical introduction to her poem, Roopjalal, originally published in Bengali in 1876, is only a few pages long.¹⁰⁷ And yet, in those few pages, she chose to write about two instances of love and intimacy. The first relates to a marriage proposal that her parents received when she was just a child from her father’s distant nephew who was staying with her family. As she tells it, the “eager” and “excited” young man was so heartbroken when his love for this “virgin” was denied that he spent his life in a “pitiable condition,” even after his marriage to another woman.¹⁰⁸ Her account suggests that fate turned against her after this incident as, subsequently, her father died and her mother married her to a wealthy man as his second wife. As she recounts with a certain sense of candor:

After my marriage I spent a few years happily. My husband started loving me more than himself. He could not leave me alone even for a moment. In the meantime, because of God’s wish, I gave birth to two daughters. Seeing the way my husband was attracted towards me, his co-wife became very jealous. She started thinking of ways to get me out of his way. Secretly she spent a lot of money on tantrics and made my husband go against me. What surprising effect sorcery had! The person who could not leave me even for a moment wanted to leave me forever.¹⁰⁹

The poem that follows continues the “unhappy story” that subsequently unfolded, and thus this vignette offers justification for her book as a whole.

From these selective examples then, we see that many Indian Muslim women – from the late twentieth century back to the late nineteenth century – wrote about their most intimate relationships in their autobiographical writings. For some, it was the shock and confusion of the sexual expectations within marriage that inspired them to revelation. But, for most, courtship, marriage and even extramarital affairs were narrated as a form of love story. The colonial and reformist context offers some explanation in that this period saw the spread of female education and, with it, the companionate ideal of marriage, as well as a proliferation of novels and later films. We may consider here the thorough disapproval with which the aforementioned Deobandi ‘alim [ayn], Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali [ayn] Thanawi, treated most novels and even Urdu poetry – with its common motif of love of the divine as expressed through the metaphor of earthly passion – when considering appropriate reading material for newly-literate young girls in his popular advice manual, Bihishti Zewar.¹¹⁰ Yet, as many Muslim women’s autobiographies indicate, it was those very readings proscribed by Thanawi – with their tales of love, romance and happy marriages – to which they were drawn.¹¹¹ It is thus not surprising that the very style of writing employed by many women authors often suggested an imagination more fuelled by Victorian romance novels and Hindi films than the reformist or historical literature favored by their male relatives.¹¹² And yet the question remains of why some Muslim women shared intimacies freely, while others did not – a question to which we may now turn to conclude.

Conclusions

As identified in the Introduction, the main aim of this paper has been to move beyond individual experiences in order to identify specific times or contexts in which Muslim women in South Asia were able to write about love, lust and the conjugal act. As such, it has considered historical materials from many parts of the Indian subcontinent – from Punjab to

Bengal, Rampur to Hyderabad – over a fairly lengthy time period. Most of the sources relate to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a period in which female education and literacy spread among South Asian women, print culture flourished, and autobiographical writing itself became more prevalent. Still, what should be immediately clear from the examples employed is that sexual expression among South Asian Muslim women did not display a linear progression: of authors revealing more or perhaps less as time goes on. On the contrary, some of the earliest and latest examples of Muslim women’s autobiographical writing were explicit on carnal matters, while those in the middle – from the high colonial period – were varied in content and tone. Even within families, like the extended Tyabji clan, there were some women who wrote on intimacy and sexuality (whether directly or circuitously), and others who failed to do so – even when they seemed to have had something on which to reflect. Some employed Urdu or perhaps Bengali as the language of love, while others – but certainly not all – considered English to offer a means to sexual revelation not possible in the vernacular. Other factors must thus have come into play.

