

**PRINT AND ISLAMIC MODERNISM IN SOUTH ASIA: AN INVESTIGATION
OF THE URDU PRINT SPHERE THROUGH *NIGĀR* MAGAZINE (1922-1947)**

by

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OF THE URDU PRINT SPHERE THROUGH *NIGĀR* MAGAZINE (1922-1947)**

Koc University

Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities

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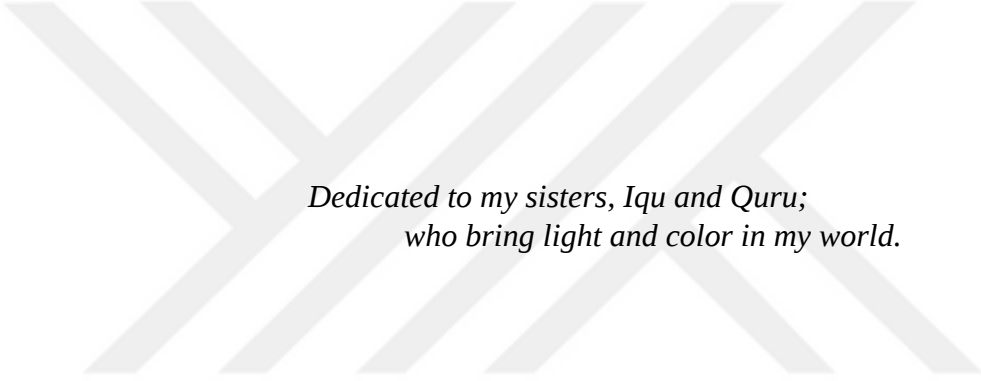
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*Dedicated to my sisters, Iqu and Quru;
who bring light and color in my world.*

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for any award or any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. It is affirmed by the candidate that, to the best of his knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Aaqib Javid



ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to understand Islamic modernism in light of print media in colonial South Asia. The area of focus is reformist ideas and their dissemination through the Urdu print media. The analysis is based on the study of the *Nigār* magazine. *Nigār* was edited by Niyaz Fatehpuri. Fatehpuri was one of the prominent Muslim reformers who strongly advocated for the reinterpretation of Islam in light of reason and rationality. Fatehpuri used *Nigār* to disseminate his ideas on religion. The timeline of the study is 1922-47. 1922 marks the start of *Nigār*, and in 1947, India gained independence from British rule.

Print culture played an essential role as a vehicle for modernization in colonial South Asia. Printing presses were introduced as early as the 1820s and spread across multiple cities and towns in the Indian subcontinent in the following decades. Religious tracts were first among the documents reproduced as '*ulamā*' took over the role of guardians of Islam. This resulted from the consolidation of British rule, which resulted in the extinction of the state structure of Islamic authorities. The 19th century witnessed the growth of a number of revivalist and reform Islamic movements, seeing itself under the image of Western modernity. Fatehpuri was influenced by the ideas and spirit of Syed Ahmed Khan, whose philosophy based on naturalism asked for the reconciliation of Islam with science. Print played a huge role in disseminating these reformist ideas. The study analyzes how Niyaz, through *Nigār*, navigated through the colonial society in which '*ulamā*' held a strong base.

Urdu print was a critical medium of creative expression during the late 19th and 20th centuries. Against the backdrop of colonial rule and the emergent nationalism with various manifestations, we see a transformation in Muslim political and social life and the emergence of community consciousness. The research is an attempt to understand this Muslim consciousness. It will follow the debates in *Nigār* in the decade (1937-47) leading up to the partition. The decade witnessed extreme political polarization. The thesis also investigates the notion of a unified Indian Muslim identity by analyzing the competing ideas of nationalism. The thesis attempts to contribute to the genres of social history, partition studies, religious studies, and print studies.

Keywords: Print culture, Urdu magazines, nationalism, colonialism, Muslim reform, Indian Partition, *Nigār*, Niyaz Fatehpuri, Urdu-Hindi divide, naturalism.

ÖZET

Bu tez, sömürgeci Güney Asya'daki yazılı medyanın ışığında İslami modernizmi anlamaya yönelik bir girişimdir. Tezin odaklandığı alan reformist fikirler ve bunların Urdu yazılı medyası aracılığıyla yayılmasıdır. Analiz Nigâr dergisinin çalışmasına dayanmaktadır. Nigâr, Niyaz Fatehpuri tarafından düzenlenmiştir. Fatehpuri, İslam'ın akıl ve rasyonellik ışığında yeniden yorumlanmasını güçlü bir şekilde savunan önde gelen Müslüman reformculardan biriydi. Fatehpuri, din hakkındaki fikirlerini yaymak için Nigâr dergisini kullanmıştır. Araştırmanın zaman çizelgesi 1922-47'dir. 1922, Nigâr'ın başlangıcıdır ve 1947'de Hindistan, İngiliz yönetiminden bağımsızlığını kazanmıştır.

Basılı kültür, sömürgeci Güney Asya'da modernleşmenin bir aracı olarak önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Matbaalar 1820'li yıllarda tanıtılmış ve sonraki yıllarda Hindistan yarımadasındaki birçok şehir ve kasabaya yayılmıştır. Ulemanın İslam'ın koruyucusu rolünü üstlenmesiyle birlikte çoğaltılacak belgeler arasında ilk sırada dini risaleler yer almıştır. Bu, İslami otoritelerin devlet yapısının yok olmasıyla sonuçlanan İngiliz yönetiminin pekişmesinin bir sonucuydu. 19. yüzyıl, kendisini Batı modernliği imajı altında gören bir dizi diriliş ve reformcu İslami hareketin büyümesine tanık olmuştur. Fatehpuri, natüralizme dayalı felsefesi İslam'ın bilimle uzlaşmasını isteyen Syed Ahmed Khan'ın fikirlerinden ve ruhundan etkilenmişti. Matbaa bu reformist fikirlerin yayılmasında büyük bir rol oynamıştır. Bu araştırma, Niyaz'ın ulemanın güçlü bir temele sahip olduğu sömürge toplumunda Nigâr aracılığıyla nasıl gezindiğini analiz etmeye çalışmaktadır.

Urduca baskı, 19. yüzyılın sonları ve 20. yüzyıl boyunca yaratıcı ifadenin kritik bir aracıydı. Sömürge yönetiminin ve çeşitli tezahürlerle ortaya çıkan milliyetçiliğin arka planında, Müslümanların siyasi ve sosyal hayatında bir dönüşüm ve toplum bilincinin ortaya çıktığını görmekteyiz. Araştırma bu Müslüman bilincini anlamaya yönelik bir girişimdir. Bunu, bölünmeye giden on yılda (1937-47) Nigâr dergisindeki tartışmaları takip ederek yapacaktır. Bu on yıl aşırı siyasi kutuplaşmaya tanık olmuştur. Tez ayrıca milliyetçiliğin rakip fikirlerini analiz ederek birleşik bir Hint Müslüman kimliği kavramını da araştırmaktadır. Tez, sosyal tarih, Hindistan taksim çalışmaları, dini çalışmalar ve matbaa çalışmaları türlerine katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Basılı kültür, Urdu dergileri, milliyetçilik, sömürgecilik, Müslüman reformu, Hindistan'ın bölünmesi, Nigâr, Niyaz Fatehpuri, Urdu-Hintçe ayrılığı , natüralizm.

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE¹

ṣ	ص	a, ā	ا, آ
ẓ	ض	B	ب
t̤	ط	P	پ
ẓ	ظ	T	ت
‘	ع	ṭ	ٹ
<u>Gh</u>	غ	s̤	ث
F	ف	j	ج
Q	ق	Ch	چ
K	ک	ḥ	ح
G	گ	<u>Kh</u>	خ
L	ل	D	د
M	م	<u>D</u>	ڈ
N	ن	<u>Z</u>	ذ
w, v, ō, ū	و	R	ر
H	ہ, ہ, ہ, ہ	ṛ	ڑ
H	ھ	Z	ز
’	ء	Zh	ژ
ē	ی	S	س
E	ے	sh	ش
a	اَ	i	اِ
u	اُ	ṇ	ن

¹ Based on the transliteration system developed by Steingass for the Persian language. Altered to accommodate Urdu sounds. Taken From: Robb, Megan Eaton. *Print and the Urdu Public: Muslims, Newspapers, and Urban Life in Colonial India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Print has been labeled as an essential modernizing agent across cultures in the world. This applies particularly in the context of religious reformations, as we witnessed with the rise of Protestantism and its challenge to traditional religious authority in Western Europe.² In the Islamic context, print played a pivotal role, not necessarily as causation but more so of a vehicle, in the 19th and 20th centuries.³ With specific context and objectives, various parts of the Islamic world adopted print at different points in time in the 19th century.⁴ In South Asia, it started in the 1820s with the production of religious tracts. Print here played a prominent role as an agent of change in Muslim reformation and in challenging colonial and religious authority.

Printing presses were introduced as early as 1840s and spread across multiple cities and towns in India over the following decades. Lucknow, Delhi, Lahore, and Hyderabad soon emerged as prominent Urdu print centers, with a wide range of newspapers and magazines printed and circulated across the region. At the start, the monopoly on print was with the colonial authority, which used it as an administrative tool. However, with the emergence of private entities like Munshi Nawal Kishore Press, it became more democratic.⁵ The establishment of newspapers and magazines saw for the first time a wide range of audiences' engagement with the time's broad social, political, economic, and technological contexts. With mass democratization and the

² Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 6th impr. London: Verso, 1990.

³ According to Robinson, Muslims were late to adopt print as it was seen as an attack at the heart of Islamic knowledge transmission, i.e., the oral tradition. See, Robinson, Francis. "Islam and the impact of print in South Asia." Chapter. In *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*. 67-68. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ali Khan Mahmudabad, *Poetry of Belonging: Muslim Imaginings of India 1850-1950*, First issue (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2020).

unprecedented overflow of information from within the region and outside the world, the debates became more diverse and critical as they saw the involvement of the larger public.

Against the backdrop of colonial rule and the overflow of ideas, South Asia witnessed a transformation in Muslim political and social life and the emergence of community consciousness. The Urdu language was the center of these dynamics, as Persian and Arabic witnessed a decline with the onset of colonial rule.⁶ Following the precedent in Europe, the early texts were primarily religious and, with time, saw a series of critiques on religion by various reformers challenging the monopoly of *‘ulamā* (religious scholars). The only distinction compared to Europe was that the print movement in India was initially led by *‘ulamā* owing to their anxieties about the perceived “threat to Islam”.⁷ What started primarily as a religious enterprise, by the start of the 20th century, saw the inclusion of topics outside the religious domain, including themes on diverse political and social issues. Similarly, various social and religious movements flourished in the period and relied on print as a medium of transmission. At the heart of these revival and reformation movements, the aim was to reinterpret Islam, i.e., its knowledge and institutions, in the light of the West. This process has been termed Islamic modernism.⁸ In the South Asian context, this process is manifested through multiple movements, each interpreting modernity in a different manner. For example, Deoband advocated for reform within the established tradition, and *Ahl-e Qurān* asked for discarding *Ḥadēṣ* altogether, whereas Naturalists like Syed sought a reconciliation of Islam with scientific reason.⁹ This research primarily focuses on an offshoot of naturalist thought as one of the outcomes of this process. It will do so by focusing on Niyaz Fatehpuri, who, being a

⁶ Rahman, Tariq. *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

⁷ Robinson, Francis. “Islam and the impact of print in South Asia.” 75-78.

⁸ Osella, Filippo, and Caroline Osella, eds. “Islamic Reform and Modernities in South Asia.” In *Islamic Reform in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁹ Rodrigues, Valerian. “In Search of an Anchor: Muslim Thought in Modern India.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 49 (2011): 43–58.

prominent literary figure in Urdu literature, became famous for his religious beliefs. He advocated his philosophy fiercely through the publication of his monthly magazine *Nigār*. Apart from its role in reforming religion, *Nigār* also served as a prominent literary magazine that focused on a diverse range of topics ranging from poetry, literature, politics, economics, etc. Through its innovative structure, it functioned as an important participant in the public sphere, reflecting the immediate social, cultural, and political context of the times.

Urdu print was a critical medium of creative expression during the late 19th and 20th centuries. *Nigār* was part of the flourishing Urdu print sphere which benefited from the Khilafat movement. It included prominent newspapers like *al-Hilāl*, *Comrade*, and *Zamindār*. The mainstreaming of Urdu print occurred in this period, marked by the rapid rise of multiple Urdu magazines with an eager audience interested in the developments in the Ottoman Empire and the wider Muslim world.¹⁰ It created a space for the expression of religious consciousness for Muslims. Centered primarily around the United Provinces, Urdu language and magazines played an essential role in shaping the politics of the entire South-Asian Muslim community. The province witnessed rise of a network of young Muslims who were disgruntled with the colonial administration and the “old Urdu elite”, as they found it difficult to secure a position in administration owing to their religious identity.¹¹ These educated men led this explosion of the Urdu print journalism in the United Provinces and India.

¹⁰ Robinson, Francis. “Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print.” *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 229–51.

¹¹ Robinson, Francis, “Young Party Victorious.” Chapter. In *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces’ Muslims, 1860 - 1923*, Digitally print. version. Cambridge South Asian Studies 16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

1.1 Research Question

This thesis primarily focuses on Islamic reformist thought and social and political debates through the Urdu print media in the colonial era. *Nigār* being part of the thriving Urdu print sphere, stands out for multiple reasons. Niyaz employed a unique tactic to make the magazine relevant to the larger section of the population. On the one hand, it would feature critical literary and historical essays. At the same time, it would appeal to larger audience by featuring popular content in terms of *afsāna* (short stories), popular religious and theological debates, and a section on general knowledge featuring updates and trivia from around the world. *Nigār* is one of the few magazines in South Asia which had the same editor and circulated consistently, not missing a single issue, throughout its circulation from 1922-1962.¹² What makes *Nigār* special, apart from other magazines, is its innovative structure. It featured an Inquiry section called *Istifsārāt* in which questions from readers would be featured, and Niyaz would answer them at length.¹³ Through this innovative structure of constant engagement with the audience, *Nigār* acts as an important source to understand the times.

This thesis will attempt to contextualize Niyaz in his environment as an actor and subject of change who attempts to navigate through the immediate social, political, and colonial constraints. Niyaz's ability to engage with his opponents on controversial religious and political issues makes him remarkable. Niyaz, unlike Syed Ahmad Khan, was operating under a different political and social reality; thus, his project had to be different from that of Syed Ahmad Khan. While Syed advocated for a particular response to modernity, his political project saw Indian Muslims as a distinct minority that he believed would be crushed under liberal democracy.¹⁴ Niyaz

¹² Niyaz handed the control of *Nigār* to Farman Fatehpuri in 1962.

¹³ *Istifsār*; Arabic, to question or inquiry.

¹⁴ Rodrigues, Valerian :43-58

didn't believe that to be the case, religion for him was a non-issue when it came to politics. Niyaz, in his theological project, used recent scientific discoveries and Western political and social ideas to make his project relevant and appealing.

Apart from theological and religious debates, this thesis will focus on key political developments that occurred during a decade before the partition of India. It will be done so by following the discussions in *Nigār*. 1937-47 witnesses the manifestation of key political developments as Indian society was divided on communal lines. Muslim league advocated for Muslim political rights and became prominent Muslim political voice at the time. The era is marked by a unique Muslim consciousness of which print acts as a medium of expression. *Nigār* is witness to this transition marked by the 1937 elections and subsequent provincial governments formed by Indian National Congress. Topics related to nationalism, Islam, colonialism, Hindi-Urdu divide, and Muslim subjecthood are discussed at length throughout the Urdu print sphere. *Nigār* based in Lucknow, United Provinces, played a crucial role in Urdu press and Muslim politics in these circumstances. *Nigār* reflects this political turn in the Urdu print sphere as magazines turned increasingly political. Niyaz opposed the Muslim League fiercely and, in line with his theological project, presented a criticism of the two-nation theory and Hindu-Muslim problem in India.¹⁵

The period of analysis for this thesis is from 1922-1947. 1922 marks the starting of *Nigār*, and the partition of the Indian subcontinent marks 1947. However, at the same time, it focuses on special issues throughout the publication of the magazine (1922-1963). The thesis, among other

¹⁵ The two-nation theory is a concept attributed to Muhammad Ali Jinnah in popular literature, according to which Muslims of India are and have historically been a separate nation from Hindus. However, the concept can be traced to Savarkar and Lajpat Rai, who advocated for a similar cause decades before the partition. For further discussion, see; Verma, Anand K. *Reassessing Pakistan: Role of Two-Nation Theory*. Lancer Publishers, 2001. Also, Ahmad, Irfan. "Modernity and Its Outcast. The Why and How of India's Partition." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (June 2012): 477–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2012.687852>

things, will contribute to genres of social history, partition studies, religious studies, and print studies.

1.2 Relevant Literature and contextualization of the topic.

The thesis deals with the themes of the print culture, Islamic reformation and revival, and partition studies in the colonial South Asia. To understand and contextualize Niyaz and *Nigār* in their immediate environment, it is important to provide context to these larger themes.

On the theme of Islamic revival and reform, the works of Francis Robinson, Barbara Metcalf, and Muhammad Qasim Zaman have proved pivotal for this study. According to Robinson, Islamic reformation and revival should not necessarily be understood as a result of the Western encounter with Muslim societies. Revival movements have historically occurred throughout Islamic history; however, in the 18th century, there was a unique phenomenon of Western encounter that shaped, to a larger extent, revival movements across the Islamic world. The process has been known as Islamic modernism.¹⁶ In his essay, “Islamic Reform and Modernities in South Asia,” Francis Robinson explains this experience at length in the colonial South Asian context. According to Robinson, these movements, although originating locally, saw themselves in the light of the West and used the tools associated with Western modernity to assist their causes. The outcome of these encounters had a lasting impact on South Asian Islam and, according to Robinson, resulted in: “an end to the total authority of past,” a new “protestant Human will,” growing “Individualism,” rationalization of Islam into an ideology and a “process of secularization.”¹⁷ However, at the same time, it shouldn’t be confused and read completely along the lines of Western experience, e.g., Weber’s thesis of disenchantment doesn’t apply here as these

¹⁶ Osella, Filippo, and Caroline Osella, eds. “Islamic Reform and Modernities in South Asia.” 26-30

¹⁷ Ibid.

movements use a fusion of methods to further their cause. Robinson points to Deobandis preparing amulets while at the same time criticizing grave worship associated with Sufism. According to Robinson, Islamic reform, in this context, opened ways for modernity and then worked with it.

In her seminal work “Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900,” Barbara Metcalf examines the foundation and functioning of the Deoband seminary, which was a product of this Islamic modernism. According to Metcalf, the 19th century witnessed the final extinction of state structures of Islamic authority in the Indian subcontinent. It was marked by an enlarged and different role for the *‘ulamā* in Muslim society as they saw themselves as the protectors of faith. The structure and functioning of Deoband provided an insight into how elements of modernity were incorporated into this revivalist institution. It incorporated the modern education model of fixed and graded syllabi, assessments, affiliated colleges, and salaried teachers. The sources of funding changed from endowments to public donations. It took no primary interest in the affairs of the state and focused on the reformation of the inner self.

In his essay “Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia,” Francis Robinson explains how print played an important role as a modernizing agent in Islamic reform in South Asia. Among others, according to Robinson, it led to “emergence of protestant Islam, the strengthening of pan-islamic layer, outflanking of oral systems of transmission of knowledge; the colonizing of the Muslim minds with Western knowledge”.¹⁸ Muhammad Qasim Zaman enters this debate by challenging Robinson’s notion that Print meant disruption of the monopoly of *‘ulamā*. According to Zaman, *‘ulamā* wrote various texts in different languages for different audiences to maintain their authority.¹⁹ Also, by wielding authority in the form of issuing *ijāzat* to specific people and

¹⁸ Robinson, Francis. “Islam and the impact of print in South Asia.” 69-74.

¹⁹ Zaman, Muhammad Qasim. “Commentaries, Print and Patronage: ‘Hadieth’ and the Madrasas in Modern South Asia.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 62, no. 1 (1999): 60–81.

limiting common people from going beyond specific texts meant they had control over interpretation of Islam.²⁰ Apart from Robinson, Zaman, and Metcalf, the works of Nile Green have been important in understanding the role of the formation of Muslim identity in the colonial era in relation to the changes in the wider Muslim world.²¹

In reference to politics, Muslim identity, and the partition of India, several texts have been pivotal in helping this thesis. In building up the context for the United Provinces and the formation of the Muslim Urdu elite, Robinson's "Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923" has been critical. Ayesha Jalal's "Self and Sovereignty" has also been useful in reframing the conception that Muslim identity didn't necessarily dictate political affiliations in colonial India, i.e., there was no unified Muslim approach to politics in colonial India.

In reference to the formation of Pakistan, there is a debate centering on the role of religion, particularly the Muslim masses, in shaping the partition. In her seminal work "The Sole Spokesperson," Ayesha Jalal challenges the religious argument in shaping partition and lays the importance on regional political dynamics. She describes Jinnah as a secular constitutionalist who relied on religious imagery to make a coherent political block for Indian Muslims. According to Jalal, Jinnah used Pakistan narrative only as a "bargaining chip" to gain parity with Hindus in a post-colonial constitutional setup. In any case, according to Jalal, Muslim masses, as such, had no coherent understanding of what Pakistan meant. Venkat Dhulipala, in his text "Creating a new Medina," challenges this argument by highlighting the debates and support the Pakistan movement generated in the United Provinces. According to Dhulipala Pakistan movement saw the support of

²⁰ *Ijaza* means permission. It indicates a transfer of authority regarding the transmission of a text.

²¹ Green, Nile, and Nile Green. *Global Islam: A Very Short Introduction*. Very Short Introductions. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. 19-45.

the masses and many *‘ulamā* who then provided active aid for its formation. Anita Singh also challenges Jalal on the “bargaining chip” thesis by pointing to the 1940 Lahore resolution and how it matched with the actual Pakistan state after Partition. However, she is also dismissive of the role of ordinary Muslims, as they had no idea what Pakistan meant. Subaltern schools, Faisal Devji, Ian Talbot, and Neeti Nair, also highlight how ordinary people had no idea what Pakistan meant and were taken aback by the turn of events during the partition process.²²

United Provinces, owing to its historical and cultural significance for Indian Muslims, has been the center of Pakistan formation debate. Regarding the politics of the United Provinces and the role of Muslim elites, there is a debate between Paul Brass and Robinson, which provides an insight into the province’s dynamics. Brass, in his text “Language, Religion, and Politics in North India,” explains how, in events leading up to the partition, *Ashraf* Muslims resorted to religious imagery and symbol manipulation to have control on North Indian Muslim politics.²³ According to Brass, Muslims in the United Provinces preferred alien Islamic symbols of disunity over Indian symbols of unity. Robinson contests this instrumental hypothesis by referring to the fact that Muslims in the United Provinces had historically this acute sense of separate religious-political identity.²⁴ Robinson here draws on C.A. Baily’s works which demonstrates the growing antagonism among Hindu and Muslim elites going as back as around the decline of the Mughal

²² The referred of these authors are as follows: Faisal Devji makes his case for the Muslim League being a secular elite group that received criticism from *Ulamā*. For details see: Devji, Faisal. *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea*. Harvard University Press, 2013. Ian Talbot’s work is related to Punjab. Talbot shows how the Muslim League made inroads in Punjab only a few years before the partition. See. Talbot, Ian. “The Growth of the Muslim League in the Punjab 1937-46.” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 20, no. 1 (March 1982): 5–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662048208447395>. For Neeti Nair’s work on Hindu minorities in Punjab, check: Nair, Neeti. *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India*. Harvard University Press, 2011. For Subaltern school, check: Pandey, Gyanendra. *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories*. Stanford University Press, 2006.

²³ *Ashraf* is the section of elite Muslims in South Asia. Mainly consisted of Muslims claiming foreign ancestry, also includes converts from Higher Hindu Castes. For further details, See Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (New Delhi: OUP, 2013)

²⁴ Robinson, Francis. “Nation formation: the Brass thesis and Muslim separatism.” Chapter. In *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*. 156-167. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010.

empire. The British would later only build on these antagonisms.²⁵ It was manifested through wider networks that percolated deep down to rural areas through networks such as *pēr-o-murēdē*.²⁶ The separate identity was further strengthened through revival movements and print culture. Regarding symbol selection, Robinson says it was instinctive, rather than deliberate, and was based on Muslim networks of solidarity and wider belonging. Farzana Sheikh also builds on Robinson's work to highlight Muslims' acute sense of political separatism.²⁷ This notion is, however, challenged by Ayesha Jalal. According to her, Muslims had no unified approach to politics. Muslim interests in politics were not determined by its collective identity.²⁸ Mushirul Hassan also argues for a similar case by focusing on nationalist Muslims in the Congress party.²⁹ On the other hand, William Gould blames Muslim consolidation on Hindu revivalist movements in the late colonial period.³⁰ Gilmartin sees wider support for Pakistan because the idea represented a "transcendental symbol of Muslim solidarity."³¹

In terms of Print culture in the South Asian context work of Francesca Orsini, "The History of the Book in South Asia," has been very helpful. The book helps us understand the shift from manuscript to print culture in India and how print culture flourished in colonial India. Ulrike Stark's text on Munshi Nawal Kishore press is also key in understanding the earlier print culture in the United Provinces and beyond. In a similar vein, Megan Robb analyses the impact of Urdu

²⁵ Bayly, Christopher Alan. *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

²⁶ Relation between spiritual master (*pēr*) and his disciple (*murēd*). Characteristic of Sufi tradition in South Asian context.

²⁷ Shaikh, Farzana. "Muslims and Political Representation in Colonial India: The Making of Pakistan." *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (1986): 539–57.

²⁸ Jalal, Ayesha. *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

²⁹ Hasan, Mushirul. *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

³⁰ Gould, William. *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*. Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

³¹ Gilmartin, David. "Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative." *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 4 (November 1, 1998): 1068–95.

print culture in South Asia through a small-scale newspaper *Madēnah* published in Bijnor town in the United Provinces. The study has been helpful in developing my thesis.

In expressing Muslim nationalism, Urdu played a pivotal role and was at the center of Muslim imagination and political divide throughout the 20th century, particularly in the 1937-47 decade. Controversial schemes, around the time, such as language reforms and *Vidyā* Mandir education schemes put language questions at the forefront of political discourse. Francesca Orsini explores this Hindi-Urdu divide and illustrates how it wasn't always the case. How religious, colonial, and political forces shaped this divide. The book is important to understand the politics around the Hindi-Urdu debate.³² Tariq Rahman's works have been helpful in understanding the history and evolution of the Urdu language in this regard.³³

During the writing of my thesis, I also discovered an M.A. thesis written by Juhi Shahin on Niyaz Fatehpuri.³⁴ Juhi Shahin wrote her thesis in 2007 as part of her M.A. in Islamic studies. The study was critical and helpful in various aspects, informing about the diverse range of other primary sources. However, Shahin had very limited access to archives, i.e., issues of ten years (the first five and last five years) of the magazine with major gaps between the issues. Her research is limited to theology, making space for a coherent account of *Nigār* and Niyaz. This thesis, by its access to almost complete issues of the magazine, attempts to put a coherent narrative.

1.3 Sources and Structure

The digitized versions of *Nigār* magazine, 1922-1965, are the main archival sources of this thesis. The Rekhta Foundation has carried out the digitization of various Urdu magazines including

³² Orsini, Francesca. *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*. Orient BlackSwan, 2010.

³³ Rahman, Tariq. *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

³⁴ Juhi Shahin, "Niyaz Fatehpuri and the *Ulamā*: Criticism and Debates (1922-1966)" (MA Thesis, McGill University, 2007).

Nigār, and the entire source can be accessed from their website. Since there are gaps in the digitized versions, this thesis benefits from the archival research conducted at Raja Mahmudabad Library and Archives in Lucknow. *Nigār* magazine operates in relation to other magazines as various authors are discussed and debated; this thesis also benefits from access to those magazines, e.g., Majid Daryabadi's *Sach* magazine and Suleiman Nadvi's *Ma'ārif* have also been used in this thesis.

Apart from magazines, Niyaz wrote various books covering issues related to a diverse range of issues, including theology, palmistry, music, psychology, etc. This thesis benefits from those sources also. Important among them are *Man-ō-Yazdān*, *Istifsārāt-ō-javābāt*, *maq̤hab*. These books were accessed through the website of the Rekhta Foundation.

This thesis also benefits from a memoir written by Daulat Ram commemorating the life and works of Niyaz Fatehpuri. Various YouTube videos have also been of help in which the life and thoughts of Niyaz Fatehpuri are discussed.³⁵

Apart from primary sources, this thesis heavily benefits from the secondary sources related to the themes of Print, South Asian Muslim modernity, Islamic revival, and partition studies. It has been discussed at length in the literature review section. It is important to mention Robinson's detailed works on South Asian modernity. It acted as an opening to explore this theme in the context of the United Provinces.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, the focus is on Niyaz's early life and education. Also, his journey, inspiration, and influences are discussed that shaped his religious and literary ideas. The chapter also focuses on *Nigār* and its establishment as a magazine.

³⁵ Niaz Fatehpuri | Aslam Jairajpuri | Ghulam Ahmed Pervez | Fitnah Inkar e Hadees | Lecture 03, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQaZENib1oQ>.

Among other things it discusses, Why and how *Nigār* was able to make itself successful in a short span of time? And what made it different from the rest of the magazines? This chapter should be read as biography of the author and the magazine.

The second chapter discusses the key ideas Niyaz had regarding Islam and religion in general. In formulating his religious project, Niyaz was following the footsteps of Syed Ahmed Khan. However, he found himself in a new social and political reality compared to Syed Ahmed. Niyaz attempts to make a complete model of Islam in line with his thought. After formulating his detailed project about Islam in which he explained key theological concepts, Niyaz explained the existing condition of Islam in general and Indian Muslims in particular with regard to what went wrong in the past. '*Ulamā* were the main target for Niyaz. The chapter provides insights into Niyaz's thoughts about Islam and the extent to which he goes in employing reason to justify his position.

The last chapter deals with the *Nigār* as a source to understand the times. It focuses on the theme on how *Nigār* acted in the public sphere as '*ulamā*, and common people participated in debates on political, social, and religious issues. Focusing on the era from 1935 to 1947 in which the print sphere became increasingly politicized, *Nigār* offers a window to understand this politicization and communal polarization. Niyaz offered a critique of the Pakistan scheme and the communal problem, in alignment with his reformist thought, and received criticism from his readers in this regard. The era also witnessed an attack on press freedom amidst World War 2 and a national independence movement. *Nigār* reveals the complex relationship between colonial authority, society, and religion.

1.4 Transliterations.

Regarding the transliterations for Urdu words, the thesis will use modified version of Steingass's Persian transliteration table (given in the preliminary pages). The modification is done to accommodate various Urdu sounds. For Qu'ranic Arabic, this thesis will incorporate transliterations provided by surahquran.com. Arabic words commonly used in Urdu language, or general Arabic words apart from Quranic Arabic, will also follow the Urdu transliteration model. Names and terms popular in Urdu language and literature have not been transliterated. Regarding translations, the thesis attempts to get as close as it can to literal meaning while also not losing the context at the same time.

1.5 Significance of the Thesis.

This project traces its origin to years ago when working on rare Persian and Arabic manuscripts at Raja Mahmudabad Archives, Lucknow; I discovered a rare set of Urdu print magazines; however, given that the source had severe gaps, a thorough study couldn't be conducted. Rekhta Foundation played a critical role in collecting and digitizing these magazines across the private libraries in India. Historiographical coursework and an interest in Islamic modernity particularly Muslim identity formation in South Asia led to this project.

The study is important in many aspects, primarily because of the availability of sources. Also, compared to Hindi counterparts, Urdu magazines haven't been studied at length. This study attempts to benefit from this process and scrutinize these magazines across various themes to look for the expression of the Muslim community, as Urdu was part and parcel of Muslim identity in India. Secondly, it encompasses the reformative spirit of the times. Throughout his writings, Niyaz urged for a de-mythologized Islam that was synchronous with Western reason. It demonstrates the psychological impact of colonial rule. *Nigār* also entered into discussions with other magazines

giving a wide idea of an existing print sphere where diverse range of topics and issues were discussed. It helps us to understand the social reality of the times. This work can also be a starting point to approach diverse Urdu print media for further research to understand the period better.



CHAPTER 2: A NEW MEDIUM TO PROPAGATE CHANGE: NIYAZ AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF *NIGĀR*³⁶

“... Religion is a name for credulous obedience; therefore, its existence, whether necessary or unnecessary, useful or useless, is only ensured by ignorance. Viewed from a prism of knowledge, it appears highly irrational. Because it is only here, we see its reality entirely, and it appears as a laughable entity....”³⁷

Niyaz Fatehpuri (1884-1965) was one of the most influential literary and religious figures in 20th-century South Asia. A literary critic, poet, journalist, essayist, *afsāna-nigār*³⁸, translator, and social reformer; however, it was only because of views about religion and relentless criticism of ‘ulamā that Niyaz became famous. Arguing for a radical re-interpretation of Islam based on a rationalism, Niyaz wrote multitudes of works to establish his case for his reformed version of Islam. Niyaz wrote for various magazines to voice his opinion. However, it was only with the establishment of *Nigār* that he cemented his position as a literary critic and religious scholar. During his lifetime *Nigār* emerged as one of the most prominent Urdu magazines of the 20th century, in which issues related to religion, politics, and society were debated. It successfully competed against established magazines such as *Al-Hilāl*, *Humāyūn*, and *Adēb*, and became known for its quality of Urdu literary content and criticism. From its establishment, the magazine was entirely controlled by Niyaz. Niyaz employed innovative mechanisms to distinguish his magazine from the rest of the Urdu magazines. Through *Nigār*, Niyaz became a controversial figure given his ideas about Islam and ‘ulamā and thus offers a window to understanding Muslim society in

³⁶ The Source citation for *Nigār* magazine will work as follows: **name of the magazine, city of publication issue number. Page numbers, month of publication year of publication.** For example, *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara number 001. 100-110, January 1938.

³⁷ Rekhta. “Man-ō-Yazdān Volume-002 by Niyaz Fatehpuri,” accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/detail/Man-ō-Yazdān-volume-002-niyaz-fatehpuri-ebooks>.

³⁸ Afsāna, meaning tale, is a short story genre in Urdu literature. *Afsāna-nigār* is the story writer.

early 20th century North India. Under colonial rule, Indian Muslims were grappling with the loss of power and the emerging threat to their identity from the Hindu majority. They were eagerly looking to the wider Muslim world with a sense of belonging. Through print, translations, and education reforms, we witness a rise in debates about making Islam congruent with modern times. Niyaz represented one such voice and offers an opening to understand the context with its nuances and complexities.

2.1 Early education

Niyaz Fatehpuri was born in Fatehpur, United Provinces, in 1884. Although a second-tier town, given its proximity to Lucknow, the area consisted of a vibrant Urdu Muslim community connected with a broader region.³⁹ Niyaz was born in a Pathan family of substantial means.⁴⁰ Being part of the Ashraf section paved the way for access to cultural capital.⁴¹ Niyaz received primary religious education at home and was enrolled in a local seminary at eight. He completed his matriculation at the seminary in 1898.⁴² The experiences at the seminary and home shaped his outlook on religion to a larger extent. His father, Mohammad Amir Khan, influenced him in this regard. Despite being from an Ashraf background, Amir Khan was the first to be formally educated in the family. It has to do with the fact that Pathans were inducted as soldiers in the army by various rulers; the trend continued until the late British era. After getting his initial education in the Persian language and literature in Fatehpur, he went to Lucknow and Delhi for higher education. Amir

³⁹ A magazine titled *Sahr-e Babul* was published here in 1886. This, combined with the influence of the recently established *Nadwat-ul-‘ulamā*, indicates that Fatehpur was engaged with the wider Oudh region.

⁴⁰ Pathan is a surname used by people of Afghan descent. Known for their martial skills, rulers recruited them as soldiers throughout history.

⁴¹ Ashraf is the section of elite Muslims in South Asia. Mainly consisted of Muslims claiming foreign ancestry, also includes converts from Higher Hindu Castes. For further details, See Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (New Delhi: OUP, 2013)

⁴² *Nigār*, Karachi, Shumara Number-003,004. 13-14, March-April 1963.

Khan was well-versed in Persian classics and poetry and wrote *qaṣ̣ēda* under the pen name Ameer Faqeer.⁴³ Amir Khan worked in the British police services and was well-connected with the literary circle in the region. He took a keen interest in Niyaz's education and ensured a relatively liberal environment where he could criticize and think freely about issues related to religious beliefs.

Niyaz was enrolled in the Madrasa Islamia when he was eight years old. The experiences at the seminary played a crucial role in shaping his views about *'ulamā* and Islam. The seminary was linked to the recently established *Nadwat-ul- 'ulamā*.⁴⁴ The establishment of the *Nadwat-ul- 'ulamā* encompasses the reform spirit of the times as Muslim intellectuals tried to find a balance between traditional and modern education.⁴⁵ The seminary employed the *Dars-i Nizami* curriculum consisting of Arabic, *ḥifẓ*, and English sections.⁴⁶ Niyaz narrates the difficulties and resistance faced by the head of the institution, Maulana Zahoor-ul-Islam, in establishing the English section. Attaining English education was seen as a negative influence. According to Niyaz, there were stark differences in the learning experiences in the Arabic and English sections. The Arabic section was managed by Maulana Noor Muhammad, whom Niyaz described as harsh, rigid, narrow-minded, tradition-oriented, and sectarian. In contrast, the experiences described in the English section were the opposite.

⁴³ *Qaṣ̣ēda*, meaning poem, has been a part of the genre of poetry across Islamic traditions. They are written to praise Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and other respected figures.

⁴⁴ The institution was founded in 1894 in Lucknow, India, to train modern Muslim scholars in traditional education while embracing the challenges of modernity. Kumar, Akriti. "Shibli Nomani and the making of Nadwatul'Ulum." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 78 (2017): 676–82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26906140>.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ḥifẓ*; Arabic, to memorize.

Narrating his experience in a biographical essay, Niyaz mentions that “other than the English section I didn’t have a good experience at the institution.”⁴⁷ He recalled the harsh treatment carried by the teachers in making young boys memorize the Qur’an. For Niyaz, the dogmatic beliefs of the teacher and such an environment made him distant and critical of Islam: “if Islam conditions a person in this manner (being uncritical and rigid in one’s thought), then it doesn’t make any sense as a religion.”⁴⁸

In the same essay, Niyaz narrated his “life-changing” experience that inspired him to research and study Islam and its history. During his stay at the madrasa, his Arabic teacher once complained to his father about Niyaz’s ill-tempered nature and the unnecessary questioning regarding the basic beliefs of Islam.⁴⁹ The issue according to Niyaz was related to *La ‘an Yazēd*.⁵⁰ Niyaz had been critical of the concept and questioned teacher’s sympathetic portrayal of Yazēd. According to Niyaz, the teacher shouldn’t have focused on such unnecessary topic as it had nothing to do with basic doctrine of Islam. Upon hearing the whole incident, Niyaz’s father was furious at the teacher and scolded him, in front of Niyaz, for his incompetence and narrowmindedness:

“I can understand the rules and regulations when it comes to grammar, just like mathematics; however, you can’t force him to abandon his reason in *fiqh* and *Ḥadēs* lessons. I don’t believe that all reason was endowed to *aslāf* only.”⁵¹ Now we live in a time where the door of reason has opened to a greater extent, please don’t close this door on my son.”⁵²

⁴⁷ *Nigār*, Karachi Shumara Number-003,004. 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *La ‘an-Yazēd* meaning cursing the Yazēd. Yazēd was the Ummayid governor held responsible for the killing of the Prophet’s grandson Hussain in Karbala

⁵¹ *Aslāf* arabic for ancestors. Here, early Muslims.

⁵² *Ibid.*

According to Niyaz, his father went on with his speech narrating the *La ‘an Yazēd* concept, its origin, what it meant and how it was used as a sectarian ploy. Seeing his father deliver such a passionate speech about Islamic history made Niyaz further question the politically motivated teachings at madrasa. It inspired Niyaz to study these issues at length on its own. The disappointment wasn’t limited to Arabic section of the seminary, it continued with the *Ḥadēṣ* studies too. According to Niyaz, the teachers were rigid and uncritical in their stance on teaching and understanding *Ḥadēṣ*. Most *Ḥadēṣ* seemed illogical, and one was supposed to believe them categorically. The experiences at the institutions shaped Niyaz’s perspectives about Islam and religion in general. Throughout his life, he didn’t rely on *Ḥadēṣ* as an authentic source to understand Islam. Maulvis, for him, symbolized stagnation, *jahālat* (ignorance), and rigidity – this would continue to be a lifelong impression.⁵³ Disillusioned with the belief parameters, Niyaz switched to understanding the role of religion in *adab* and *akhlāq* i.e., morality and as an ethical code of conduct. At the same time, he developed an inclination towards Sufism. Niyaz was attracted to Sufism based on what he saw its lenient approach and openness towards criticism.