What seems evident – perhaps contrary to common expectation, but in line with Ze’evi’s [hamza] findings for Ottoman Turkey – is that it was those women representing sections of Indian Muslim society closest to the colonial state or, more generally, “the West” that were least likely to reveal on a sexual theme. That is not to say that female authors may not have been influenced by notions of companionate marriage or the great love stories of English literature to write of more innocent intimacies. But the influence of Victorian notions of bourgeois sexuality – famously puritan, repressed and censorious – seems to have been greatest on those invested in the colonial project. Of course, as Foucault and others have shown, Victorian society itself may not have been quite so subdued sexually as is generally assumed. Rather, the diverse discourses on sexuality in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe – from prostitution and pedagogy to fertility, illegitimacy and birth rates – suggest a

society enmeshed in sexual talk and acts, if ones promulgated primarily by professional men (doctors, psychiatrists, bureaucrats).¹¹³ Still, the way in which these discourses were translated into a colonial context seemed to accentuate repression and denial as a model. And yet colonial influence was uneven, so we cannot simply say that it was with the arrival of Europeans in the Indian subcontinent that sexual expression began to change. Rather, it was those female authors whose male relatives worked in the highest echelons of the colonial state or participated in socio-religious reform movements inspired, at least partially, by European ideas – like that based at Aligarh – that remained stubbornly silent on sexual matters.

On the other hand, those who did choose to reflect on sexual matters appear, on the whole, to have been operating in a context less dependent on the colonial state, either on account of inherited wealth or physical location. Perhaps they were simply very rich, or living far from the hubs of colonial power and influence, whether in the Bombay countryside or the outer reaches of east Bengal. What seems highly significant though is that an inordinate number of the authors quoted in the last section, if not princes themselves, were raised in one of India's "Muslim" princely states, including Hyderabad, Bhopal or Rampur. Princely India has often been portrayed as a kind of "anachronistic backwater" in which "tradition" was preserved, perhaps as a form of "theatre," by India's "natural" rulers.¹¹⁴ Whether one agrees with this portrayal or not, it seems clear that the system of paramountcy – by which local rulers retained some degree of autonomy within their states, even as they recognized British overlordship – meant that princely states offered a unique space in which to negotiate with notions of colonial modernity. Hence, Muslim reform movements that emerged in these contexts may have drawn on European ideas, but, just as thoroughly, adapted them to local circumstances in a reflection of indigenous models.¹¹⁵ It was here too, I would conjecture, that female authors could use their autobiographical writing to continue the long tradition of

writing about love and sexuality within Islamic literary traditions, whether Sufic or otherwise.¹¹⁶ Any easy dichotomy between a sexually repressed Islam and a confessional West when it comes to autobiographical writing is thus brought into question. Furthermore, we see how sexuality offered a means by which some writers could stage knowledge of an ecumene that excluded colonial power.¹¹⁷

A second point to be made here relates to the importance of the institution of purdah, or female seclusion, to women's writing. What I would suggest is that those female authors who were freed of the most severe restrictions had an awareness of writing for an expanded and mixed audience facilitated by print culture – male and female, South Asian and European, Muslim and non-Muslim – that could have led to a metaphorical veiling of their autobiographical voices. Most, if not all, of the authors discussed in the first section experienced unprecedented levels of mobility on account of being part of South Asia's first generation of elite women to leave purdah – but the resultant effect seems to have been a silencing of their sexuality. In "Veiled Voices," Farzaneh Milani makes the point with reference to women's autobiographical writing in Iran that, with gender desegregation, comes a change in women's language to something less explicit, more public. Seemingly aware of their need to fulfill the image of the "ideal woman" within a conservative society, female writers composed autobiographies that resembled, in Milani's words, little more than a "beefed-up curriculum vitae," a book that "keeps its readers at a distance."¹¹⁸ In other words, when unveiled physically, women found other ways of hiding their inner selves, donning a theatrical "mask" for their autobiographical performance that veiled their voices and, in turn, their sexuality.¹¹⁹

An additional factor in the South Asian context was a religiously-diverse population plagued increasingly by communal conflict, particularly in the early twentieth century. Charu Gupta has documented the extent to which (largely male) Hindu campaigners went to "keep

Hindu women away from Muslim men,” both physically and at the level of “symbols, customs and culture,” as a means of controlling their sexuality and firming community identity.¹²⁰ The “danger” posed to the chaste Hindu woman by the “lustful Muslim male” – exemplified in this literature by the “licentious” Prophet Muhammad and the “debauched” Muslim rulers that followed – could not be replicated exactly in reverse in Muslim propaganda literature.¹²¹ But Muslim community leaders were still not short of motivation for wanting to “protect their women” by controlling their sexuality – whether with real or metaphorical veils. That women authors outside purdah – conscious of a widened, but anonymous audience – reproduced these male strictures with their sexual silence is hardly surprising in a broader cultural context in which a Hindu man who won a Muslim woman’s love was glorified as “the ultimate hero” and Muslim women were targeted for conversion by revivalist organizations, like the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Sabha.¹²² And yet we should underestimate women’s agency – a concept so central to autobiographical writing in the western tradition especially – in this process. In contrast to the bureaucratizing zeal noted above as underpinning Foucault’s history of sexuality in “the West,” this paper points to writers – women, Muslim – who felt entitled to shape the discourse on sexuality, whether through their silence or, in certain circumstances, the production of knowledge.

Indeed, what I argue is that it was those women at least raised within the primarily female (and Muslim) context of an elite zenana culture that may have been used to having a space for intimacies to be discussed that was then translated into written form. I think here again of “Muslim” princely states, like Bhopal, where female rule especially led to an institutionalization of purdah at the court, in schools and through the establishment of women’s clubs and organizations – and from which context many of the franker discussions of women’s sexuality emerge.¹²³ Young Muslim girls may not have received a detailed enough sexual education from their female elders to enter their marriages in any way

prepared – as many of the wedding night surprises, if not traumas, detailed in their autobiographies attest – but still a less constrained environment for female discussion in their childhoods and beyond may have impacted on their willingness to reflect upon these sexual experiences in writing later on. In other words, whatever their actual audience, their imagined audience seems to have inspired complicity. At the heart of this argument is an assumption that women speak differently to women, especially when it comes to intimate matters. Perhaps this supposition is simply a generalization of my own experience of female company, not just in Britain and Canada, but also in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. But we may think here too of the bawdy, even vulgar songs sung by groups of women at South Asian weddings. As Anindita Ghosh admits, “Inherent in them is an honest admission of love and lust in the physical world, and open enjoyment of it.”¹²⁴ Perhaps no surprise then that male reformers in Bengal especially – mortified by this open flaunting of women’s sexuality – projected wedding songs, or basar, as a “social disease” in their social novels and journalistic writings from the late nineteenth century.¹²⁵

Of course, to suggest that zenana women might speak more freely of sexual matters may be simply to evoke the Orientalist trope introduced in the Introduction: to reproduce those earlier discourses in which women’s spaces in “the East” were inherently sexual. And yet, rejecting that political agenda, there is no intention here of portraying “the harem” as a place of cruelty or depravity in order to reinforce some kind of uneven power dynamic between “East” and “West,” or male and female. On the contrary, by using autobiography as a means to recover woman’s voice, this paper seeks to show the multiple and varied ways in which Muslim female subjects in South Asia construed their own and others’ sexuality. They may have expressed a sexualized self or they may have not. But, either way, their writings show that individuality and introspection have not been limited to the Western autobiographical tradition – or, to paraphrase Dwight Reynolds, those “non-western”

autobiographies understood to be written in “pale” imitation of it.¹²⁶ Writing as early as 1949, S.P. Saksena opined in his seminal Indian Autobiographies that “self-portrayal” was of “recent origin in this country” and “essentially the result of English education” – an assertion that still resonates in much of the scholarly work on modern autobiography in South Asia with its emphasis on colonial legacy.¹²⁷ Yet, as we have seen, the complexities of that legacy when it comes to intimate revelation are only really uncovered when placed in the context of other, longer cultural forms of self and self-representation in South Asia and the Islamic world.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented in a panel entitled “Intimacy and Sexuality in Muslim Women’s Autobiographical Writing, 17th-20th c.” at the 40th Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 21-23 October 2011; and at a workshop on ‘Women’s Autobiography in Islamic Societies: Representation and Identity’, American University Sharjah, 29 October-1 November 2011. I am extremely grateful to participants on both occasions for their rich comments and suggestions. My thanks also to my Loughborough colleague, Marcus Collins, and the anonymous reviewers at the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* for their careful and constructive reading of a later draft.

² Abida Sultaan, Memoirs of a Rebel Princess (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 98.

³ Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, “Introduction: A Princess Revealed,” in Sultaan, Memoirs, xx.