While obtaining his regular Arabic education at the seminary, the learning environment at home added to his intellectual development. At home, he learned the Farsi language and literature from his father and engaged with non-religious texts, i.e., literature on *taṣawwuf*. It was during this time that he started to translate *Fuṣūṣ-ul-ḥikam*.⁵⁴ Niyaz stayed in Fatehpur for 14 years and moved to Lucknow after completing his matriculation. After matriculation, he also took lessons at *Nadwat-ul-‘ulamā*, *Firangē Maḥal* in Lucknow, and *Madrasa-e ‘āliyah* at Rampur. The early

⁵³ Maulvi from Arabic Molaa means a master. Used for a religious person not necessarily a scholar.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Fuṣūṣ-ul-ḥikam* (translated to english as “ringstones of wisdom”) is a famous philosophical text by Andalusian scholar Ibn Arabi.

years in Fatehpur shaped his earlier outlook toward Islam, and religion in general, which for him needed redemption and reinterpretation to suit modern times.

2.2 From Fatehpur to the starting of *Nigār*.

Niyaz started *Nigār* only in 1922. Before *Nigār*, the period from 1899 to 1922 marked a significant era in his intellectual development. During this period, he developed his skills as a critic, poet, journalist, essayist, and religious scholar. Niyaz switched jobs, changed places, met prominent intellectuals, and wrote in multiple journals in various capacities.

Finishing his matriculation around 1899, Niyaz shifted to Lucknow. Given his father's reputation and networks, he easily secured a position in the police department. However, not finding it appropriate to his literary temperaments, he resigned in 1902. From 1902 to 1908, he worked in various managerial and security officer roles in the Estates of Hansi and Jaigarh. Following his father's death in 1908, Niyaz shifted back to Fatehpur. In Fatehpur, Niyaz served as the headmaster of the English section of *Madrassa Islāmiyah* – the institution he attended as a child.⁵⁶ Niyaz stayed here for two years and left it in 1910 to be associated with the leading Urdu paper *Zamēndār*.⁵⁷ This proved to be Niyaz's last proper stay in his hometown.

In 1910, Niyaz started his journalistic career in *Zamēndār* under the supervision of Maulana Zafar Ali Khan.⁵⁸ A year later, he would be the assistant editor of *Tawhīd* and continue to perform similar roles till 1919 in prominent papers like *Khatīb* and *Ri'āyat*.⁵⁹ These magazines

⁵⁶ *Nigār*, Pakistan Shumara Number-003,004. 21.

⁵⁷ *Zamēndār* was the leading Urdu daily from Lahore, Punjab. It was started by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, also known as the father of Urdu print journalism in South Asia. Sulaman, Zahida. "Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and Hindu Muslim unity." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 75 (2014): 1341–47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44158527>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁹ *Nigār*, Pakistan Shumara Number-003,004. 21.

catered to the Urdu-speaking elite class and featured topics related to religion, politics, and literature. The era marked the revolution in Urdu print as ideas of scholars like Syed, Hali, Shibli, Mohsin-ul-Mulk, etc., gained traction among the literate Muslim class and they debated and discussed the condition of Muslims and Islam in colonial India.⁶⁰ Even before the start of *Nigār*, Niyaz had published nine essays in prominent magazines, including *al-Hilāl*, *Zamēndār*, *Naqqād*, *Ṣalā-e-‘ām*, and *Tamaddun*. Niyaz was well-connected and aware of Urdu print journalism and its networks.

In this era, it is important to mention the role Bhopal played in his development as a scholar and critic. In 1915 Niyaz shifted to the princely state of Bhopal, where he was initially assigned to the Police department and later transferred to a clerical position in the administrative section. Niyaz wasn't happy with his job, he complained directly to Sultan Jaha Begum, ruler of Bhopal, who then transferred him to the history department.⁶¹ The department worked closely with the ruler, and published scholarship on religion, poetry, and philosophy. The period proved pivotal to Niyaz's intellectual growth as he was able to research and publish his works freely. It was here that Niyaz's position as a writer was established. Niyaz wrote his famous works *Ṣaḥābiyat*, *Gahwāra-e Tamaddun*, and translated several Arabic texts.⁶² The connections in Bhopal proved critical for the establishment of *Nigār*.

⁶⁰ Robinson, Francis. "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print." *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 229–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312883>.

⁶¹ Niyaz wrote his complete in poetic format.

Ram, Malik. 1974. *Woh Suratei Ilahi (The immortals)*. New Delhi, India: National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language. 218-19. OL18886411M

⁶² *Ṣaḥābiyat* discusses the lives of female followers of the Prophet Muhammad. *Gahwāra-e Tamaddun* (cradle of civilization) discusses the contribution of women to human civilization.

2.3 Influences and Inspirations.

Although Niyaz became most famous for his views on religion; his literary skills were recognized and appreciated and accepted by everyone. He was well-versed in Urdu prose and poetry genres and, throughout his lifetime, attempted to modernize Urdu literature through *Nigār*. It can be seen through the nature of content in the magazine which challenged existing societal norms.

Niyaz started reciting poetry in Fatehpur and was initially inspired by famous Urdu poet Hasrat Mohani, his then classmate at the seminary. However, he seriously started engaging with *Nazam* and *Ghazal* genres around 1906. In *Nazm*, he was inspired by Iqbal and Hafiz, and in *Ghazal* by Ghalib, Momin, and Daag Dehlvi.⁶³ In the poetic genres of *Masnavē*, he preferred Mir Hasan, and for *Marsiya*, Mir Anees.⁶⁴ Niyaz, from the young age, was interested in research on Islam; however, it would only be with the establishment of *Nigār* that he would delve deeply into the theme of religious criticism and reform. It was also only with the establishment of *Nigār* that he focused on literary criticism, including genres of *afsāna*, *Inshā-e latēf*, *Tanaz*, etc.⁶⁵ In starting years, his prose writing was heavily influenced by Sajjad Haider Yildirim whom he met in 1911. Yildirim was an essential figure in the Urdu romantic literary movement. In his biographical essay, Niyaz mentioned the people who inspired and shaped his personality, it included Syed Ahmed Khan, Mohsin Mulk, Shibli Nomani, Tagore, Oscar Wilde, Iqbal, Karamat Hussain, Zaffar Ali Khan, and Gandhi.

⁶³ Nazam is a genre in Urdu poetry that follows a particular meter, rhyme, and theme. Ghazal is a genre in Urdu poetry that follows a particular rhyme, and every couplet has a different subject.

⁶⁴ *Masnavē* (lament) is written to mourn the martyrdom of the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, Hussain.

⁶⁵ *Tanaz* means satire. “*Inshā-e latēf*” means a style of writing.

Throughout his 32 publications and *Nigār*, Niyaz demonstrates his expertise in *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *Ḥadēṣ*, *Tafsēr*⁶⁶, *‘ilm al-yad* (Palmistry), *‘ilm al-kalām*⁶⁷, philosophy, logic, music, and psychology. The wider scope of research interests can be attributed to his linguistic abilities. Niyaz was well-versed in Urdu, Farsi, Arabic, Hindi, and English. Also, he claimed to have expertise in Turkish language.

It is with these learning experiences and wide range of connections, Niyaz started *Nigār*. *Nigār* provided Niyaz with a platform to unleash his creative forces, express freely and establish himself as a prominent figure in the Urdu language and literature.

⁶⁶ Tafsir means exegesis, interpretation of the Qur'an.

⁶⁷ *Ilm-el-kalam* means the science of islamic theology.

2.4 *Nigār*: Establishment of the magazine.

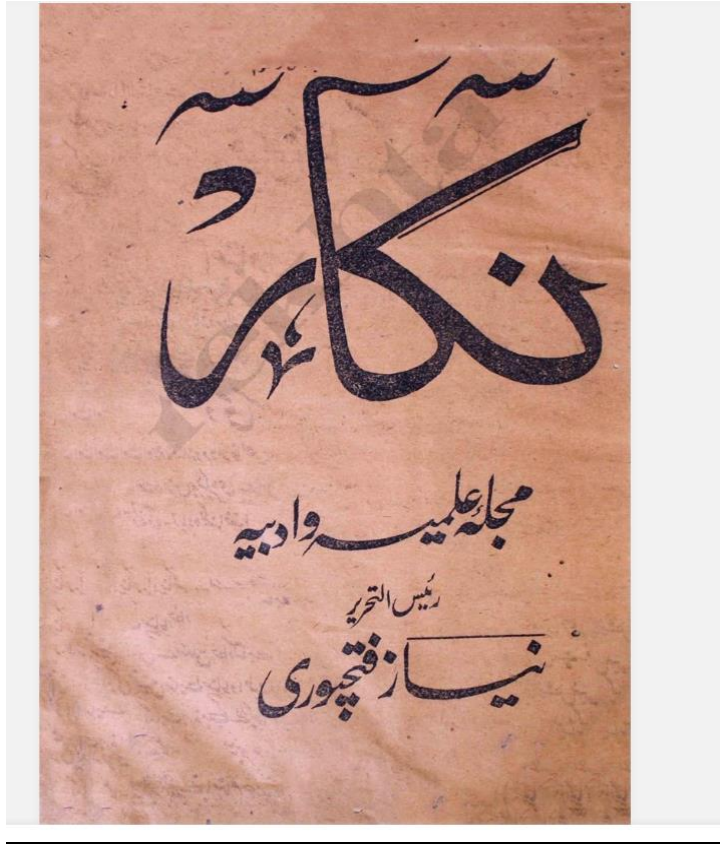


Figure 1. Cover of the first issue of *Nigār*.⁶⁸

Nigār was established in Feb. 1922. Given his prior experiences and connections, Niyaz was well acquainted with the Indian journalistic and literary environment. In particular, there was an Agra-based literary group, of which Niyaz was an important member. This group would publish their works collectively in *Naqqād* magazine.⁶⁹ The editor of the magazine had lost interest in continuing *Naqqād*, and thus was closed in 1921. Owing to its closure; a new platform was sought by this literary group. They all agreed for creation of a new magazine. Niyaz was made its editor, and it was he who proposed the name *Nigār*. The name was inspired from famous Turkish poet

⁶⁸ *Nigār*, Agra Shumara Number-001. February 1922. Accessed from rekhta.org.

⁶⁹ *Naqqād* was a literary magazine published in Agra. Shah Dilgeer edited it.

Nigār Binti Osman. Niyaz worked from Bhopal, and the group was mostly based in Agra. A mechanism had to be established to make the new magazine work. The mechanism proposed was that Niyaz, as an editor, would compile the magazine in Bhopal and send it to Agra for publication. In Agra, it would be printed at the Agra Press. In Feb. 1922, the first copy of *Nigār* was printed and published in Agra. Later in Feb. 1923, finding this inter-city transfer mechanism tiresome, it was decided to transfer *Nigār* completely to Bhopal. In Bhopal, Niyaz became the sole owner and editor of the magazine.

2.5 Aim and objective of *Nigār*.

In the first published issue, Niyaz laid the outline of the magazine with the intended aims and objectives. Niyaz began with assessment of the present state of Urdu magazines. According to Niyaz a number of Urdu magazines were emerging in the Urdu print sphere; however, only a fraction of these magazines survived.⁷⁰ Given the background of the Khilafat movement and its impact on raising political awareness among the masses, the Urdu print sphere witnessed a boom in India.⁷¹ According to Niyaz, the structure and content used by these magazines were enough to understand their premature closure. These magazines, according to Niyaz, had neither understood the present needs of audience nor had they any larger aims or objectives. Niyaz promised *Nigār* to be innovative and critical as it would adapt to suit modern times. The aim was to serve the interests of *qōm* by providing them with in-depth knowledge about culture, history, and literature.⁷² Niyaz, in basing his argument, was making comparisons with Europe and European Enlightenment, and planned to inculcate and imitate it in the Indian setting. According

⁷⁰ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001. 2-7, February 1922.

⁷¹ Robinson, Francis. "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print."

⁷² The Urdu word "*Qōm*" has multiple interpretations. Here, it implies Indian's Muslim community.

to Niyaz, a magazine was specifically dedicated to any one of the prominent genres, e.g., either *Adab*, History, *‘ilm* or *politics*. But this exclusive focus on a particular genre worked for European journalism since they had historically fulfilled the duty of nation-building.

According to Niyaz, “If you see hundreds of magazines in Europe, you must remember the stress of the materialistic world they are facing. It requires such tools for recreation. Compare it to here; you haven’t made your mind tired of that level of serious literature. So, it doesn’t make sense when (our) people get restless for “*adab-e latēf*”⁷³ here”⁷⁴ Discarding the exclusive focus on *Adab*, Niyaz then turned to politics and religion as next choice. Niyaz discarded the theme of politics saying that it meant magazine won’t focus on anything other than political affairs of the country and world.⁷⁵ Interestingly in the initial year of the magazine; there is no focus on religious issues. When commenting on a query regarding a religious issue, Niyaz refused to entertain it on the grounds that it was religious in nature and thus needed to be avoided.⁷⁶⁷⁷ “Since the issue is purely religious in nature and it is going in the direction which is completely in contrast to the aims of *Nigār*, so I won’t comment on it”⁷⁸

Niyaz wanted to focus on *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *tārēkh* (history), as they were seen critical for developing *qōm* (community).⁷⁹ To reach a larger audience Niyaz attempted to both balance the content i.e., included diverse genres and at the same time used simple Urdu language. Keeping

⁷³ “*Adab-e Latēf*” means belles-lettres or fine writing.

⁷⁴ *Nigār*, Agra Shumara Number-001. 2-7, February 1922.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Niyaz here refers to the nature of political magazines at that time. For him, it is impossible to focus on anything else once you start covering politics.

⁷⁶ *Adab* is an Arabic term that, in South Asian and Islamic traditions, encompasses an individual's moral and ethical behavior. For further discussion: (Metcalf and Joint Committee on South Asia 1984) pp. 38-50.

⁷⁷ *Nigār*, Agra Shumara Number-001. 2-7, December 1922. The question asked is whether Hazrat Ali should be seen as the first rightly guided Caliph.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ The Urdu word “*qōm*” has multiple interpretations depending on the context. Here, it implies “Muslim community in India”. Post 1935 scenario, it would imply “nation”.

this aim in mind, Niyaz inculcated a section on *Adab*. The magazine thus formed was named *Nigār*, with a subheading *Majallah ‘ilmiyah-ō-adabiyah*.⁸⁰

From its inception, Niyaz was innovative in his approach when it came to designing his magazine. He wanted it to be critical and scholarly, yet at the same time, he wanted to appeal to a larger audience. *Nigār* was competing with famous Urdu literary magazines such as *Adeeb*, *Humāyūn*, *Ma ‘ārif*, *Zamānah*. Introducing a new magazine in this context was a difficult task. Also, *Nigār* didn’t publish any pictures, posters, or “objectionable” advertisements.⁸¹ Despite the constraints, Niyaz established the reputation of *Nigār* as the magazine became self-sustaining during its initial years.⁸²

Magazines at the time were usually classified into two categories: first group was there for mass consumption, and the second group was for elite Urdu audiences with an acquired taste in Urdu language and literature. Niyaz attempted to find a path in between and published content that appealed to both audiences. He published essays on history, poetry, and translations of English, Arabic, Persian, and French novels. Niyaz developed a novel technique to engage his audience by including a section of questions and answers called *Istifsārāt*.⁸³ It specifically engaged with controversial topics related to religion, and Niyaz would take pages to answer his critiques. *Istifsārāt* was a special feature of *Nigār* and made it stand out among the other magazines. Niyaz’s rhetoric and command on Urdu language made his works popular among the newly established

⁸⁰ Translated as “a magazine of knowledge and literature”.

⁸¹ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001. January 1929. Niyaz here takes great pride in not publishing “obscene and objectionable” advertisements. Various magazines published advertisements of aphrodisiacs, erotic literature, etc. to sustain themselves.

⁸² Niyaz talks about the initial years of *Nigār* at length in the January 1929 issue of the magazine. The issue is compiled to celebrate 7 years of *Nigār*.

⁸³ *Istifsār*; Arabic, to question or inquiry.

Urdu class.⁸⁴ Niyaz also included popular themes such as Palmistry, psychology, and music to engage a larger audience. Niyaz setup high standards for the writers to contribute to the magazine, and *Nigār* was known to reject essays that did not meet the requirements set by the editor. Niyaz engaged with a diverse audience through his magazine by including writings on Hindu religion, Hindi poetry, the role of Gandhi and Congress in the freedom struggle, etc. He also brought attention to prominent poets and literary figures by issuing special issues discussing and celebrating their works.

2.6 Structure of the magazine.

Niyaz published the first issue of the magazine in Feb. 1922. The content was divided into five sections. Section one consisted of *Mulāḥizāt*.⁸⁵ The editor would use this space to give an overview of the content to be presented in the issue. This space would also be used to comment on various issues, issues as wide-ranging as politics in the country and as personal as answering personal criticism. Niyaz would also use this section to share feedback from readers. He would also through this space criticize or praise the content published in the previous issues. The second section of the magazine consisted of poetry and short stories, i.e., *Ghazal*, *Nazam* and *Afsāna*. This section formed the core content of *Nigār* and later evolved to include translated texts from Arabic, English, and other languages. The third section would feature researched essays. Essays covering history, current European political events, political and sociological ideas, the Ottoman Empire, religion, literary criticism etc. The next section would be of *Ma'luūmāt* (general knowledge).

⁸⁴ For detailed discussion check, Robinson, Francis. *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860 - 1923*, Digitally print. Version. Cambridge South Asian Studies 16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁸⁵ *Mulāḥizāt* means attention or analysis here overview.

from various ‘*ulamā* and other magazines, which then Niyaz would further engage with, and it is in this manner that debates would continue for months.

Accessing the editorials of *Nigār* throughout the early 1920s, we witness an implicit, at times explicit, reference to then print technology and its accessibility to various magazines based on region. For example, Niyaz, throughout the early years of *Nigār*, mentioned his difficulties in getting the magazine printed on time. At times there was a delay of days and even weeks in publication, forcing him to establish his own press in Lucknow. Though *Nigār* was self-sustaining in its early years, it didn’t have enough resources to start its printing press earlier or to print pictures like the Punjab-based magazines. Although acknowledging the shortcoming, for Niyaz, the quality of content is enough to keep the readers glued to the magazine. Also, according to Niyaz, the given resources are insufficient to print the images that match the quality of the content of *Nigār*. This clearly indicates that printing images was a huge challenge, and Punjab-based papers with access to resources and technology could integrate it much earlier.⁸⁷ *Nigār*, throughout its publication, didn’t utilize images as it couldn’t afford to do so, nor found it necessary for its case. By contrast, magazines like *Humāyūn*, *Shabistān*, and *Naērang* relied heavily on the images.

Apart from relentless criticism from ‘*ulamā*, *Nigār* faced several other challenges, including financial conditions. In 1924 Allianz Bank declared bankruptcy, causing *Nigār* almost to halt its operations if it wasn’t for the timely intervention by Niyaz’s friends. The bankruptcy, declared by several banks in India, was linked to the Post WW1 situation. Similarly, in its Lucknow era, *Nigār* faced the impact of the Bankruptcy of the Bank of Calcutta. Apart from financial issues, Niyaz faced relentless attacks from a section of ‘*ulamā* which peaked in 1931 when a fatwa was

⁸⁷ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-002, 2-7, February 1929.

issued against him. He was forced to carry a gun for his safety for at least a year. Niyaz also lists 1947, when his wife and daughter passed away, as one of the difficult times for him. Despite all these hurdles, *Nigār* was published for 43 years continuously without any break, a rare feat for any Urdu magazine.

2.7 *Nigār* and Pakistan

Post-partition, *Nigār* was published from Lucknow and circulated both in India and Pakistan. Niyaz didn't face any difficulties in publishing the magazine from India; however, in 1962, he shifted to Pakistan. Niyaz fondly remembered his life in India and how it helped him in his literary achievements. His deteriorating health and concern for the family forced him to shift to Pakistan. Did Niyaz feel strongly about the creation of Pakistan? It wasn't the case at all. He fiercely contested the formation of Pakistan and the politics of Muslim League from the beginning. However, after the partition, in his special issue titled Pakistan Number, he urged the newly created state to follow the universal principles of Islam, i.e., tolerance and mercy regarding its minorities.⁸⁸ One of his friends, Dr. Showkat Sabzwari, mentioned that he wanted to shift to Dhaka, then East Pakistan, as early as in 1951 to serve the Urdu language in the Bengal province. However, owing to several difficulties, he couldn't go there and had to wait for ten more years to shift permanently to Pakistan.⁸⁹

In 1962, the Indian government conferred him with the third highest state award of Padma Bhushan for his services to Urdu language and literature. The Pakistani government also awarded him the *Nishān-e Sipās* for his Urdu language and literature contributions.

⁸⁸ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001,002, 6-9, January - February 1948.

⁸⁹ *Nigār*, Pakistan Shumara Number-003,004, 111-114, March-April 1963.

One of the critical aspects of *Nigār* was its clear political stance when it came to colonial government, national movement for Independence and the Pakistan movement. Niyaz in the beginning sympathized with Gandhi for his ideas of Hindu-Muslim unity and criticized the British's economic and cultural exploitation of India. However, with time he grew critical of Gandhi, whom he thought of as a religious zealot with a dictatorial mindset in his approach to politics.⁹⁰ *Nigār* also fiercely criticized the Muslim League throughout the Pakistan movement. In his politics, he was very sympathetic towards Nehru and the socialist wing of Indian National Congress. *Nigār* was one of the few Urdu magazines that published essays on Hindi poetry and Hindu religion. In several issues, Niyaz informed his audience about the political activities of Congress and the Muslim League; articles were also published throughout the years regarding India's political economy. Niyaz didn't support the idea of the two-nation theory, nor was he fully appreciative of Congress as he saw its failure in addressing the fears of the Muslim community. In Pakistan number, Niyaz blames the British for the partition of India. As a "proud member of the Muslim community," he urged the state and people of Pakistan not to reciprocate the behavior meted out to minorities in India. Niyaz cited the push by Hindu Mahasabha to relocate all Hindus from Pakistan to India, saying reciprocating such actions were not only unfeasible politically and economically but would also give a bad name to Islam and Pakistan.⁹¹

2.8 *Nigār* and the woman question

One of the highlights of *Nigār* magazine was its representation and portrayal of Women. Though not prevalent, *Nigār* frequently mentioned women and their role in society. Niyaz framed the ideal role for an Indian woman. When compared to other reforms at the time his ideas in this

⁹⁰ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-002,3-8, August 1938.

⁹¹ *Nigār* 6-9,

regard were unique and nuanced. Niyaz strongly advocated for the education of women. Niyaz was against gender segregation and complete *pardah* of the women in Muslim households. He provided theological, cultural, and economic explanations to justify his stance. For him, women's education was critical in the Indian context, as it could contribute to the cleanliness of the household, participation of women in the economic force, and inculcate values in the upcoming generation. Niyaz had Western society in mind while discussing this framework. He was completely dismissive of Indian women imitating the West, as he didn't want them to study romantic literature and poetry, as it would drift them from their societal roles and responsibilities. A woman had to be an ideal mother, and only through education could she learn her role and responsibility.⁹² It didn't matter whether the education was provided by Christian missionary schools or government schools as long as it met this criterion. For Niyaz, the assumption that *pardah* (veil) maintained societal balance and was thus a necessary virtue was false and problematic. According to Niyaz, "One couldn't judge a person's character and modesty based on whether one took *pardah*".⁹³ Also on the contrary, if *pardah* (veil) was removed from overall society, the fascination and fetishization about women would stop automatically as both genders would get to interact often with each other. Also, it was because of *pardah* that women couldn't participate in the mainstream economic force. With these thoughts, Niyaz framed the role for women. It was done by invoking history, primarily by focusing on prominent Muslim women including rulers, in *Nigār*. Niyaz took keen interest in this theme. His works *Ṣaḥābiyat* and *Gahwāra-e Tamaddun* attest to this fact. He was critical of people who portrayed educated women as morally corrupt.

⁹² *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004, 89-91, April 1928.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

In *Nigār*, we see the presence, although infinitesimal, of women as contributors to various debates and discussions. In the first article in June 1927, an anonymous woman wrote an essay titled “*pardah aur ṣaḥat-e ta’līm*” (*pardah* and the quality of education). The essay depicted a protesting tone and was full of rhetoric.⁹⁴ Niyaz as editor took pride in the fact that “*Nigār* was the first magazine” to give space to a woman to express her views openly. The writer’s identity in this case cannot be traced; however, given the similarity in her and Niyaz’s views, Niyaz might have written it himself. In another instance, in April 1928 issue, an anonymous woman from Rae Bareilly asked Niyaz his opinion on *Pardah* and women’s education. In the special issue dedicated to Niyaz, Princess Aabida Sultan of Bhopal narrated her experience of *Nigār* and Niyaz and how the magazine impacted her intellectual growth in a conservative setting.

2.9 Special Issues of the *Nigār*.

One of the prominent features of the *Nigār* magazine was its special issues which would be published once a year, mostly in the month of January. These pivotal issues allowed Niyaz to focus exclusively on key personalities, ideas, and events. More importantly, through these issues, we see a critical debate and discussion on the topic with contributions from diverse writers with differing viewpoints from all over the country. It was only through these special issues that various prominent figures were rediscovered, and their works discussed. The pre-defined structure of the magazine would be bypassed during the issuance of special issues. Either Niyaz would exclusively write the entire issue, or it would have contributions from prominent experts in the field. These special issues are a repository and a service to Urdu and Islamic thought. The quality of these issues sets *Nigār* apart from other magazines. In this thesis, I will put a list of special issues to

⁹⁴ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-006, 81-83, June 1927.

display the diversity and quality of topics discussed in the magazine. The first special issue was published in January 1928. The list is attached to appendix. These issues are critical to understand Niyaz's views on religion. Later in life, Niyaz would reflect on his held views regarding various themes concerning religion with special focus on Islam.

Nigār was a vast resource of diverse well-researched subjects and themes. Apart from these special issues, Niyaz would convert either entire issues or combine similar topics or themes across several issues into small books. These books are an important contribution to Islamic history and the Urdu language and literature. There were advertisements throughout *Nigār* regarding these books.

2.10 *Nigār* after Niyaz

Niyaz handed the *Nigār* to Farman Fatehpuri in 1962, four years before his death. Farman Fatehpuri continued the legacy of Niyaz by publishing critical literary pieces that set *Nigār* apart from other journals. Farman Fatehpuri was taken as a disciple by Niyaz in 1952, he had met him during a poetic symposium. Although he highly regarded his master, Farman differed from Niyaz regarding religious issues. Farman was a devout Muslim who, unlike Niyaz, didn't touch on controversial issues and focused primarily on literary themes.⁹⁵ *Nigār* was published up until Farman died in 2013.

⁹⁵ “*Nigār* and Niaz |.” Accessed July 19, 2023. <https://drfarmanfatehpuri.com/>.

2.11 Conclusion

Nigār was one of the prominent Urdu literary magazines in the 20th century. Started in 1922 by Niyaz Fatehpuri, it became a trademark of excellence in the Urdu print sphere, particularly in the genre of Urdu literary criticism, debates on religious issues, researched articles on history, poetry, short stories, etc. Niyaz was the force behind the magazine. He used it to disseminate his ideas concerned primarily with reforming society. Niyaz, early in his life, concluded that religion was a defining aspect of society in the Indian case. Religion had to be reinterpreted to do any social reform, and the interpretation had to be in a manner that suited modern times. It primarily needed a divorce from superstition and integration of reason. His understanding of reason was very much in spirit with the times i.e., close to naturalism advocated by Syed.

From its inception, *Nigār* became successful as it was counted among the primary Urdu magazines of the era. Although it faced censorship, financial difficulties, and resistance from a section of the *‘ulamā*, it could still sustain itself until the end. *Nigār* was unique in its content and structure because it simultaneously catered to literary circles and the masses. *Nigār* had a special question-and-answer section, called *Istifsārāt*⁹⁶, that aided in making it initiate debates on controversial issues. Women were featured in the magazine, and their portrayal differed completely from the other leading magazines, as *Nigār* advocated for progress. *Nigār* contributed to the Urdu language and literature by issuing special issues to research poets, writers, religious, and cultural themes. The list of contributors also made it a special and unique magazine, as prominent intellectuals contributed and were associated with it.

⁹⁶ Istifsārāt (Arabic) means enquires.

Nigār offers us an insight into the times; we witness the rise of Urdu print amidst colonial rule and various modernistic movements advocating for reinterpretations of Islam. It acts as a sight to investigate a diverse range of topics, how print technology worked, how Urdu literary genres evolved, how the politics of religion and region interplayed, and how women became a focal point for reforming and educating Muslim India.



CHAPTER 3: ARTICULATING “REAL” ISLAM

“So, in present times when a common movement against religion is going on throughout the world. Islam doesn’t face the question of why it should be saved from the criticism of its opponents, but the real question is how it can do away with its (so-called) advocates and supporters (‘ulamā) who are doing real damage to it. There are only two ways to do it. Either one, just like Turkey and Iran, has (control on) a government that can crush this maulvi (religious scholar) mentality through physical force. Or people are made so knowledgeable that they can distinguish between the practical and the spiritual domain. Since the first is impractical in the Indian case, we have to follow the second path; it may take time, but it will eventually happen someday”⁹⁷

This chapter discusses Niyaz’s general ideas regarding the reconceptualization of Islam. In doing so, he was not alone but represented a stream of thought that strongly advocated for a rigidly rational and demythologized Islam that was consistent, inspired, and even guided by the ruling episteme of times, i.e., Western rational philosophy represented by the colonial government. It is important to understand Niyaz in this regard, not merely as one of the proponents of this positivist school but as someone who took liberties in extending this rationalistic approach to extreme form. Niyaz, unlike others, went far in his positivist approach to reframing Islam entirely on these new lines, and again unlike others, it stayed consistent with his political views. In doing so, he was following the likes of Syed Ahmed Khan and their naturalist approach to Islam. The ‘ulamā as a class were the direct target as they were seen as responsible for the stagnation and degradation of Islam and Indian Muslims. This line of inquiry continued in 20th-century South Asia and included major figures like Ghulam Ahmed Pervez, Aslam Jairajpuri.

This chapter will be an attempt to understand Niyaz’s views about Islam, its history, failures, its future, and what it means in the current context. It will be done using case studies based

⁹⁷ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004,8, May 1934.

on *Istifisārāt* section from *Nigār* as well as his other writings in the magazine over the years of its publication. Moreso, it will show how print helped him to disseminate his ideas and to engage in a conversation with ‘*ulamā* and people. According to Francis Robinson, print acted as a powerful modernizing agent in South Asia, primarily dislodging the role of ‘*ulamā* as sole interpreters of Islam.⁹⁸ Among other things, it led to the “...emergence of protestant Islam, the strengthening of pan-islamic layer, outflanking of oral systems of transmission of knowledge; the colonizing of the Muslim minds with Western knowledge ...”⁹⁹. Apart from these visible impacts, there was a psychological transformation as well, primarily “....in the process of distancing, to bring about the new historical consciousness; reification of religion and the emphasis on this-worldly action; and the process of interiorization which is manifest in increasingly personal and private encounter with Qur’an....”¹⁰⁰

The case studies show the employment of this instrumental reason to reframe and reinterpret not only the doctrinal tenants of Islam related to personal belief but all social and political aspects of life. This was in line with the late 19th and early 20th century European political and social thought. Niyaz did cause a stir with these writings, and we will see how various ‘*ulamā*, and editors of several magazines engaged in a conversation on these topics. *Nigār* did act as a link between people and ‘*ulamā*. However, we have to also keep in mind that the people (readers of *Nigār*) represented a minority albeit a powerful section of the Urdu-speaking audience. Niyaz, in propagating his ideas, didn’t shy away from employing other methods, including severe personal

⁹⁸ Robinson, Francis. “Islam and the impact of print in South Asia.” Chapter. In *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*. 66-104. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 96-98

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

criticism, as a tool to silence his opponents. It seemed to be a common tactic among various editors, as we will witness in the case of Daryabadi's *Talāq* (divorce) scandal in 1932.¹⁰¹

This chapter is an attempt to contextualize Niyaz in his times and illustrate how he was influenced by this enlightenment philosophy and a reform spirit represented by Syed Ahmed Khan. This group represented the section of English-educated Muslims whose ideas, shaken under the influence of colonialism and Western knowledge, sought to salvage Islam from the onslaught of rationality. Seeing reason as the governing episteme of the times, they attempted to reinterpret Islam, making it consistent with modern times. In doing so, they had to dislodge the existing traditional system represented by *'ulamā*. It makes this era interesting, as *'ulamā*, also used print magazines to engage with the wider audiences.

This model of Islam as a total system would be then used to interpret (or rather re-interpret) every aspect of Islam including its history. Following the footsteps of Syed Ahmed Khan, this whole rational “real Islam” project was primarily an intentional act. The aim was to establish a coherent all-encompassing system which would accommodate Muslims as participants of the modern world. The model attempted to account for history (by re-reading it in light of this project), present and a future all together in the simplest possible manner. Niyaz took selective things from Islam which fitted with his views; important among them being Qur'an. Niyaz tried to base his arguments and criticism only in reference to the Qur'an.

¹⁰¹ Majid Daryabadi (d. 1977) was a prominent religious scholar in the United Provinces who edited *Sach* (Truth) Magazine. On the related issue, see Chapter 4 of the thesis.

3.1 A history of religion

Niyaz, despite being a renowned literary figure, only came to the limelight for his religious beliefs, which he propagated relentlessly throughout his life using *Nigār*. Niyaz was developing a humanistic and utilitarian model of Islam, which would be in sync with reason and progress. To understand his model, it is important to understand how he developed and understood reason and progress.

According to Niyaz, “the aim of religion is to make a human out of a person in its finest form. By divorcing animalistic tendencies, religion intends to raise a human to a level where it is beneficial for progress and peace in the world. A person from any community and region whose speech and action are in line with this spirit has understood the meaning of religion.”¹⁰² After laying out the humanistic-rationalistic framework, Niyaz attempted to explain the history of religion since its inception.

Niyaz presented an evolutionary idea of religion. He began with the idea that earlier humans, struck with the vastness and absurdity of the universe, felt a need to imagine a higher supreme being who was all-powerful and would provide them some solace and meaning in their lives. Earlier, God was conceived in a form that would be perceivable to a normal human. As humanity progressed, the definition became complex and metaphysical. A social order was invented around this conception which later, according to Niyaz, became Religion. And this order could only be established and sustained through power. Niyaz explained his position in a special issue titled “*Tanqēh-e Islām*” (Inquiry into Islam) Jan. 1959. Going forward with this logic, Niyaz explained how different concepts and rituals related to religion were established. The concept of *rūh* (soul) was derived from the darkness of night – a space where bodies would wander during

¹⁰² *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001,12-13, January 1959.

sleep. A social hierarchy based on violence led to the creation and reverence of tribal chiefs, thus starting the concept of worship.¹⁰³ As one tribal chief dominated all the other parties, it led to a concept similar to *Tawḥēd* (oneness of God). With time as humans settled down and agriculture flourished, people found a need to associate natural events with various gods. Certain specialized rituals were created, and men who specialized in them became priests.¹⁰⁴ According to Niyaz, idol worship also entered the arena as justification for natural powers like the sun, moon, and stars. These were the religions based on *fitrah* (natural constitution), and as time progressed and societies evolved with more knowledge and some ethics, it set the basis for *mazāhib-e ilāhi* (divine religions). The progress in sciences and arts also led to the changing practices in divine religions. For example, several small idols were reconstructed into one big giant idol, signifying the consolidation of modern *Tawḥēd*. And with more progress, the material aspects were removed completely, as we see with the emergence of Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Confucianism.

Shifting to divine religions, Niyaz takes the case of Christianity as one of the last greatest religions in terms of its expansion and analyses its history and the fate it suffered over time with enlightenment. This analysis and understanding of Christianity are crucial as he would also employ it in analyzing Islam. Niyaz saw Islam in this light, a religion that would follow a similar journey as that of Christianity. Niyaz saw Protestantism as the primary critique of Christianity that would eventually lead to its demise in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁰⁵ Niyaz credited Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Kant's scholarship for removing the element of the divine in the popular imagination. People started looking back at the Romans and Greeks. And together with the

¹⁰³ *Nigār*, 14-15, January 1959.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Nigār*, 22, January 1959.

establishment of modern disciplines of philology¹⁰⁶, archaeology¹⁰⁷, and biology¹⁰⁸, people realized the stories concocted in the Bible were wrong. According to Niyaz, Christianity lost its place as it could no longer support progress. Also, the loss of monarchy, which gave it necessary power, meant it could no longer be supported. The Bible became a ridiculed text in Europe as people made fun of its stories.¹⁰⁹ According to Niyaz, "...a step, in this world, that moves towards knowledge and wisdom puts religion behind by a hundred steps..."¹¹⁰

3.2 Islam - What makes it different?

It is important to remember the above context while understanding Niyaz's project. Niyaz attempts to salvage Islam from the onslaught of reason and Western criticism and, in doing so, attempts to reinterpret every belief and ritual of Islam. Given the nature of his project, he doesn't only have to generalize it but also makes it relevant to the Indian context. In doing so, he has to deal with the established traditional base and navigate the existing political landscape.

In beginning his assessment, Niyaz lays his outline to understand Islam and evaluate it among other religions and in itself. According to Niyaz, three key elements are associated with the doctrine of Islam that one had to consider while doing any study of it. First was the Qur'an, the second was the prophet's biography, and the third was the *Ḥadēṣ*. According to Robinson, this was the time when we witness the impact of print profoundly on the psyche of Indian Muslims, and people were increasingly drawn to the study of the text in itself (Qur'an) and the prophet's

¹⁰⁶ It highlights that all languages have common connectedness; no language is divine or special.

¹⁰⁷ Common stories throughout history

¹⁰⁸ *Nigār*, 25-26, January 1959.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

biography.¹¹¹ Niyaz rejected *Ḥadēṣ* as a source to understand Islam owing to its corruption over time; in doing so, he was merely reiterating the doctrine of the *Ahl-e Qurān* movement, which also gained traction at the same time.¹¹² According to Niyaz, the Qur'an was the sole historically immutable element of Islam; thus, every analysis had to be based on it. Since the Qur'an couldn't be separated from the prophet (because he narrated it) and his life, so they were both one and the same thing.¹¹³

Niyaz then laid out his criteria for a religion to be of high standard. According to him, since its inception, mankind has reached the conclusion that the idea of religion is built within a human as we are a civilizational species. And every civilization was based on certain laws associated with its core beliefs.

For any religion to be of a higher standard, it needs to be based on human *fitrah*¹¹⁴, i.e., as humanity progressed, the religion should not only support this progress but also lay forward the constitution for its perpetual progress. According to Niyaz, Islam was the only religion that fitted this definition. The rules guiding the spirit of Islam were permanent and immutable for all times “*wa lan tajida lisunnatil laahi tabdeela*”¹¹⁵. If people followed these rules, God would give them success and make them Khalifa on earth. This, according to Niyaz, was the basic doctrine and crux of Islam. Any group of people who followed this message, didn't matter whether they called themselves Christians or Hindus, were Muslims, and those who didn't were non-Muslims. Every action should necessarily correspond to this spirit.

¹¹¹ Robinson, Francis. “Islam and the impact of print in South Asia.” 96-97.

¹¹² *Ahl-e Qurān* (People of the Qur'an) was an Islamic reformist movement in Colonial India in the late 19th and early 20th century. Its supporters rejected *Ḥadēṣ* as an authentic source of studying Islam and focused only on the Qur'an. For more, see: Qasmi, Ali Usman. “Islamic universalism: the ‘Amritsari’ version of *Ahl-e Qurān*.” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, no. 2 (2009): 159–87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26200737>.

¹¹³ *Nigār*, 28, January 1959.

¹¹⁴ *Fitrah* (Arabic)—a natural inbuilt order.

¹¹⁵ Qur'an 48:23: Translation “And never will you find in the way of Allah any change.”

The other aspect of Islam that Niyaz emphasized was ethics. According to him, Islam was the only religion that focused on action and movement: “...when it came to ethical thinking, even the strongest critics of Islam would agree to it that, no religion comes close to Islam in focusing on action and movement....it is the only religion that is not bound by rituals, tradition, mythology, or any specific ways to worship.”¹¹⁶ According to Niyaz, its aim was to ponder on external reality, studying nature to harvest the innate forces which could be utilized for the betterment of civilization and humanity. In addition, it guided us to make this world a paradise.