⁴ See, as an example, Gustave E. von Grunebaum’s seminal essay on “Self-Expression: Literature and History,” in Medieval Islam, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

⁵ Paramita Ghosh, “Internal Affairs,” The Hindustan Times, 26 Jun. 2011 [accessible on-line at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Internal-affairs/Article1-713819.aspx>].

⁶Shobha De, Shobha at Sixty: The Secrets of Getting It Right (Delhi: Penguin, 2010); and Swapan Seth, This is All I Have to Say (Delhi: Roli Books, 2010).

⁷ Ghosh, “Internal Affairs.”

⁸ Padma Desai, Breaking Out: An Indian Woman’s American Journey (Delhi: Penguin, 2012).

⁹ Ghosh, “Internal Affairs.”

¹⁰ See, as an example, Reina Lewis’s Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), chapter 1:

“Harem Travellers.”

¹¹ This painting is kept in the Louvre in Paris. On Delacroix and his paintings, see Beth S. Wright, The Cambridge Companion to Delacroix (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹² Lewis, Rethinking, 13.

¹³ Billie Melman, Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918 (Basingstoke: PalgraveMacmillan, 1992).

¹⁴ Lewis, Rethinking, 13.

¹⁵ Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, Islamicate Sexualities: Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); and Janet Afary, Sexual Politics in Modern Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For an overview of “Islamicate Sexuality Studies,” see Valerie Traub’s “The Past is a Foreign Country? The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies” in Babayan and Najmabadi, Islamicate Sexualities, pp. 1-40. As Traub highlights, lesbian and queer sexualities have been perhaps best served in Middle Eastern scholarship. For an overview, see Frédéric Lagrange,

“Sexualities and Queer Studies” in Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures, ed. Suad Joseph (Leiden: Brill, 2003). On the contemporary Muslim world, see, as examples, Linda Rae Bennett, Women, Islam and Modernity: Single Women, Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Contemporary Indonesia (London: Routledge, 2005); and Margot Badran (ed.), Gender and Islam in Africa: Rights, Sexuality and Law (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹⁶ B.F. Musallam, Sex and Society in Islam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10-11.

¹⁷ Dror Ze’evi, Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Consider, as examples, Ruth Vanita (ed.), Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society (London: Routledge, 2001); and Anjali Arondekar, For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2009) – the latter of which won the “Alan Bray Memorial Book Award for best book in lesbian, gay, or queer studies in literature and cultural studies from the GL/Q Caucus of the Modern Language Association.”

[<http://dukeupress.typepad.com/dukeupresslog/2011/01/duke-university-press-award-winners-at-mla.html>, accessed 14 Mar. 2012). Arondekar is also associated with “Queer & Sexuality Studies” within the Feminist Studies Department at the University of California at Santa Cruz. A special issue on “Studying the History of Sexuality: Theory, Method, Praxis” guest edited by Julian Carter and Lesley A. Hall for the Journal of the History of Sexuality 14, no. 1/2 (2005) also dealt primarily with same-sex encounters.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Love in South Asia: a Cultural History, ed. Francesca Orsini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁰ For a further justification of this extended definition on autobiography, see Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, “Life/History/Archive: Identifying Autobiographical Writings by Muslim Women in South Asia,” Journal of Women’s History 25, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 61-84.

²¹ The four parts of Taslima Nasreen’s autobiography are entitled: Amar Meyebela (1999); Utal Hawa (2002); Ka (2003); and Sei Sob Ondhokar Din guli (2004). Their candidness, especially on sexual matters, has meant that all four have been banned by the Bangladesh government.

²² Nalim Jameela, Om Laingikatozhilaliyude Atmakatha (Kottayam: DC Books, 2005).

²³ For female literacy statistics in twentieth century India, see Shahida Latif, Muslim Women in India: Political and Private Realities (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990), 153-5.

²⁴ See, as an example, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson on “autobiographical truth” in Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, 2nd ed.), 15-18.

²⁵ Saeed Naqvi, “The Other Side of Iqbal,” The Friday Times (Lahore), 15 April 2011.

²⁶ See her entries for 22 April and 25 August 1907, in Atiya Fyzee, Zamana-i-tahsil (Agra: Matba‘ Mufi d-i-‘Am, 1921).