Regarding the ritualistic elements, Niyaz stated that they were meant for a particular time and culture to inculcate values in the people and keep them bound as a group. Namaz was to cultivate a sense of community, Zakat was for cooperation, fasting to awaken the self, and Haj was to foster a sense of global community. Because of their temporality and cultural specificity, they couldn't be continued for all times and all cultures.¹¹⁷ The whole aim behind these practices was the flourishing of society.

The *‘ulamā*, according to Niyaz, were to be blamed for the current condition of Islam. Since the death of the prophet, Islam lost to internal politics and divisions among Muslims. Empires were constructed and kingships installed using Islam as a tool, and in this power struggle, the *‘ulamā* sided with the ruling powers by interpreting Islam to aid the rulers. They reduced Muslims to mere animals who were supposed to blindly follow their justifications.¹¹⁸ And moreover, they themselves were so incompetent that they couldn't even understand the difference even between *mazhab* and *dēn*. According to Niyaz, *dēn* involved spiritual and personal aspects and had nothing to do with social aspects of life. *Mazhab*, on the other hand, was akin to culture

¹¹⁶ *Nigār*, 31, January 1959.

¹¹⁷ *Nigār*, 32, January 1959.

¹¹⁸ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004, 6-7, October 1932.

and had to deal with organizing men at a societal level. According to Niyaz, “how was it possible that a non-Muslim who is ethical and contributes to the betterment of society was less superior or would face hellfire compared to a Muslim who was dishonest and committed sins?”¹¹⁹

In constructing his de-mythologized Islam project, Niyaz had to explain and reinterpret key elements and beliefs of Islam in line with his philosophy. He categorically rejected anything that couldn't be understood or explained rationally, i.e., miracles, the afterlife, divine revelation, etc. This thesis will select certain case studies based on the *Istīfsārāt* section of the *Nigār*. These discussions continued throughout the forty-five years of the magazine and provided an insight into how Niyaz constructed his defense; I have selected topics that are key to Islamic theology. Given the constraints of time, this thesis will focus only on the following issues:

- *Tawḥēd*.¹²⁰
- Why wasn't *Ḥadēs* an authentic source to understand Islam?
- Regarding *Mu'jizah* (miracles) and *‘ilm al-ghēb* (knowledge of the unseen).
- Nature of divine revelation.
- Evolution and Islam.
- Reward after Punishment.

3.1 *Tawḥēd*:

According to Niyaz, *Tawḥēd* was the primary belief concerning Islam which the Maulvis had misunderstood. *Tawḥēd* didn't simply mean the oneness of God. God was beyond the realm of space and time; the commonly held definition constrained him under space and time. According to Niyaz, “...*Tawḥēd* meant accepting God as an all-encompassing totality, supreme conscious

¹¹⁹ *Nigār*, 54, January 1959.

¹²⁰ *Tawḥēd* translates to Oneness of God.

being, maker of the world...”¹²¹ Idol worship then didn’t correspond to *shirik* because it only pointed to that supreme being.¹²² According to Niyaz, to assume that the idol worshippers in actual believed in the powers of idol was nonsensical.

According to Niyaz, in the earlier Islamic period, continuing from previous religions and traditions, God was casted in the form of a worldly king who became angry, sad, and happy based on our actions. Niyaz justified the act by pointing to cultural and historical context i.e., the masses and society was not that developed to imagine God in some other form. It was deliberately done to make it easier for people to comprehend the concept.

3.2 *Ḥadēṣ*, not an authentic source to understand Islam.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries in South Asia are marked by criticism of *Ḥadēṣ* as a source to understand Islam.¹²³ It started with Syed Ahmed Khan and was then propagated by several movements, most notable among them was the *Ahl-e Qurān* movement. *Ḥadēṣ* were increasingly seen as irrational, and events described in them as unsuitable for modern times. There was a genuine effort to go back to the original text. Niyaz’s demythologized Islam narrative was an effort in a similar vein; however, given the nature of his project, he was not entirely dismissive of *Ḥadēṣ*. The *Ḥadēṣ* that corresponded to his ethical doctrine were seen at best as useful wisdom.

Niyaz received several queries in this regard. E.g., In the September 1934 issue of the magazine, Syed Ahmed Turab from Hyderabad asked him why he was dismissive of *Ḥadēṣ* as it was an important aspect of Islam. He also asked Niyaz to enlighten readers about the rules and

¹²¹ *Nigār*, 29, January 1959.

¹²² *Shirik* in Islam refers to the association of Allah with other deities.

¹²³ Robinson, Francis. “Islam and the impact of print in South Asia.” 66-104.

craft of studying *Ḥadēṣ*. Niyaz answered the question at length. He went into detail about the study of *Ḥadēṣ*. Explaining in detail concepts such as *isnad*, *matan*, *fan-e rijjāl*, *fan-e Ḥadēṣ*, Niyaz explained the classification of *Ḥadēṣ* into *Ṣaḥēḥ*, *Husan*, *Za‘ēf*, etc.¹²⁴ Niyaz gave readers details of the craft supposedly to demonstrate his expertise in the subject.

According to Niyaz, the basis of the rejection of *Ḥadēṣ* were historical, political, and psychological. The *Ḥadēṣ* tradition started when early Muslims came in contact with other cultures, i.e., Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism etc. Upon contact, they felt a need to explain and reflect on Islam in light of these traditions. They tried to understand what the prophet did or would have done in such and such situation. And after the prophet’s death, there were several interpretations or narrations of the same event. Various groups used it for their own ends. According to Niyaz, the conversion of Christians and Jews into Islam also led to the inclusion of myths, folklore, and stories from their holy books. Prominent among them was the influence of Judaism.¹²⁵ E.g., Abu Huraira quoted in Bukhari and Muslim “...prophet said that Women have been created from a curved portion of a rib and will stay like this no matter how much you try to straighten it...”. Niyaz assigns it to Bible. He extended it to *Ḥadēṣ* about “...creation of days and other folklores...” and accused Abu Hurairah of copying it from the Bible.¹²⁶ Further, *Ḥadēṣ*, like the conquest of Constantinople, according to Niyaz had a historical basis and were concocted to aid the existing ruler.

Niyaz pointed to the fact that the collection of *Ḥadēṣ* began much later, around 200 years after the prophet’s death. And therefore, *Ḥadēṣ* should be read with caution. Even when one was attempting to analyze a *Ḥadēṣ*, he should consider the context and mood of the prophet at that

¹²⁴ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-003, 58, September 1934.

¹²⁵ *Nigār*, 51, January 1959.

¹²⁶ *Nigār*, 49, January 1959.

moment. According to Niyaz, “...even in the early days of Islam, certain *Ṣaḥābah* (companions of the prophet) didn’t like the *Ḥadēṣ* altogether owing to its suspicious nature...”¹²⁷ ...And when combined with the early political conflicts in Islam during the first three caliphs, i.e., groups like Alioun (supporters of Ali), Khawarij¹²⁸, Umayyad, etc., must have impacted the *Ḥadēṣ*. According to Niyaz, it reached a peak during Umayyad and Abbasid periods when *Ḥadēṣ* were openly concocted to suit the ruler.”¹²⁹ Further, *Ḥadēṣ* were more a source of dispute rather than unity, e.g., in terms of an important aspect such as *Salah* (ritual prayers), every sect had different interpretations.¹³⁰ To support his argument, Niyaz referred to Shah Abdul Aziz¹³¹ who laid strict rules for the inquiry of *Ḥadēṣ* in his text *‘ijāla-e nāfi‘h*, according to Niyaz, if we applied these rules to Bukhari,¹³² only 10/1000 *Ḥadēṣ* would be correct.

Although not convinced with the authenticity of *Ḥadēṣ*, Niyaz didn’t reject them categorically. He categorized *Ḥadēṣ* into four groups: *‘aqā‘id-ō-akhlāq*¹³³, *qaṣaṣ* (stories), *shar‘at*,¹³⁴ and *mā-ba‘ād* (afterlife). Except for the first group, Niyaz rejected all three. Criticizing *Ahl-e Ḥadēṣ* and *Ahl-e Qurān* movements, he said that there was no harm in accepting *Ḥadēṣ*, given that they were in line with the Qur’an and focused on ethics and the betterment of humanity. For Niyaz, there was no hope in the near future to start research afresh on *Ḥadēṣ* because of the stubbornness of the *‘ulamā* as a group unwilling to rethink. Thus, it was seen as logical step to permanently separate *Ḥadēṣ* from the study of Islam.¹³⁵ Doing away with *Ḥadēṣ* was a major theme

¹²⁷ *Nigār*, 110, January 1959.

¹²⁸ *Khawārij* (an Arabic term meaning “the leavers”) was the first sect among Muslims who challenged the authority of Caliphs.

¹²⁹ *Nigār*, 44, January 1959.

¹³⁰ *Nigār*, 45, January 1959.

¹³¹ Shah Abdul Aziz is the son of famous scholar and reformer Shah Waliullah Dehlvi.

¹³² *‘ijāla*: something which is done in a hurry. *Nāfi‘h*: beneficial. For the book: *Ujala e Nafia By Shah Abdul Aziz ra*. Accessed August 30, 2023. <http://archive.org/details/Ujala-e-Nafia>.

¹³³ *‘aqā‘id*: beliefs. *Akhlāq*: all-encompassing aspects of human behavior, including morality and ethical code of conduct.

¹³⁴ *Shar‘at*: Islamic canonical law.

¹³⁵ *Nigār*, 47, January 1959.

among modern reformers in South Asia, including important figures such as Chirag Ali, Syed Ahmed Khan, etc., as they perceived *Ḥadēṣ* completely irrational. *Ḥadēṣ* were perceived as an easy target. Reformers targeted both Sufis and traditional institutions such as Deoband, which were seen as the centers of un-reason, thus a hurdle in developing Muslims in South Asia.

3.3 *Mu‘jizah* (miracle) and *‘ilm al-ghēb* (knowledge of the unseen)

One of the criticisms of Islam that modernist Muslim thinkers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in South Asia had to deal with was the association of miracles with prophets and Sufi saints. Almost all of them either categorically rejected miracles altogether or sought a reinterpretation that could be explained through reason and rational thinking. The latter was applied to events mentioned in Qur’an since it was the sole document they had to rely on. Niyaz follows a similar path in this regard. In *Nigār*, he receives several questions throughout the years on his views on *Mu‘jizah* (miracles) and interpretations of those miraculous events. Events ranging from the birth of Christ, the Splitting of the Moon, Miraj, miracles associated with the prophets as narrated in the Qur’an, etc.

In Islamic tradition, miracles and knowledge of the unseen have been associated as an important characteristic of prophethood. Every prophet is said to have access to a miracle exclusive to him. Niyaz rejected and reframed this concept. According to him, scholars define miraculous events as something that goes against the order of nature, i.e., it violates natural law. For Niyaz, it was unacceptable since Qur’an mentioned “... *everything follows a particular order*...”¹³⁶ which cannot be changed. There could be events that look strange as they weren’t explored until recently,

¹³⁶ *Nigār*, 127, January 1959.

but it didn't necessarily mean that these events indicated a change in the natural order. According to Niyaz, these so-called extraordinary events could be performed or explored by anyone with access to the required conditions. Since prophets had far superior intellect innate in them, they discovered these laws at the earliest. But it didn't limit other people from discovering them; marvels of modern science were a testament to it.¹³⁷ The logic was also applied to *'ilm al-ghēb* (knowledge of the unseen). However, at the same time, Niyaz was dismissive of the miracle as a necessary condition for prophethood and, thus, of the events described as miracles. He referred to the works of two scholars in this regard, Qazi Abul Waleed Muhammad bin Rasheed¹³⁸ (d. 1126) and Shah Waliullah Dehlvi¹³⁹ (d. 1762), to reject miracle as a basis for prophethood and to demonstrate how popular events associated with the prophet, e.g., *Shaq al-Qamar* (splitting of the moon) were factually incorrect. To aid his argument, he quoted from chapter *Banē isrā'ēl* (The Children of Israel) of Qur'an, which came as a response to people asking the prophet to perform a miracle.¹⁴⁰ In another instance, he quoted from chapter *'ankabūt* (The spider) of Qur'an in which the prophet said that "...miracles are associated with God only and I am just a warner...".¹⁴¹ According to Niyaz, if miracles were true and necessary, then the prophet would have surely performed them. The only miracle the prophet had, according to Niyaz, were his ethics and morality, which inspired people to follow him. It made him a reformer. In portraying this image, Niyaz is again reinstating Syed's position to demythologize Islam and the prophet. The aim was to humanize the prophet (making him an ethical role model) and to portray him as a social reformer bounded by his social and cultural context.

¹³⁷ *Nigār*, 130, January 1959.

¹³⁸ Rasheed: "*Akhshāf 'an manhāj*". Dehlvi: "*Tafhēmāt-e ilāhi*."

¹³⁹ *Nigār*, 13, January 1959.

¹⁴⁰ Qur'an 29:95-96.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*.

As mentioned earlier, the *Istifsār* section made *Nigār* a popular and contentious space where discussions on varied topics regularly took place. An example in this regard was a discussion on the miracle of Prophet Yusuf. A simple question on prophet Yousuf sets the ground for a discussion that lasted for months in which various '*ulamā*' participated with their views on the topic. It began as someone named Muezz-ud Din from Kamal Gunj asked Niyaz his views on the miracles associated with prophet Yusuf. Muezz-ud Din mentioned he came across poetry which stated that the beauty of the prophet Yusuf was his miracle. However, he can't make sense of the fact how beauty could be a miracle?¹⁴² Niyaz, in answering the question, outrightly dismissed the fact that Prophet Yusuf was extraordinarily beautiful. Since these were the beginning years of the magazine and he hadn't started being outrightly critical of Islam, he didn't deny the existence of the miracle as an event in itself but dismissed the information here as false. Relying only on Qur'an as a source, Niyaz pointed to false translations of the verses which have been associated with the event. E.g., the verse indicating the women of the town upon seeing Prophet Yusuf for the first time cut their hands and recited the phrase "*he is an angel*"¹⁴³; according to Niyaz, the term angel here referred to his character and ethics. Niyaz narrated the story in a different manner highlighting the mistranslation of the Qur'anic Arabic. Upon publishing his answer, Niyaz received a rebuttal from '*ulamā*'. Two of the responses were published in *Nigār* i.e., Syed Fakhar from Firangi Mahal and Maulvi Ghulam Rabbani from Kambalpur.¹⁴⁴ They both challenged Niyaz's interpretation of the event by pointing out to hermeneutics of the verses of the Qur'an and the literary criticism in question. Niyaz, defending his earlier position, again wrote a detailed answer to the points raised

¹⁴² *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-002, 87, February 1928.

¹⁴³ Qur'an 12:31.

¹⁴⁴ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-003, 77-87, March 1928.

by these men. The discussion continued for a couple of months, with readers asking more questions about other popular miracles e.g., the wealth of Qaroon.¹⁴⁵

3.4 The Nature of Divine Revelation

One of the most contentious topics in the naturalist doctrine was to explain the nature of divine revelation. Niyaz, following Syed in this regard, attempted to explain it according to his rational philosophy while relying only on the Qur'an as a source. The issue was crucial as it meant denying the divine nature of the Qur'an and denying the physical existence of the angel Jibrael.

Niyaz began his position by explaining the words used in this regard in the Qur'an; *wahē*, *ilhām*, and *ilqā*¹⁴⁶. All of these words translated to “something done against the norm”, here indicating the signs shown to Prophet by God. According to Niyaz, the first common misconception Muslims had developed over time was to associate *wahē* only with Prophets.¹⁴⁷ According to Niyaz, there were several junctions in Qur'an when common people, even objects, were subjected to *wahē* e.g., Moses' mother, bees, earth etc.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, it was also been associated with negative connotations e.g. used in context of Satan.¹⁴⁹ Also, the verse “*fa-alhamahaa fujoorahaa wa taqwaahaa*” indicated *wahē* could be associated with a wrong knowledge.¹⁵⁰ However, there was no doubt to the fact that, Qur'an did indeed refer to itself as *wahē* in various instances.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005, 84, May 1928.

¹⁴⁶ *Wahē*: Arabic for revelation. *Ilhām*: Arabic for inspiration. *Ilqā*: Arabic for “casting away”.

¹⁴⁷ *Nigār*, 34, January 1959.

¹⁴⁸ For Bees, Qur'an 16:68. For Moses' mother, Qur'an 20:38. Regarding Earth, Qur'an 99:5.

¹⁴⁹ Qur'an 6:112.

¹⁵⁰ Qur'an 91:8. Translated as “then with the knowledge of right and wrong inspired it.” Qur'an.com

¹⁵¹ Qur'an 6:50.

The whole debate then surrounded around the word *waḥē* and its interpretation. But to refer it as the word of God, for Niyaz, was problematic. Niyaz quoted from chapter *Shurāh* (Council) of the Qur'an: "*a human can't speak to God...*".¹⁵² So how does this explain the nature of revelation, and more importantly, how did Muslims develop such beliefs about the nature of *waḥē* (as a speech of God)? Regarding the belief, Niyaz blamed the confusion regarding interpretation of Qur'anic terms like *Umm al-Kitāb*¹⁵³ and *Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*¹⁵⁴. Citing Surah *Āl 'imrān* (The Family of Imran) "...*Huwal lazeee anzala 'alaikal Kitaaba minhu Ayaatum Muh kamaatun hunna Ummul Kitaabi wa ukharu Mutashaabihaatun...*".¹⁵⁵ Niyaz affirmed his position that *Umm al-Kitāb*, as indicated here, meant verses, that could further be interpreted as fixed, natural, immutable laws. Niyaz blamed books like *Qaṣaṣ ul-Anbiyā'* for propagating the myth of a physical *Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*. According to Niyaz, these were inspired from Babylonian mythology, which inspired Torah and, later, Islam. Muslims at that time were influenced by the intellectual superiority of Christians and Jews and inculcated as many myths as they could, and which later became *Ḥadēs*.¹⁵⁶

According to Niyaz, Qur'an although inspired by God, was actually the *kalām* (speech) of the prophet. Stating anything otherwise would have made it difficult to understand and explain its nature. E.g., Did it relate to God's *zāt* or *ṣiffāt*? How could we explain angel Jibrael? Verses for specific contexts? The concept of predestination? Is the order of the actual book and the Qur'an the same? Did God have a language like humans?¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Qur'an 42:51.

¹⁵³ *Umm al-Kitāb*: Arabic, translated as mother of the book. Refers to the preserved tablet of divine decrees.

¹⁵⁴ *Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*: Arabic, translated as preserved tablet. *Umm al-Kitāb* is a part of Loh-e-Mahfuz.

¹⁵⁵ Qur'an 3:7.

¹⁵⁶ *Nigār*, 37, January 1959.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

Niyaz proposed a different interpretation of the term *ilhām*. It indicated, for him, a special human instinct, which was innate in a person by birth, and a human performed seemingly extraordinary things under its influence.¹⁵⁸ This explanation made Prophethood an acquired entity i.e., a strong special instinct that a person was born with. And this person, according to Niyaz, was different from the rest through his intellectual abilities, intuition, perception, and moral integrity. In particular instances, this person went through a state of trance and uttered words that appeared as if someone was making him speak. These utterances, according to Niyaz, were *wahi*. The influence under which he spoke has been interpreted as *rūḥ al-Quds* (the holy spirit), also known as angel Jibrael. This line of reasoning indicated that no such real angel came down with verses. Niyaz pointed to the Arabic word *rūḥ* and its connotations.¹⁵⁹ To demonstrate the Prophet's excellent intellectual abilities to compose such a text, he had to disprove the *ummē* (unread, illiterate) notion associated with the prophet. Responding to a question whether Prophet was illiterate, Niyaz framed his discussion around the word *ummē* and how it was used for different purposes in Qur'an. At the same time, he dismissed the fact that a prophet needed to be highly literate to produce a document like Qur'an. According to Niyaz, the innate ability with which he was born, combined with an understanding of his social context, was enough for him to produce a text like Qur'an.¹⁶⁰

Niyaz started writing about these topics based on the questions he was asked in April 1935 issue of the magazine. Niyaz briefly touched the topic and stated his position in this regard. However, it would only be through the series of texts in the magazine's June, July, and August 1940 issues that Niyaz would discuss the topic in detail. He challenged the *'ulamā* to respond to

¹⁵⁸ *Nigār*, 39, January 1959.

¹⁵⁹ *Nigār*, 41, January 1959.

¹⁶⁰ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004, 67, April 1935.

his questions on whether they believed Qur'an to be the word of God. These questions were based on the discussion in the above paragraphs. The editorial generated a response from the public and other newspapers. Fazal-ud-din Asar from Agra congratulated Niyaz for his services to Islam by criticizing irrational forces. He called the reframed narrative “eye-opening”¹⁶¹ In the same text, he reminded Niyaz that the justification provided in *Nigār* was very similar to that of a Christian missionary based in Punjab who wrote the text “Bible is not the word of God.”¹⁶² Muslim Hyderabad wrote about the responses these articles generated in Hyderabad as people were criticizing Niyaz openly. He urged ‘*ulamā* to enlighten the public using Qur’anic references in this regard. Another Zaheer Ahmed from Muzaffarnagar wrote about the unwarranted and irrational criticism in *Haq* magazine in this regard.¹⁶³ He congratulated Niyaz for his views and questioned the *Haq* magazine’s editor to answer the question posed by Niyaz rationally. The discussions continued up until the August issue of the magazine.

3.5 Evolution and Islam

Niyaz, in concurrence with naturalist philosophy, was strongly in favor of Evolution. According to him, the theory of Evolution met singlehandedly the biggest blow to religious doctrines across the world.¹⁶⁴ Further, according to Niyaz, the concept was embedded in Islam, and Muslim scholars were among the first to point it out much earlier in history; however, given that the theory was currently associated with Darwin, it stopped ‘*ulamā* from endorsing it. Niyaz pointed to the Qur’anic verses in this regard. e.g., “... God created a thing and set it on the path of

¹⁶¹ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-002, 7-8, August 1940.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Nigār*, 30, January 1959.

development...” was treated as proof of evolution. “...Man is given in proportionate to his efforts...” was read as survival of the fittest. “...He is one who originated you from a single soul...” was seen as proof of a common origin.¹⁶⁵ Answering a question on “the nature of the afterlife” posed by Maulvi Ghulam Rabbani, Niyaz used an example given in the Qur’an to exhibit proof of evolution. Pointing to the verse from Surah Noah, “...God has created you from soil...”¹⁶⁶, Niyaz stated that although we knew the biological process of human reproduction, God here referring to soil was a hint towards our evolution process. In this process we evolved from soil to our current form.¹⁶⁷

In this regard, Niyaz also pointed out scholars like Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Bajja, and Ibn Miskawayh, stating they had talked about these things much earlier. Their achievements were mentioned in detail in the January 1955 issue of the magazine.¹⁶⁸

3.6 Qiyāmat (doomsday), Ḥashr-i ajsād (day of judgement), and the Nature of the Afterlife

Niyaz’s whole philosophy about religion was with the intention to simplify, universalize, and ground it in the present world, i.e., not delegate important aspects to the afterlife. It is in this context, he presented his critique of the existing understanding of important terms associated with Islam like *Qiyāmat*, *Ḥashr-i ajsād*, and the nature of afterlife.

Niyaz faced various questions in this regard, but the detailed assessment of the topic is encompassed in Maulvi Rabbani’s question. Maulvi Ghulam Rabbani posed a question to Niyaz about his beliefs on reward and punishment. Rabbani asked Niyaz to explain his recent statement

¹⁶⁵ Qur’an 20:50, 53:39, 6:98.

¹⁶⁶ Qur’an 71:17-18.

¹⁶⁷ Rekhta. “Istifsāraat-o-Javābāt by Niyaz Fatehpuri.” 159-160. Accessed June 30, 2023. <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/detail/Istifsāraat-o-javābāt-niyaz-fatehpuri-ebooks>.

¹⁶⁸ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001, January 1955.

that Hell and Heaven were metaphors, not real places.¹⁶⁹ Also, to state that the retribution and reward would only be spiritual in nature raised a philosophical question. That is to even enjoy a spiritual reward, we must have a physical existence. Rabbani consciously used Niyaz's rational approach (select Qur'anic verses) and rhetoric to counter him. Asking him to further explain the nature of the afterlife, the role of the body, and why, when it was the primary instrument to be inflicted by suffering in this world, it was discarded in the afterlife. In the same eight-page text, Rabbani accused him of blindly following 20th-century Christian philosophy.¹⁷⁰

Niyaz acknowledged the seriousness of the question by mentioning that it took him 2 years to figure out the answer.¹⁷¹ He began by reframing the concept of *rūḥ* posed by the questioner as it was critical to dismantle the confusion about the afterlife that people have developed over time. According to Niyaz, there was no mention of *insānē rūḥ* (human soul) in the Qur'an. Wherever Qur'an used *rūḥ* it was to indicate inspiration, i.e., a spiritual state exclusively innate in some people, e.g., prophets. The only term that comes close to what we understood from the term *rūḥ* was *Nafs* (conscience).¹⁷² For Niyaz, people had developed the notion of *insānē rūḥ* (human soul) which lived till eternity because of historical and cultural reasons. According to Niyaz, in its initial stage, religion needed these concepts to reform human society. To do so, it had to create concepts like hell, heaven, retribution day etc., to keep a human in check. According to Niyaz, since Arabs were extremely materialist and prone to violent retributions, Islam had to invent concepts of hell and heaven in its early days. So, one shouldn't be surprised by the imagery of hell and heaven in

¹⁶⁹ Rekhta. "Istifsāraat-o-Javābāt by Niyaz Fatehpuri." 138.

¹⁷⁰ Rekhta. "Istifsārāt-o-Javābāt by Niyaz Fatehpuri." 143-45.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Rekhta. "Istifsāraat-o-Javābāt by Niyaz Fatehpuri." 150-52.

the Qur'an, it was only metaphorical and suitable to a particular context.¹⁷³ Through this reasoning, Niyaz tried to make Islam a this-worldly religion.

Regarding the concept of *Hashr-i ajsād* and *Qiyāmat*, according to Niyaz, they were separate events. The former referred to the day of judgment, whereas the latter pointed to the time when everything on this universe would end. Nowhere in the Qur'an were they mentioned in unison. Niyaz dismissed the *Hashr-i ajsād* concept outright, stating it was only created to discipline people. To believe that people will be resurrected from their graves and will be expected to wait for their deeds to be evaluated didn't make sense for him. For Niyaz, whatever a person did in this world was limited to here i.e., its consequences, both good and bad. After death, people became part of the larger cosmos as energies and continued to exist there till *Qiyāmat*. Niyaz here pointed to the recent scientific discovery that matter, and energy were interchangeable. Niyaz's explanation is based on the logic that since the universe operated on immutable laws; to have a resurrection would have to happen in accordance with these laws only. To resurrect every human on the doomsday didn't fit the logic as we couldn't accommodate everyone on earth; this included all people from earlier times to the day of *Qiyāmat*. Countering the Qur'anic argument, "Do people think We cannot reassemble their bones?"¹⁷⁴, Niyaz stated that the verses indicated the abilities of God and didn't ensure, in any manner, the occurrence of the event.

He acknowledged *Qiyāmat* as a future event and explained how it will happen, as the sun would start losing its energy, and the earth would be pulled towards it with a huge force. It would be a universalistic event i.e., everything will end with it. This was all in accordance with early 20th-century science. All the events mentioned in the Qur'an about the flattening of mountains

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Qur'an 75:3.

would prove to be true. He even suggested that we could calculate scientifically when it would happen.

Coming to life after death, according to Niyaz, indeed it would happen, but no one had any idea how it was going to be. Niyaz quoted Qur'an here, "...*We have ordained death for all of you, and We cannot be prevented from transforming and recreating you in forms unknown to you...*"¹⁷⁵

In a similar vein, he quoted the famous *Ḥadēṣ* from Bukhari which stated that the paradise (afterlife) was something that no eye had seen, or no ear had heard about.

3.7 Shia – Sunni divide and '*ulamā*

Niyaz was keenly interested in addressing the issues related to the reformation of society. Given his expertise and interest in religion, he analyzed its historical, political, and psychological aspects and how they shaped Islam to its current form. Niyaz addressed the issue of Shia-Sunni divide at length; given his stay in Lucknow for a long period of time, he was exposed to sectarian cleavages.¹⁷⁶ In the late 1930s, Lucknow witnessed intense Shia-Sunni riots, which communalized the entire environment.¹⁷⁷ *Nigār* offers a window to understand the divide in this regard as it narrated the events throughout its issues in detail. It was in this context and environment, Niyaz was writing about the history of the Shia-Sunni divide.

Niyaz approached the Shia-Sunni divide in light of his rational philosophy of religion. According to him, the issue had a historical and political basis and in reality had nothing to do with Islam as a religion.¹⁷⁸ Reiterating that Islamic belief essentially rested only on two principles;

¹⁷⁵ Qur'an 56:60-61.

¹⁷⁶ Lucknow has had a historically influential and major Shia population in South Asia.

¹⁷⁷ Mushirul Hasan, "Traditional Rites and Contested Meanings: Sectarian Strife in Colonial Lucknow," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 9 (1996): 543–50.

¹⁷⁸ Rekhta. "Man-ō-Yazdān Part-001 by Niyaz Fatehpuri." 79-80. Accessed August 30, 2023. <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/detail/Man-ō-Yazdān-part-001-niyaz-fatehpuri-ebooks>.

accepting the totality of God and Muhammad as his messenger. And both groups accepted these beliefs, so both of them were Muslims. The answer to conflict between these two groups then lied in history. In the early years of Islam, a division among Muslims occurred on who should be preferred as successor to the prophet; one group, Sunnis, advocated an approach based on consensus and practicality. While the other one, Shias, taken in by their reverence of the prophet and his family wanted Ali, his son in law, as successor. The former group, known as Sunnis, dominated in this earlier fight. These differences didn't end and were cemented in the upcoming times as both of them fought openly for power and wealth. These political reasons and later literature motivated by this bigotry led to a perpetual divide between Sunnis and Shias.

Niyaz acknowledged the fact that he was Sunni and as such had to be very careful in approaching the Shia-Sunni issue in an unbiased manner. He addressed Sunnis asking them to reflect on the fact of how the prophet could ever forgive Muā'wiyah for unethically paving the way for his son Yazēd to rule. Niyaz also urged Sunnis to look at Umayyad and Abbasid rule and how they propagated the hate for Shias and Ali through mosques. At the same time, he urged Shias to stop from provoking the sentiments of Sunnis as it didn't achieve anything.¹⁷⁹ Throughout the articles he wrote in *Nigār* in the late 1930s he blamed the '*ulamā*' of both sides for the continuation of sectarianism.¹⁸⁰ According to Niyaz, '*ulamā*' from both the sides aroused the sentiments of the masses by focusing on controversial issues so much so these issues were made an inalienable aspect of religion. This all was done to keep the people under their control.

¹⁷⁹ Rekhta. "Man-ō-Yazdān Part-001 by Niyaz Fatehpuri." 86-87.

¹⁸⁰ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-006,4-7 June 1939.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter focused on Niyaz's religious beliefs, which he propagated and defended till his death in 1966. Dismayed by the existing religious authority and the state of Islam, Niyaz started approaching Islam seriously. *Nigār* provided him with a much-needed platform to freely express his opinions. In making his doctrine, he found refuge in the existing naturalist philosophy represented by Syed Ahmed Khan. Niyaz went a step beyond Syed in extending his project to all arenas of life.

Although pessimistic about religion in general, he couldn't do away with it altogether and was forced to find a solution keeping the social context in mind. In doing so, he attempted to achieve two aims; dismantle '*ulamā*' as a class and sole authority on religion and, on the other hand, made sure his humanist-rational project wasn't in contradiction with foundational Islamic beliefs. In doing this, he justified every act in line with his beliefs and criticized everything that went against his thought while relying on the Qur'an as the only source to understand Islam.

For the Indian context, he even attempted to localize Islam with Hindu traditions. The nature of the political extension of his project, as we will witness in the next chapter, separated him from other reformers, including Syed Ahmed Khan. Syed saw Indian Muslims as a separate political and cultural unit which were different from Hindus. And being a minority would have meant their perpetual suffering under a liberal democracy.¹⁸¹ Enlightenment was the primary inspiration for Niyaz as he reinterpreted all the important elements and history of Islam through this philosophy. A product of his times, he compared the existing situation of Islam to medieval Europe. Also, he didn't advocate Islam as the only means to shape a human character and was not

¹⁸¹ Rodrigues, Valerian. "In Search of an Anchor: Muslim Thought in Modern India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 49 (2011): 43–58.

insistent on emphasizing the greatness of Islam compared to other religions, unlike his fellow reformers. An example of this can be found when he was asked the question “should Ambedkar become a Muslim?”; he dismissed it outrightly. For Niyaz, it won’t make much of a difference for Ambedkar and his people, as Muslims would have never socially accepted these “lower caste” people as their own brethren.¹⁸² He then went on to advise Ambedkar either to stay as a Hindu and work for reforms in his community or not to choose any religion and stay non-religious.¹⁸³ Niyaz received constant criticism from the ‘*ulamā*, who, at one point in time issued a Fatwa against him.¹⁸⁴ It did force Niyaz to tone down the rhetoric for some time, but eventually, he started again to propagate his views.

In studying Niyaz, it is important to understand him in his societal context; he wasn’t the sole voice. His era was marked by the growth of various religious reform movements in all religions across South Asia; most of these reforms were amplified by print culture. Niyaz hoped to find his audience among the newly educated Urdu class who would question and be critical of ‘*ulamā* and traditional Islam. Although his ideas weren’t unique, the radical nature of his thought and the unique interpretations covering every aspect of life did make him stand out among his peers. Also, his attempt to create such a project gives us an idea of the time as Indian Muslims were influenced by colonial domination, which stood for rationality and enlightenment.

However, what was unique in Niyaz, as we will witness in the next chapter, was that he wasn’t pro-British like Syed. He found himself in the middle of a national awakening in India, which can be seen in his unconditional support for the socialistic section of the Indian National Congress, particularly Nehru.¹⁸⁵ Also, at the same time he was inspired by the Russian Revolution

¹⁸² *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-006, 2-9 December 1935.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004, 3-6, October 1931. For more details, check Chapter 4.

¹⁸⁵ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005, 2-7 November 1938.

and constantly praised socialism and the development of society in the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, he appreciated Mustafa Kemal for his successful revolution and containment of Maulvis in Turkey.¹⁸⁷



¹⁸⁶ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-006, 2-6 December 1939.

¹⁸⁷ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005, 33-41 May 1935.

CHAPTER 4: NAVIGATING THE INDIAN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SPHERE THROUGH *NIGĀR*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on *Nigār* as a participant in the public sphere and as a source to understand the times (1935-47). *Nigār* acted as a platform for debate and discussion through articles, editorials, essays, and particularly the *Istifsārāt* section.¹⁸⁸ Apart from *Istifsārāt*, *Nigār* used the *Mulāḥizāt* section of the magazine to keep track of important political and social developments in the country.¹⁸⁹ Niyaz himself did the commentary on the issues. Thus, offering a window to look into the social, political, and cultural life as it unfolded.

To study the interaction of *Nigār* with other magazines, we will focus on the year 1931-32 as a case study. Niyaz found himself in the limelight during this year. A *Fatwā-e Kufr* was issued against him and in other instance, he was at the center of another controversy.¹⁹⁰ Various Urdu magazines and editors engaged with Niyaz and continued to criticize one other vehemently for a prolonged period. The magazine offers an insight into these engagements as the personal lives of individuals were brought into this rivalry. The year was a catalyst for Niyaz as he openly began to put forward his radical views about religion.

Given that the magazine was not limited to theological and religious debates, it offers an insight into political life, particularly post-1935 when the print sphere became increasingly political. In this chapter, there will be an exclusive focus on the years 1935-47. The year 1935 is

¹⁸⁸ As explained in the second chapter, *Istifsārāt* (an Arabic term meaning “inquiries”) is a section of the magazine where Niyaz answers questions from the audience.

¹⁸⁹ *Mulāḥizāt* (an Arabic term meaning “comments”) is the opening section in which Niyaz, apart from social and political commentary, gives an overview of the content in the magazine.

¹⁹⁰ *Fatwa-e Kufr*: (*Fatwa* Arabic term meaning religious decree, *Kufr* means disbelief) decree issued by the religious authority deemed a person out of the fold of Islam.

marked by the passing of the Government of India Act.¹⁹¹ The act, among other things, was characterized by political reforms with which provincial elections were held in 1937. The era is critical as we witness the emergence of the Muslim League and a Muslim political consciousness in the Indian political sphere. The political sphere in India was further communalized, particularly in the United Provinces, where *Nigār* was based at the time, as the Indian National Congress took control of the province.¹⁹² The insistence of the Indian National Congress on language and education reforms, combined with the rhetoric against Muslims from the Hindu nationalist section of the party, led to an increased alienation among the Muslim masses.¹⁹³ We will see how Niyaz navigated the political sphere and how he aligned his ideology with the political environment of the time. Language reforms were at the center of politics as the divide between Urdu and Hindi was exacerbated.

Apart from debating Hindu-Muslim communal issues and political divide between Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, *Nigār* documented the sectarian strife between Shias and Sunnis in Lucknow. The Shia-Sunni riots of the late 1930s featured in the magazine with appropriate social commentary by Niyaz.¹⁹⁴ *Nigār* also covered World War 2 diligently, as updates were given each month about the progress of the war. Niyaz even intended to start a separate newspaper to document the war.¹⁹⁵ *Nigār* offers insights into governmental policies during the war, e.g., paper shortage during the war forced magazines to decrease its length.

¹⁹¹ The act was the culmination of a series of efforts aimed at legislative reforms in the functioning of Govt. of India. For details, see India, *The Government of India Act, 1935, as Originally Enacted*. Karachi: Manager of Publications, Govt. of Pakistan, 1963.

¹⁹² Gould, William. *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*. Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

¹⁹³ Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence* (New Delhi, 2001), 55-57.

¹⁹⁴ Mushirul Hasan, "Traditional Rites and Contested Meanings: Sectarian Strife in Colonial Lucknow," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 9 (1996): 543-50.

¹⁹⁵ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001,2-3, February 1940.

4.2 Inter-'ulamā Debates and Controversies

The year 1931-32 was critical for Niyaz and *Nigār*, as *Fatwā-e Kufr* was issued against him. It forced Niyaz to limit his travel and maintain caution regarding his personal security.¹⁹⁶ The experience changed him completely as he started the propagation of his ideas against 'ulamā more fiercely. The issuance of the *Fatwā* was a culmination of a series of events based on general discontent about his writings and rivalry among magazine editors. The whole episode helps us to understand the intersection of Urdu print, religion, and politics at that time. To understand the issue, it is important to consider the Urdu print sphere in North India at the given time, in particular, the religious magazines. Prominent among these magazines were *Sach*,¹⁹⁷ edited by Majid Daryabadi,¹⁹⁸ and *Ma'ārif*,¹⁹⁹ edited by Suleiman Nadvi.²⁰⁰ Both of these were prominent Islamic scholars with wider audiences. They were strong adversaries of Niyaz and critiqued his views in their respective magazines. However, Abdul Majid Daryabadi had a personal rivalry with Niyaz. Syed Suleiman Nadvi, on the other hand, criticized him only for his religious beliefs.

The affair starts with the July 1931 issue of the magazine when Niyaz, for the first time, openly criticized the *Ḥadēṣ* and highlighted its inconsistencies with the Qur'an. He pointed to the case of slavery in the context of the Qur'an and *Ḥadēṣ*, emphasizing that while the Qur'an prohibited it, the *Ḥadēṣ* justified it.²⁰¹ In the August issue, Niyaz, more brazenly, attacked the *Ḥadēṣ* highlighting the fact that it influenced our daily rituals, including *Ṣalāh* (ritual prayers).²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Ram, Malik. 1974. *Woh Suratei Ilahi (The immortals)*. New Delhi, India: National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language. 218-19. OL18886411M

¹⁹⁷ *Sach* (Urdu meaning Truth) was a religious-social magazine by Majid Daryabadi.

¹⁹⁸ Majid Daryabadi was a prominent Deobandi religious scholar known for his *Tafsīr* (exegesis) of the Qur'an.

¹⁹⁹ *Ma'ārif* (Arabic for Knowledge) was an Urdu socio-religious magazine by Suleiman Nadvi.

²⁰⁰ Syed Suleiman Nadvi was a prominent Islamic scholar and historian of Islam, known for his biography of the prophet.

²⁰¹ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001,55, July 1931.

²⁰² Daily ritual prayer associated with Islam.

Going to the extent of justifying *Khawārij*,²⁰³ Niyaz stated that *Khawārij* were the original *Ahl-e Qurān*²⁰⁴ and were attacked only for not accepting the *Hadēs*.²⁰⁵ Continuing with the same fervor, in the September issue, Niyaz pointed to the inconsistencies in *Hadēs* regarding fasting and other rituals of Ramazan.²⁰⁶ All these essays were written under the pseudonym *Haq Gō* (truth-sayer).