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the evidence, see Siobhan Lambert-Hurley and Sunil Sharma, Atiya’s Journeys: A Muslim Woman from Colonial Bombay to Edwardian Britain (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 2.

²⁸ Theodore Wright, Jr, “Muslim Kinship and Modernization: The Tyabji Clan of Bombay,” in Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India, ed. Imtiaz Ahmad (Delhi: Manohar, 1976), 227.

²⁹ See her entry for 18 May 1908, in Nazli Rafia Sultan Nawab Begam Sahiba, Sair-i-Yurop (Lahore: Union Steam Press, n.d.).

³⁰ Samuel Fyzee-Rahamin, Gilded India (London: Herbert Joseph, 1938). For a review, see The Times Literary Supplement, 26 March 1938, 222.

³¹ For a discussion of Atiya's correspondence with Iqbal, see Lambert-Hurley and Sharma, Atiya's Journeys, chapter 2.

³² See the introductory paragraphs to Atiya's Zamana and Nazli's Sair.

³³ For a biographical introduction to Badruddin Tyabji, see F. H. Brown, "Tyabji, Badruddin (1844–1906)," rev. Jim Masselos, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36600>, accessed 23 June 2006].

³⁴ Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, From Purdah to Parliament (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998, rev. ed.).

³⁵ Ikramullah, From Purdah to Parliament, chapters 6-7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁷ Jahanara Habibullah, Remembrance of Days Past: Glimpses of a Princely State during the Raj (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 52-60. This memoir appears to have been written in Urdu, but the English translation was published sometime before the Urdu original: Zindagi ki Yaadein: Riyasat Rampur ka Nawab Daur (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, xvii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, chapter 13.

⁴⁰ Hamida Saiduzzafar, Autobiography, ed. Lola Chatterji (New Delhi: Trianka, 1996).

⁴¹ Kenneth W. Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3.

⁴² For a brief introduction to Syed Ahmad Khan's career, see Francis Robinson, "Ahmad Khan, Sir Saiyid [Syed Ahmed Khan] (1817–1898)," Oxford Dictionary of National

Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47667>], accessed 26 March 2012].

⁴³ Aligarh Institute Gazette (Aligarh), 19 November 1869, quoted in Rehmani Begam, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan; The Politics of an Educationalist (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1985), 146.

⁴⁴ Atiya Fyzee, for instance, was often as critical, as celebratory, of what she observed in Britain. Lambert-Hurley and Sharma, Atiya's Journeys, 39-40.

⁴⁵ Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, "The Heart of a Gopi: Raihana Tyabji's Bhakti Devotionalism as Self-Representation," Modern Asian Studies (online July 2013), 1-27.

⁴⁶ Velcheru N. Rao, "A Ramayan of their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telegu," in Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Tradition in South Asia, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 114-36.

⁴⁷ Anshu Malhotra, "Telling her tale? Unravelling a life in conflict in Peero's Ik Sau Saṭh Kāfīān (one hundred and sixty kafis)," The Indian Economic and Social History Review 46, no. 4 (2009): 541-78, 561-6.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Ved Mehta, Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penquin Books, 1976), 211.

⁴⁹ Raihana Tyabji, The Heart of a Gopi (Poona: Miss R. Tyabji, n.d.), v-vi.

⁵⁰ See, as examples, letter to Raihana Tyabji, 18 June 1931, Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi Online; and Mehta, Mahatma, 209.

⁵¹ For a development of this argument, see Lambert-Hurley, "The Heart of a Gopi," 22-25.

⁵² Lewis, Rethinking Orientalism, 147. Also see Melman, Women's Orients and Mary Roberts, "Contested Terrains: Women Orientalists and the Colonial Harem," in Orientalism's Interlocutors: Rewriting the Colonial Encounter, ed. Jill Bealieu and Mary Roberts (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁴ The Nawab Sikandar Begum of Bhopal, A Pilgrimage to Mecca, tr. Mrs Willoughby-Osborne (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1870). It has been republished recently as A Princess's Pilgrimage: Nawab Sikandar Begum's A Pilgrimage to Mecca, ed. Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 106-7.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁷ On Sikandar's life and reign, see Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, Muslim Women, Reform and Princely Patronage: Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal (London: Routledge, 2007), chapter 1.