The essays generated a massive response from the audience and *‘ulamā. Nigār*, in the October issue, focused on the whole episode at length. It pointed to the developments of September when a campaign was launched against Niyaz, and he was declared *Kāfir*.²⁰⁷ A campaign was run to discredit *Nigār* by issuing fatwas asking people to stop reading *Nigār*. Niyaz mentions Maulvi Abdul Hakim from Bihar, who declared reading *Nigār harām* (proscribed).²⁰⁸ Two newspapers in the United Provinces took the lead in the campaign; *Himmat* (courage) and *Sach* (truth).²⁰⁹ Majid Daryabadi edited *Sach*. The *fatwā* accused Niyaz of maligning the names of scholars like Abu Hanifa, Bukhari, and other *Hadēs* scholars. It also accused Niyaz of misappropriating concepts of hell and heaven, the concept of God, etc. Niyaz dismissed these allegations saying he would never discredit or malign Abu Hanifa or other scholars. His whole aim was to expose current *‘ulamā* and show their hypocrisy. Niyaz asserts that since these people had no answers to his questions and since he didn’t follow them blindly like others, they had resorted to personal attacks under the garb of religion. Niyaz reiterates his mission of saving Islam in the current context, as *‘ulamā* were unable even to comprehend the challenges posed by the modern age. However, in the same essay,

²⁰³ *Khawārij* (an Arabic term meaning “the leavers”) was the first sect among Muslims who challenged the authority of Caliphs.

²⁰⁴ *Ahl-e Qurān* (People of the Qur’an) was an Islamic reformist movement in Colonial India in the late 19th and early 20th century. Its supporters rejected *Hadēs* as an authentic source of studying Islam and focused only on the Qur’an. For more see: Qasmi, Ali Usman. “Islamic Universalism: the ‘Amritsari’ version of *Ahl-e Qurān*.” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, no. 2 (2009): 159–87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26200737>.

²⁰⁵ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-002,16, August 1931.

²⁰⁶ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-003,19-20, September 1931.

²⁰⁷ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004,3-6, October 1931.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*,

Niyaz agrees to reconcile and stop the publication of similar essays. The rationale provided is that since sentiments were hurt, and people got polarized, doing so would have made the situation worse. Also, for Niyaz, the time hadn't come for his views to be accepted by society. At this time, he seemed unsure of his future and reiterated that he indeed considered himself a Muslim like everyone else with similar *'aqā'id* (beliefs).²¹⁰

Niyaz's friend Malik Ram narrated the event 40 years later in his book "*Woh Suratein Ilahi*."²¹¹ According to him, two *'ulamā* from Lucknow orchestrated the whole campaign against Niyaz. Given the nature of engagement and rivalry, it does point to Daryabadi, with whom Niyaz continued to debate and disagree throughout his life. Taking help from *'ulamā*, they went to the governor's office of the United Provinces, asking the Home Member to book Niyaz under the *Taūhēn-e Mazhab* (sacrilege) act. The Home Member didn't book Niyaz; however, a compromise was reached in which Niyaz was supposed to apologize and refrain from publishing similar content further.²¹²

The incident acted as a turning point in Niyaz's career. He had to fear for his life and had to carry a gun for personal safety afterward. Several months later, in 1932, another controversy linked to the previous one broke out with Niyaz again at the center of it.

The whole scandal of 1932 began with the circulation of a pamphlet titled "*'abdul Mājīd Daryābādē be-niqāb*" (Abdul Majid Daryabadi exposed). It was written by a young woman who accused Majid Daryabadi of luring her into a marriage and then abandoning her only after a month. The ten-page pamphlet caused a sensation and gets published in various magazines. The pamphlet included a detailed conversation between Daryabadi and the women, including letters written over

²¹⁰ Ibid.,

²¹¹ Ram, Malik. 1974. *Woh Suratei Ilahi*, 218-20.

²¹² Ibid.,

time. Daryabadi was forced to issue a statement. Accepting that he indeed did marry the woman but only out of sympathy as she was his friend's widow. Regarding the divorce, Daryabadi says his mother hadn't approved of the marriage, forcing him to divorce the lady. Daryabadi invoked the prophet's example and a fatwa of Deobandi 'ulamā to justify the act.²¹³ Daryabadi accused Niyaz, "the *Ḥadēṣ* denier,"²¹⁴ of framing the entire pamphlet, saying the research, tone, and hatred for 'ulamā all pointed to Niyaz.²¹⁵ The accusation started a series of rebuttals as both sides debated the validity of this act of *Talāq* (divorce). For Niyaz, it was an excellent opportunity to display the hypocrisy of 'ulamā, the irrelevancy of Islamic laws in the current context, and, more importantly, to take revenge for the 1931 incident.

In the May and June issues of the magazine, Niyaz does a detailed assessment of the pamphlet and highlighted the inconsistencies in the narrative shared by Daryabadi. According to Niyaz, three important questions raised in the pamphlet required attention and analysis. First, was the marriage indeed done out of sympathy and not lust? Second, what was the real reason for divorce –Daryabadi had given multiple answers to multiple people. Third, and most importantly, invoking the prophet's example of divorcing wives without any proper reason. For the first two questions, Niyaz analyzed all the characters, including the families of both sides and 'ulamā and their statements. Niyaz pointed to the inconsistencies in the Daryabadi narrative and targets 'ulamā for being regressive and illogical as they sided with Daryabadi to make this affair valid. In the July issue, Niyaz did a study of the prophet's divorces and contextualized them in their context. Niyaz attempted to highlight that all of the controversial marriages and divorces attributed to the prophet had their specific reasons. There were no element of lust or material gains involved.²¹⁶ The cases

²¹³ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-006,6-9, June 1931.

²¹⁴ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005,5-8, May 1931.

²¹⁵ *Nigār*, ,19-20, June 1931.

²¹⁶ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001,10-12, July 1931.

in this regard were of the wives of the prophet; Sawdah Bint Zama'h, Hafsa Bint Umar, Umrao Bint Yazēd, and Asma Bint Noman.

The whole affair points to the rivalry between magazine editors based on religious views. The question of whether Niyaz did indeed frame and sensationalize the pamphlet to bring down Daryabadi is unclear. However, in the April issue of the magazine (when the pamphlet wasn't published), Niyaz focused on detail about the issues faced by Indian Muslim women because of the irregularities in marriage laws. Niyaz pointed to the recent news of a woman who declared herself *murtad* (an apostate) because courts run by '*ulamā* didn't approve of her *Khulā* (separation) and asked her to go back to her abusive husband.²¹⁷ Targeting *ulamā* Niyaz says, "... the hypocrisy and unjustness of the '*ulamā* are forcing the woman to abandon her religion...²¹⁸". Niyaz pointed to the legal reforms done in the princely state of Bhopal but given that the interpreters of the law were the same people, it won't have changed much for the women. The incident indicated that Niyaz did have some role in the affair.

Apart from Daryabadi, Niyaz engaged with other magazines, or to rephrase it, other magazines engaged with Niyaz. Since Niyaz was an outlier, he tried to pose his questions to '*ulamā* all across the country, to which only a few would reply back. One such example is *Ma'ārif* magazine's editor Syed Suleiman Nadvi. Niyaz held him in high regard, and although always critical, he would at least engage with Niyaz. It is attested by the fact that Niyaz became disheartened when Nadvi criticized him for publishing "heretical" content despite agreeing not to do it.²¹⁹ It forced Niyaz to write a detailed critique explaining that it is not his thoughts that were

²¹⁷ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004,5-10, April 1932.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ *Ma'ārif*, Azamgarh, Shumara Number-003. 164, September 1932.

<https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/detail/Ma'ārif-shumara-number-003-syed-sulaiman-nadvi-magazines-6>

heretic, but the '*ulamā* who didn't have any real assessment of the current condition of the society.²²⁰

While Niyaz was indeed an outlier when it came to the religious print sphere; however, solidarity was not only ensured by one's religious beliefs. For example, in June 1943 Niyaz targeted Daryabadi again. This time the issue was that Daryabadi had visited a cinema hall in Lucknow. Joining Niyaz is the editor of Medina newspaper, who severely criticized Daryabadi for his hypocrisy. Daryabadi's earlier college life was discussed and made fun of.²²¹ The only connection between Niyaz and Medina editor was that they were both fierce Congress party supporters and were strongly against the Muslim league.

The above discussions explain that *Nigār* didn't operate in a vacuum and was indeed part of a broader social, religious, and political context. It did engage with other magazines and was shaped by these interactions.

4.3 1935 and the political sphere

Nigār, although a literary magazine, was famous for its religious ideas. This is evident by the frequency of religious questions asked in the magazine. However, post-1935, we see a pattern of increased focus on politics across all the magazines and newspapers as the public sphere got politicized. This was owing to the 1935 Govt of India Act, which sped up the political activities in colonial India. The act aimed at increasing the participation of Indians in the government, giving autonomy to provinces and increasing the franchise to 35 million people, i.e., 14% of the British

²²⁰ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004,5-7, October 1932.

²²¹ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-006,5-6, June 1943.

Indian population.²²² The provincial elections of 1937 were based on the regulations of this act. United Provinces, with a historically influential Muslim minority population, was at the center of these new political activities. The province would play a crucial role in the upcoming decade in the revival of the Muslim League and the generation of support for the Pakistan movement.²²³ *Nigār*, based in the United Provinces, reflects the political environment of the time as essays and editorials were written covering political events. Apart from the communal strife and a growing wedge between the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, there was a focus on World War 2 and the emergency measures and restrictions on freedom of speech enforced by the colonial government.²²⁴ As Britain entered World War 2, it inducted India into the war without asking for its opinion. The reaction to the unilateral war efforts by the colonial government was the resignation of provincial ministries by Congress and the launch of mass movements. The government tried various measures to get support from all the political parties in India for the War. August Offer and Cripps Mission are examples in this regard. The government promised to give India dominion status, among other measures; however, it was on the condition that they support the War. Indian National Congress outrightly rejected these plans, but the negotiations to get maximum benefits continued throughout and post the war years. It is in this context of World War 2 politics, growing nationalistic discourse, and the rise of the Muslim League, that Niyaz based his writings.

Historians of the partition have emphasized the role of the 1937 provincial elections in flaring up the differences between Congress and the Muslim League, thus setting the stage for

²²² Jalal, Ayesha. *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge South Asian Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 15-16.

²²³ Dhulipala, Venkat. *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 49-50.

²²⁴ Ahmad, Saeed. "GOVERNMENT-PRESS RELATIONS IN INDIA DURING WORLD WAR II." *Pakistan Horizon* 30, no. 2 (1977): 35-43.

Muslim separatism and the demand for Pakistan.²²⁵ *Nigār* attests to the same fact. Niyaz, despite being staunchly pro-Congress and anti-League, encapsulated the change in Muslim perception in favor of the Muslim League. In Feb. 1937 Congress party formed the provincial government in 8 out of 11 provinces, including the United Provinces. With increasing autonomy and public support, the Congress party attempted to implement its reformist program. Niyaz, analyzing the election results, was full of praise for the Congress and credited the win to their reformist nationalist ideology and robust organizational setup. This was seen as contrary to the Muslim League, which according to Niyaz, was based on the cult of personality of Mr. Jinnah.²²⁶ The admiration continued until late 1937 as Congress promised to do the land reforms. Niyaz was influenced by Nehru's section of the party, which according to him was socialistic and didn't have any regard for religion.

Analyzing the situation of Indian Muslims, Niyaz blamed their deteriorated conditions for their colonial mentality and a sense of superiority complex. This mentality, according to Niyaz, was created by '*ulamā*. For Niyaz, Muslims didn't see the fight against British rule as their primary aim; in fact, they preferred British over the Hindus as they were seen as people of the book. "Muslims don't want to change their *mazhab* (culture) because changing the culture means contradicting the past."²²⁷ According to Niyaz, the question for Indian Muslims was whether they could develop nationalistic reverence towards India without contradicting the lived past.²²⁸ Niyaz was highly critical of the Muslim League and blamed it for furthering the wedge between Hindus and Muslims in India. Niyaz compared the existence of the league as the worse event in history of Indian Muslims even when compared to Khilafat movement. According to Niyaz, "*disasters of the Khilafat movement and the Kaaba movement don't even come closer to the establishment of the*

²²⁵ Khaliqzaman, Choudhry. *Pathway to Pakistan*. Lahore: Longmans, Pakistan Branch, 1961.

²²⁶ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004,2-7, April 1937.

²²⁷ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-006,5-7, December 1932.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*,

League".²²⁹ In the following years, Niyaz will continue to be critical of the Muslim League, its leader Jinnah, and the two-nation theory. However, what is interesting is that he had to defend Congress amidst the polarizing environment and the increasing perception among Muslim masses that Congress was targeting Muslims.

4.4 Hindi-Urdu politics, *Wardhā* scheme, and criticism of Congress

As mentioned earlier, the nature of Congress rule (1937-39) across the provinces galvanized popular Muslim discontent. The impact was much visible in Muslim minority provinces. While always being a defender of Congress and its policies, even Niyaz found its policies difficult to justify. It became visible in 1938 when Niyaz accused Congress of playing in the hands of Hindu extremists. At the heart of issues are language and education reforms. Getting provincial autonomy for the first time, Congress got a chance to test its policies which would be used later to frame the constitution for the country.

Among other controversial issues, it included the ban on cow slaughter, the idea of a common national language, and a uniform educational curriculum. The education policy was called the *Wardhā* or *Vidyā Mandir* Scheme.²³⁰ A test case for it were the Central and the United Provinces. The reforms, combined with the reported mistreatment of Muslims in government offices, generated a response from Muslims across the province. In terms of language reforms, Hindustani was supposed to be the standardized version of the already popular, Hindvi language in both *Nāgarī* (Nagri) and Nastaliq (*Naskh-i ta'liq*) scripts.²³¹ The nature of the curriculum and

²²⁹ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-002,5-6, August 1937.

²³⁰ *Wardhā* scheme was framed under the guidance of Gandhi at *Wardhā*, Maharashtra. Thus, the name *Wardhā*. *Vidyā* means Knowledge; Mandir means Temple. The proposed schools were called "Temples of Knowledge".

²³¹ Pandey, Deepak. "Congress-Muslim League Relations 1937-39: 'The Parting of the Ways.'" *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 4 (1978): 629-54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312372>.

the name, *Vidyā Mandir*²³², made it controversial from the outset. ‘*Ulamā* protested the changes staunchly. Niyaz was impacted by the changes, too; he started to criticize the Congress party severely. Blaming Gandhi and the group of Hindu extremists in the party, Niyaz labelled him as the dictator of Congress.²³³ According to Niyaz, India was aspiring for a state with no influence of capitalists or religion. Gandhi was supposed to have both, big capitalists like Birlas openly supported him, and he viewed religion as an all-encompassing aspect of life. Niyaz highlighted the treatment meted out to Muslims in the province by the Congress ministries and the perceived attack on Muslim culture. Niyaz was not as such against language reforms or the uniform education system, but he questioned the motives behind it. Citing Turkey as an example, he proposed a Roman script model which would be applicable to both Urdu and Hindi. He was not primarily against the idea of language reforms in itself. His criticism lied in the manner and intent with which these reforms were done. For, the common language was supposed to be neutral when it came to the influence of Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit. According to Niyaz, “we see only the purging of Arabic and Persian vocabulary and that, too, words that are being used in daily life”.²³⁴ He cited an example from the recent Congress convention, saying “...we have never heard of this kind of Sanskrit Hindvi language...”.²³⁵ Even common Hindus didn’t understand this language. Popular phrases like *qānūn nāfiz karnā* (to implement law) became *qānūn lāgū karnā* (to implement law), *Şūbah-e Muttahidah* (United Provinces) became *Juṭṭ Şūbah* (United Provinces).²³⁶ On top of this, these leaders who were implementing it through legislation didn’t even use this vocabulary themselves in their day-to-day lives. This behavior was primarily aimed at targeting Muslim

²³² Dhulipala, Venkat. *Creating a New Medina*. 71-82.

²³³ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-002,3-8, August 1938.

²³⁴ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001,3-7, July 1938.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ “*Nāfiz*” is Urdu/Persian, “*Lāgū*” is Hindi. Both mean the same thing: “to apply”. Similarly, “*Muttahidah*” and “*Juṭṭ*” are from Urdu and Hindi and correspond to the exact meaning “United.” *Şūbah* means province.

culture.²³⁷ This reverence for Urdu goes back in time for Niyaz. An interesting example in this regard is the severe criticism of Niyaz by prominent Hindi writer Munshi Premchand.²³⁸ Premchand accused Niyaz of being communal in his assessment that Hindus can't be good Urdu writers and thus shouldn't have a say in the functioning of Hindustani Academy. The academy was created to increase interaction between Urdu and Hindi writers. After being part of the academy for three years, Niyaz was dropped from the committee. It didn't go well with Niyaz as he criticized the committee severely.²³⁹

Regarding the *Wardhā* education scheme, he wasn't against the idea in itself; however, he called for a curriculum that was free of prejudice and aimed at creating ideal citizens out of young children. Niyaz pointed to the special consideration for teaching History as the subject that until now was designed by the British with the intent to rule India. In the September 1938 issue, Niyaz discussed the criticism by the '*ulamā* regarding the proposed *Wardhā* education scheme. Taking the concerns and criticism raised by Syed Suleiman Nadvi as an example; for Niyaz, the fact that the scheme didn't incorporate religious education shouldn't be the cause of concern. Muslims can teach religion to their children separately. And to say that it went against the idea of preserving our culture was problematic because there was no such thing as static culture. Since the program was for every Indian, irrespective of religion and sect, no one should object to it. For Niyaz, this was the only way to reform Muslim society and to loosen the grasp of '*ulamā* from society. The only concern Niyaz had is regarding the nature of the curriculum. He was suspicious of Gandhi and his obsession with religion. Apart from the fears of Sanskritic Hindi, he feared for the further incorporation of religious elements inspired by Hinduism. Amidst all this concern and criticism,

²³⁷ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001,3-7, July 1938.

²³⁸ Premchand, Munshi. "The Pharaohs of Urdu," 2003. <https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/18380>.

²³⁹ Ibid.,

Niyaz was disheartened by the fact that Nehru thought of all these concerns as a non-issue. He blamed the rise of the Muslim League and Jinnah on the nature of Congress ministries and their failure to alleviate the fears of Muslim minorities.²⁴⁰

Despite his severe criticism of Congress, Niyaz emphasized on the fact that he was a proud Congressi, and this phase of turmoil was transitional. He is hopeful of the socialist section led by Nehru and the forward block led by Bose. Regarding Muslims, his only suggestion for them was to join the Congress to reduce the impact of Hindu extremists represented by Hindu Mahasabha. For Niyaz, Congress was supposed to be led by people like Nehru, who believed that socialism was the only solution to end the suffering of the masses in India. He saw religion as a transitory or cultural aspect that shouldn't come in the middle of human development. What is interesting in these issues is that Niyaz separated the issue of Urdu language from *Wardhā* scheme of education. He didn't have the same enthusiasm when it came to the *Wardhā* Scheme of education. He supported Urdu conferences throughout the country and gave these events proper coverage through *Nigār*.²⁴¹

4.5 Critique of Muslim League and Pakistan Scheme.

Niyaz, from the beginning, was critical of the Muslim League and its policies. As mentioned in the previous section, he saw its foundation as a bigger tragedy than the Khilafat movement. For Niyaz, the problem with these religion-based movements was that they generated extra-territorial loyalties.²⁴² The case of Indian Muslims was seen as a failure as they were not able to reconcile their *mazhab* (culture) with Indian nationalism.²⁴³ Throughout the decade 1937-47, he

²⁴⁰ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005,2-8, November 1938.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

²⁴² *Nigār*,5-6, August 1938.

²⁴³ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-006,2-8, December 1932.

criticized Jinnah for widening the wedge between Hindus and Muslims. Against the backdrop of resentment against Congress ministries, *Nigār* documented the rise of the Muslim League among the masses. In almost every issue of 1938, there was a reference to the League and its rallies.²⁴⁴ Niyaz blamed the rise of the Muslim League on the policies pursued by Congress during its short government in provinces.²⁴⁵

Niyaz criticized the league for its lack of vision. The demands put forward by the league for the post-war settlement were seen as illogical. The insistence on a weak center, a veto power to minorities to undo constitutional changes, complete autonomy of provinces, and special constitutional provisions for minorities in Hindu majority provinces were seen as unrealistic and irrational demands as they would derail the grand Indian post-colonial project envisaged by Nehru. According to Niyaz, Hindus could make similar claims in their majority provinces, which would bring destruction for half of the Indian Muslims.²⁴⁶ This assessment was based on the Lahore resolution when the Muslim League in March 1940, for the first time, made the demand for a separate homeland for Indian Muslims. Niyaz points to the statement made by Chaudry Rehman that “Muslims are not a minority but a nation which they will achieve through any means, including swords.”²⁴⁷ For Niyaz, this terminology and rhetoric was unacceptable since it went against the spirit of the nation. We also see the use of the term Pakistan for the first time. Throughout the war years, *Nigār* constantly criticized the Muslim League; for its cooperation with the colonial government and for ingraining fear of Hindu majoritarianism among the Muslim masses.