⁵⁸ Nawar al-Hassan Golley, Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 106-7.

⁵⁹ Sukrita Paul Kumar, "Introducing Ismat," in Ismat: Her Life, Her Times, ed. Kumar & Sadique (Delhi: Katha, 2000), viii.

⁶⁰ Kumar & Sadique, Ismat, 52.

⁶¹ This story is translated by M. Asaduddin as "The Quilt," in Lifting the Veil: Selected Writings of Ismat Chughtai (Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001), pp. 13-22.

⁶² Ibid., 22.

⁶³ See, as example, "Ismat Chughtai: The Quilt (Lihaaf) translated from the Urdu by Syeda Hameed and Tahira Naqvir" on "Theinkbrain" blog

[<http://theinkbrain.wordpress.com/2012/01/09>, accessed 28 March 2012].

⁶⁴ This chapter is translated by Tahira Naqvi in My Friend, My Eneomy: Essays, Reminiscences, Portraits (Delhi: Kali for Women, 2001), 131-47.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 140-1.

⁶⁶ Georgina Maddox, "Rebel in a Man's World," India Today, 25 March 2012

[<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/rebel-in-a-mans-world/1/179307.html>, accessed 28 March

2012]. For the translation, see Ismat Chughtai, A Life in Words: Memoirs, trans. M. Asaddudin (Delhi: Penguin, 2012).

⁶⁷ This chapter is translated by M. Asaduddin as “Under lock & key,” in Kumar & Sadique, Ismat, 33-46.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 37-8.

⁶⁹ See the book jacket of Tehmina Durrani with William and Marilyn Hoffer, My Feudal Lord (London: Corgi Books, 1994). The book was first published by Bantam Books in 1991.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 185.

⁷¹ Ibid., 106-7.

⁷² Ibid., 5-7.

⁷³ Tehmina Durrani, Mainda Sain (Karachi: Vanguard Books, n.d.) and Mere Aaka (Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2002).

⁷⁴ For reasons of confidentiality, I choose not to reveal these women’s names or identities beyond that the conversation occurred on 28 November 2005.

⁷⁵ See, as an example, Shabina Nishat Omar, “Breaking the Silence in Tehmina Durrani’s My Feudal Lord,” Jazbah Magazine [<http://www.jazbah.org/bookmfl.php>, accessed 12 October 2011]

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See Salma Ahmed, Cutting Free: An Autobiography (Karachi: Sama, 2002).

⁷⁸ Ibid., 26-7.

⁷⁹ Shah Jahan Begam, Tahzib un-Niswan wa Tarbiyat ul-Insan (Delhi: Matba‘i-Ansari, 1889).

⁸⁰ Barbara Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002 reprint), 268.

⁸¹ On this confrontation, see Lambert-Hurley, Muslim Women, 33-4.

⁸² Sultan Jahan Begam, Al-Hijab or Why Purdah is Necessary (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1922), 148.

⁸³ Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam, An Account of My Life, vol. II, trans. Abdus Samad Khan (Bombay: The Times Press, 1922), 36-7.

⁸⁴ For comparison with her reformist writings on companionate marriage, see Lambert-Hurley, Muslim Women, 151.

⁸⁵ Interview with her niece, Sakina Hassan, 13 February 2006.

⁸⁶ Saeeda Bano, Dagar se hat kar (New Delhi: Sajad Publishing House, 1996), 136. I am indebted to Asiya Alam for her dedicated analysis of this text in a paper entitled “Intimacy Against Convention: Marriage and Romance in Syeda Bano’s Dagar se Hat kar” at the 40th Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 21-23 October 2011.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 186-90.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁹¹ Bilquis Jehan Khan, A Song for Hyderabad: Memories of a World Gone By (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 114; Princess Mehrunissa of Rampur, *An Extraordinary Life* (Noida: Brijbasi Art Press, 2006), 100.

⁹² Hameeda Akhtar Husain, Humsafar (Karachi: Danyal, 1992); and Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri, My Fellow Traveller: A Translation of Humsafar (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁹³ Joan L Erdman with Zohra Segal, Stages: The Art and Adventures of Zohra Segal (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997), 104.

⁹⁴ Shaukat Kaifi, Yaad ki Rehguzar (New Delhi: Star Publications, 2004). The quotations that follow are taken from the recent translation: Shaukat Kaifi, Kaifi & I: a Memoir, trans.

Nasreen Rehman (Delhi: Zubaan, 2010).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁶ For an example of Kaifi's love letters, see *ibid.*, 38.

⁹⁷ I am grateful to Walter Hakala, in the audience at Madison, for encouraging me to draw out this point.

⁹⁸ A Woman of Substance: The Memoirs of Begum Khurshid Mirza, ed. Lubna Kazim (Delhi: Zubaan, 2005), 105-6. As example, see the final romantic scene from her 1938 hit, *Bhabi*, in which she sings with the hero played by Jairaj

⁹⁹ "Manuscript Memoirs of Mrs. Safia Jabir Ali," in Badruddin Tyabji Family Papers VI, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. A descendant, Salima Tyabji, aims to publish a translation of these memoirs under the title "Creating an Identity: The Family Journals of Tyabji Bhoymeeah of Bombay, 1877-1944."

¹⁰⁰ Hamida Rahman, Jibon Smriti (Dhaka: Naoroze Kitabistan, 1990), chapter one. I am indebted to Sarmistha Gupta for working with me to translate this text from the original Bengali.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 128-9.

¹⁰⁶ On Nawab Faizunnessa, see Sonia Nishat Amin, The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876-1939 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 149-50.

¹⁰⁷ Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani, Roopjalal, ed. Mohammad Abdul Kuddus (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2004 reprint), 3-7.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁰ See Barbara Daly Metcalf, Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi’s Bihishti Zewar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 323-6.

¹¹¹ A particularly useful example here in that she wrote at length about her love of popular fiction is the memoirs of Hyderabadi educationalist, Zahira Ghouse (1922-2003), written for a family magazine in the early 1950s. See Sylvia Vatuk, “A Passion for Reading: The Role of Early Twentieth Century Urdu Novels in the Construction of an Individual Female Identity in 1930s Hyderabad,” in Speaking of the Self: Gender, Performance and Autobiography in South Asia, ed. Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (Durham NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

¹¹² For a particularly flowery example, see the early travel writing of Atiya Fyzee quoted in Lambert-Hurley and Sharma, Atiya’s Journeys, 30.

¹¹³ See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vols. I-III (London: Penguin, 1976-84).

¹¹⁴ On Orientalist stereotypes, see Barbara Ramusack, The Indian Princes and their States (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 164-7; and Nicholas Dirks, The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 3-7.

¹¹⁵ For a development of this argument, see Lambert-Hurley, Muslim Women, 177.

¹¹⁶ I am grateful to Farzaneh Milani and Roberta Micallef for encouraging this line of analysis by pointing me to examples of sexual writing in classical and early modern Middle Eastern literature that compared very favourably with my more modern ones.

¹¹⁷ My thanks to one of my anonymous readers for pushing me to this broader conclusion.

¹¹⁸ Farzaneh Milani, “Veiled Voices: Women’s Autobiographies in Iran,” in Women’s Autobiographies in Contemporary Iran, ed. Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 13-14.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13. On autobiography as performance, see Sidonie Smith’s seminal article, “Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance,” in Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

¹²⁰ Charu Gupta, Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India (Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001), 268.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 243-47

¹²² *Ibid.*, 239-42

¹²³ On purdah’s institutionalization, see Lambert-Hurley, Muslim Women, chapter 4.

¹²⁴ Anindita Ghosh, “A World of Their Very Own: Religion, Pain, and Subversion in Bengali Homes in the Nineteenth Century,” in Behind the Veil: Resistance, Women and the Everyday in Colonial South Asia, ed. Anindita Ghosh (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008), 193.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 194-5.

¹²⁶ Dwight F. Reynolds (ed.), Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 19.

¹²⁷ S.P. Saksena, Indian Autobiographies (Calcutta: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1949), v, vii. See, as example of the latter trend, A.R. Venkatachalapathy, “Making a Modern Self in Colonial Tamil Nadu,” in Biography as History: Indian Perspectives, ed. Vijaya Ramaswamy and Yogesh Sharma (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009), 30-52.