Analyzing the Pakistan scheme, Niyaz rejected it outrightly for its impracticality. “Putting together the western provinces into Pakistan would save only half the Muslims; what about the

²⁴⁴ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-002,2-8, November 1938.

²⁴⁵ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001,3-6, July 1938.

²⁴⁶ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-004,3-6, April 1940.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*,

Muslims in Hindu-majority provinces?”²⁴⁸ Given the geography and lack of natural resources, it would be impossible for Pakistan to survive economically. According to Niyaz, given the sectarian and cultural differences among various groups, Pakistan would also be facing constant social strife. There will also be a threat of constant attack from India, forcing Pakistan to ally with the Western powers making it a vassal state. Niyaz here points to Jinnah’s statement that the British should guarantee the security of Pakistan.²⁴⁹ The scheme would be disastrous as it would split the Indian Muslims into two groups. The Pakistani group would face social, cultural, security, and economic hardships. The Indian counterparts would live perpetually under Hindu majoritarianism. As we come close to the partition, the doom and gloom is reflected in the *Nigār*; events of violence in Bengal, Bihar, and other provinces make it to the magazine.

Niyaz’s criticism of the Muslim League was in line with his political and religious ideology. He saw religion as a transitional phase and was completely taken in by Congress’s manifesto of Social and economic upliftment of all Indians. The revival of the League and its religious rhetoric was seen as a threat to Muslim society and its development. According to Niyaz, not having an actionable program made the League problematic, as people were deriving multiple interpretations of its Pakistan confusion. For example, some ‘*ulamā* were asking for an Islamic form of government (in to be Pakistan), and if that wasn’t worse, the League was currently under the influence of capitalists and the landed class. Niyaz advises the League to change its orientation from political to social reforms and focus on the economic upliftment of Muslims. According to Niyaz, Muslims were scared of Socialism because of Bolshevism; they saw it as a threat to religion. On the contrary, it was only an economic program. Niyaz was a committed Congress nationalist; he supported unity of India at any cost. It is attested by the fact that when the constitution reforms

²⁴⁸ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001,45-51, July 1944.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,

of 1935 gave the princely states a choice to join federation or opt of it, Niyaz criticized this decision as it was seen as laying foundations for division of India. He envisaged a Socialist modern republic led by people like Nehru in which religion will have little to no role, and all communities would live together just as they did in Soviet Russia.²⁵⁰ However, critiquing the Muslim League, he doesn't shy away from criticizing extremist elements in the Congress party. Niyaz blamed them constantly for the revival and popularity of the Muslim League.

4.6 Public responses, Hindu-Muslim unity, and criticism at *Nigār*

As mentioned in the previous section, *Nigār* constantly criticized the Muslim League and Jinnah throughout the time from the year 1937 (when elections were held) to 1947 (when partition was announced). The “high history” approach to the partition has been severely criticized in South Asian historiography.²⁵¹ Modern South Asian historians are focusing on the “peoples” aspect of it, i.e., cultural histories and histories from below.²⁵² It would be interesting to analyze the public response in this regard; What did people think of the Muslim League, and how did they live the political and communal frenzy? Newspapers do offer an opening. However, it is based on a top-down approach, i.e., it is the editor narrating the events from an ideological perspective. *Nigār* was unique in this regard, as it constantly featured immediate social, political, and religious issues in its *Istifsār* section. It is assumed in the popular imagination that the Muslim League enjoyed overwhelming support among the Muslim masses throughout World War 2 and the years leading to the Partition.²⁵³ *Nigār* offers evidence in this regard. It published a number of responses from

²⁵⁰ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-003,66-69, March 1939.

²⁵¹ For detailed discussion, see: Gilmartin, David. “Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative.” *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 4 (November 1, 1998): 1068–95. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2659304>.

²⁵² *Ibid.*,

²⁵³ Dhulipala, Venkat. *Creating a New Medina*. 390-400.

the public criticizing the *Nigār* and Niyaz for their support of Congress. These questions also offer a window to understand the political and social environment at the time. Niyaz was criticized for his failure to understand the plight of an average Muslim and his blind support for Congress. He was asked questions on various topics, including the concept of Muslim culture in India, Hindu-Muslim unity, etc. This thesis will be translating excerpts from many of these detailed questions to offer a people's perspective.

These questions are from the year 1944 when Niyaz fiercely criticized the League in its *Mulāhizāt* section.

M.A. Samad Malik from Jahanabad.²⁵⁴

“Muslim League and Hindu-Muslim Unity”

“I respect your sentiments; in fact, everyone appreciates you as a literary figure, and your contributions to Urdu literature are commendable. However, I am sorry to say that, in general, people don't like your thoughts (regarding politics). In the May (1944) issue, you (say that) want to do away with religion to uphold Hindu-Muslim unity. Luckily, you don't live in Bihar; otherwise, you would have seen for yourself how Hindus can't be friends with Muslims. You are eager to sacrifice your religion. However, you would be sad to know that Hindus are not. Knowing all this, why are you still keen on destroying your religion? I don't know whether you understand that the real name of the so-called “Pakistan scheme” is “Lahore Resolution.”²⁵⁵ Hindus have given it the name Pakistan. I am writing to let you know that your sympathies should be with Muslims. Your readers are supporters of the Muslim League; if they stop, you know what will happen to your paper.”²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ *Nigār*, 45-51, July 1944.

²⁵⁵ It was propagated that Hindus changed the name from “Lahore Resolution” to “Pakistan scheme”. It was done to project Muslims and Muslim league as dividers of the nation. For further discussion see: Dhulipala, Venkat. *Creating a New Medina* 288-290.

²⁵⁶ *Nigār*, 45-51, July 1944.

Abdullah Wahid Sahib from Matya Brij Calcutta.²⁵⁷

“What should Muslims do?”

“This issue has been discussed for a long time. However, it is heartening to see Muslims getting together on a common platform. If (according to you) the Muslim League is not the sole representative of all (Indian) Muslims, even then, we have to accept that a large number of Muslims are with this party. And (only) it can act as a platform for all Muslims.

Regarding the League’s inaction, pro-govt attitude, and personality clashes, it will continue to be the case till the time selfless and freedom-loving Muslims stay away from the League.²⁵⁸

It is said that Muslims should join the Congress party to support the “good” side and to keep the extremist side in check.²⁵⁹ It can be similarly argued for the League. Till the time real Muslims don’t join it, it can’t be stable.

No matter what the League is, the majority of Muslims are with it, and the majority, no matter how wrong, can’t be left aside.... The question right now is not about the independence of a nation but that of an entire community (Muslims). No one should criticize the League while being out of it; neither will the League people take it seriously.

It is not about liking or disliking Mr. Jinnah; the question right now is of the entire community. Therefore, personal preferences shouldn’t come in between. One might say that the League’s policies are wrong, that leading to the Kaaba it might land in Turkistan. Even if this is the case, we shouldn’t abandon the majority. Also, we should accept the reality that the League can’t be dismantled now.... The questions that arise now are:

- 1) If the majority of Muslims are wrong, how can the League be reformed?
- 2) The non-Leaguers who don’t believe in the League, what is their solution to the Muslim problem?
- 3) Those who are happily in League and want reforms; what should their role be?
- 4) How can Muslims unite on a single platform?”

²⁵⁷ Ibid.,

²⁵⁸ A reference to Niyaz. Niyaz has leveled all of these criticisms throughout the years.

²⁵⁹ Again, this is a reference to Niyaz as he would urge Muslims throughout the years to strengthen the socialist wing of Congress led by Nehru.

Shameem Rizvi from Gaya, Bihar.²⁶⁰

“Are Hindus and Muslims a single *qōm* (nation)”²⁶¹

“.... Mr. Jinnah says Hindus and Muslims are two different *Qōm* (nations). Isn’t this true? Muslims have a separate religion, history, culture, language, literature, etc., which is distinct from Hindus. They think of Muslims as untouchables, don’t drink from their utensils, attack Urdu as a foreign language, and snatch the livelihoods of Muslims. Despite all of this, Gandhi says we are the same nation.

You, in your *Mulāhizāt*, say that the Muslim League is communal. Come to Bihar and see the shortsightedness of Hindus, which manifests in their hatred of Muslims. I am sure you (when you see this reality) will change the tone of *Mulāhizāt* and will support the Muslim League.

Unfortunately, the press is under the control of Hindus, which is why you don’t get real news about the condition of Muslims.

Also, what is your take on the two-nation theory?”²⁶²

The above questions indicate that Niyaz did face severe criticism for his support for Congress and disregard for the Muslim League from his readers across the country. However, Niyaz didn’t shy away from writing his opinion despite knowing that it could impede his sales as his audience, the urban Urdu elite, was increasingly becoming critical of Congress and supporters of the League. In view of pressing questions, Niyaz does a detailed assessment of Hindu-Muslim communal issue. His analysis is consistent with his religious doctrine in which ‘*ulamā*’ were blamed for the deterioration of Islam and in particular Indian Muslims. ‘*Ulamā*’, who criticized the Muslim League and its two-nation theory, gave justifications based on early Islamic tradition and the history of Islam in South Asia.²⁶³ Niyaz offered an altogether different perspective.

²⁶⁰ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005,44-48, November 1944.

²⁶¹ The Urdu word “*qōm*” has multiple interpretations depending on the context. Here, it implies “nation”.

²⁶² *Nigār*,44-48, November 1944.Nov.

²⁶³ Dhulipala, Venkat. “*Ulamā* at the Forefront of Politics Three Critiques of Pakistan.” Chapter. In *Creating a New Medina*, 279–313. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Niyaz began his analysis with the statement that, despite being critical of Islam as it is practiced today, he would never recommend people to do away with it altogether. Niyaz reminded the questioner that Islam, as we practice now, was some cultural practice and had nothing to do with real Islam. The real Islam died with the passing away of the prophet.²⁶⁴ Niyaz acknowledged the deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations but blamed Muslims and Indian Islam in particular for it. According to Niyaz, Muslims could never develop a strong sense of belonging towards India. While Hindus had a strong notion of territorial nationalism, Muslims, on the other hand, always pledged their allegiances to the outside Islamic world, i.e., Turks, Arabs, etc. All the movements they participated in, i.e., Kaaba, Khilafat, etc., were primarily a result of hatred towards the British. Hindus, on the other hand, wanted a new era of freedom, and Muslims were interested in getting back the old glory. Separate electorates, according to Niyaz, was an important example here.²⁶⁵ For Niyaz, even if we agree that Hindus and Muslims were separate communities, why should it come in between the freedom struggle? Muslims had two roles here, as a community for which they should invest in education, and as Indians, for which they should unite with Hindus for independence of India. Niyaz here pointed to the Soviet example. Niyaz urged Muslims to give up religious zealotry since it would hurt them most. Niyaz addresses the populist concerns that Hindu rule in India would mean a ban on cow slaughter, disturbances in prayers, and discrimination against Muslims in government jobs. For Niyaz, the first two were not important in the Islamic context, and Muslims could do away with them and still be Muslims. Regarding the jobs, he wished that the government gave no jobs to Muslims so they could at last focus on trade and commerce. Given the rhetoric and argumentation, Niyaz's approach was unique among all the reformers in

²⁶⁴ *Nigār*, 45-51, July 1944.

²⁶⁵ Under separate electorates, a particular number of legislatures were reserved for the community on which only members of those communities could vote. In India, it was first enacted in 1909 through the Indian Council Act.

South Asia at that time. However, he did receive backlash in the form of letters, of which above were a few examples, criticizing him vehemently.

Again, it is important to keep in mind his audience. They were primarily the urban Urdu Muslim class; he criticized the popular opinion of this powerful class, urging them to be reflexive of their positions. Given his ideology and political commitments, Niyaz's argument was different from the rest of 'ulamā. However, he didn't shy away from commending 'ulamā, who criticized the Muslim League and were trying to mend the Hindu-Muslim ties. One such incident was the communal violence in Bengal, where he commended the efforts of *Jamē'at 'ulamā-e Hind*.²⁶⁶

4.7 An assessment of the partition and future for Indian Muslims.

After the partition and Independence of India were announced in August 1947, Niyaz did a detailed assessment of what transpired over the last decades. Apart from blaming colonial policies of divide and rule, Niyaz vehemently criticized the Congress party and Gandhi.²⁶⁷ According to Niyaz, "after 1921, the Congress party let Muslims on their own. They created such an atmosphere that if there were no Jinnah, Muslims would have had to create one. Despite having 'ulamā and intellectual class with them, they didn't focus on the Hindu-Muslim theme. They should have focused on it the way Gandhi focused on the Harijan issue."²⁶⁸ Instead of dealing with Muslims, Gandhi bowed down to Jinnah. According to Niyaz, it was one of the main reasons for Partition. Gandhi should have handled the Muslim League the way they handled Hindu extremists.²⁶⁹ Niyaz goes back to pre-Khilafat politics, pointing out that it was wrong of the

²⁶⁶ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005,6-9, November 1946.

²⁶⁷ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-003,3-16, September 1947.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Harijan, literally meaning Children of God, was the term coined by M.K. Gandhi for "Untouchable Caste." "Untouchables," also known as Dalits, are at the lowest level of the Hindu hierarchy of social stratification.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*,

Congress party to accept separate electorates from the beginning.²⁷⁰ Niyaz had always been against Separate electorates and criticized them for driving a wedge between two communities.²⁷¹ And when Congress got the chance to do away with it in 1935, they again accepted it in the form of the “communal award.”²⁷² According to Niyaz, Congress appeased the Muslim League only to be in power. Niyaz here gives the example of Stalin and how he preferred the destruction of Russia rather than compromising on his ideology with Hitler.

According to Niyaz, Indian Muslims had lost most from the partition.²⁷³ Niyaz predicted that the one section, Pakistan, would face constant financial, security, and social crises. Also, given the capitalist class in Pakistan were Hindus, so how come Muslims have benefitted from the partition? And coming to the Indian section of Muslims, according to Niyaz they will face perpetual Hindu domination. Niyaz blamed the Muslim league as another important element in this disaster. For Niyaz, the cabinet plan of 1945 should have been accepted by the Muslim League.

Reflecting on the future of Muslims in India, Niyaz urged them to forget Pakistan and the “hostage theory.”²⁷⁴ Niyaz acknowledged that the difficulty of living with a community that “Muslims demonized” for the last decade.²⁷⁵ Indian Muslims, according to Niyaz, should consider India as their own country and should strive to live in cohesion with the majority community. They should help in making India a socialist state. Niyaz, in 1948 issued a special number dedicated to the Muslims of Pakistan, urging them to be kind towards its citizens and minorities.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁰ Lucknow pact refers to the agreement between the Muslim League and Congress to form a united front against the British. For more details: Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Lucknow Pact."

²⁷¹ *Nigār*, 5-7, October 1932.

²⁷² Communal Award was an update to Separate electorates as the British tried to include more depressed classes into it.

²⁷³ *Nigār*, 3-16, September 1947.

²⁷⁴ Hostage theory refers to the implicit understanding that the existence of minority populations in both states ensures each other's safety.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

²⁷⁶ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001, January 1948.

4.8 World War 2, Paper shortage, and Sectarian strife

Apart from being a source to understand theological discussions and political developments in colonial India, *Nigār* also acts as a channel documenting other key events portraying the social context of the time. One key event is the World War 2 period. At the beginning of the War, the colonial government suspended the provincial governments to pass emergency measures for effective and total control of the country.²⁷⁷ The press was at the center of this debacle. Laws such as censorship of content deemed critical of government policies during the war, strengthening of the Defense of India Act, seizure of hostile media, rationing of paper, surveillance, etc.

Nigār highlighted the impact of these draconian acts. Being critical of the colonial government and its policies, *Nigār* changed the tone during the war period. Niyaz attempted to separate local politics from the larger picture. From the outset, Niyaz sympathized with the British government from the beginning of the war.²⁷⁸ Niyaz urged the people, in particular all the nationalists, to enroll in the British Indian army.²⁷⁹ Niyaz reminded them of the expected horrors in case the Nazis and Japanese won the war and took over India. The support continued throughout the wartime. Apart from supporting the British, the socialist leanings of Niyaz were clear from the beginning of the War. Throughout the publication of *Nigār*, we see an ideological support for the Soviets for their reforms in religion and education. It continued throughout the war. *Nigār* hailed and defended Stalin from the beginning when he signed the pact with Hitler and also when he entered into the war with Germany.²⁸⁰ There is a dedicated section in the magazine giving regular

²⁷⁷ Ahmad, Saeed. "GOVERNMENT-PRESS RELATIONS IN INDIA DURING WORLD WAR II." *Pakistan Horizon* 30, no. 2 (1977): 35–43.

²⁷⁸ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-001, 2-9 July 1940.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,

²⁸⁰ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-006, 2-6 December 1939.

updates to the readers as the events unravel in Europe. Although sympathetic towards the British, it also tried to give the perspective of all parties. The popularity of the war section can be seen from the fact that Niyaz even planned to start a separate weekly newspaper for the same in Feb. 1940 titled *Jang* (War).

Another important development during the War was the paper crisis. The war disrupted the supply chain for the import of paper, forcing the government to look for alternative supplies. And on top of it, whatever was imported, the government rationed it. It had a daunting impact on the Indian press. Combined with the censorship, it disrupted the publication and circulation of newspapers, forcing many newspapers to shut altogether.²⁸¹ In *Nigār*, we see this evident in the form of a decrease in the size of the magazine. Starting from January 1941, the magazine was reduced to half of its original size (from earlier sizes of 80-90 pages to 35-40 pages). The trend continued till 1946. Even at one point in the year 1943, issues consisting of 26 pages were printed. It forced *Nigār* to cut down on the content. Post-war, Niyaz discussed the issue at length.²⁸² Complaining about the limited quota of paper allowed by the government, Niyaz highlighted the difficulties in maintaining the operational capabilities of *Nigār*. Niyaz mentioned the supply chain mechanism, as pre-war India imported paper from Norway, and during the War, it was imported from Canada. Government hoarded most of the incoming supplies, forcing newspaper owners to opt for Indian white paper, even that was rationed. Niyaz complained about the technical, economic, and aesthetic difficulties with this new paper. Previously imported paper was sold at 5.5 annas per pound. The new white paper was sold at 8 annas per pound.²⁸³ It testifies to the fact that the colonial government employed various methods to keep the press in check.

²⁸¹ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005, 4-6 May 1946.

²⁸² Ibid.,

²⁸³ Anna is a monetary unit used in Colonial India. One anna equals one-sixteenth of a rupee.

Another important set of events that marked Niyaz's stay in Lucknow was Shia-Sunni strife. Although the city witnessed sporadic riots in the past, however, it reached a new level in 1937-39.²⁸⁴ *Nigār* documented the events throughout the years as it transpired. In 1937, Various Sunni groups started petitioning the provincial government to allow them to organize *Madh-e Ṣaḥābah* marches.²⁸⁵ The aim was to instigate the Shia section of the population during the Muharram commemorations.²⁸⁶ It reached a peak in May 1939 when violence broke out between the two groups.²⁸⁷ Niyaz criticized the 'ulamā of both the communities as well as the Congress provincial government for igniting these riots.²⁸⁸

4.9 Conclusion

Nigār played an important role in the print sphere as 'ulamā, and common people participated in debate and discussion on key theological, social, and political issues. Niyaz, because of his controversial religious ideas and rivalry, did face backlash from the 'ulamā and was saved by the intervention of a government official at that time. *Nigār* didn't act out of a vacuum and should be understood in the context of the Urdu print sphere at that time. It interacted and was shaped by other magazines. Apart from theological beliefs, politics, and personal rivalries also shaped the magazine. It also demonstrates how religion, print, and politics intertwined in the functioning of colonial India.

²⁸⁴ Mushirul Hasan, "Traditional Rites and Contested Meanings: Sectarian Strife in Colonial Lucknow," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 9 (1996): 543–50.

²⁸⁵ *Madh-e* (one who praises) *Ṣaḥābah* (*Companions of the prophet*). Meaning one who praises the companions of the prophet.

²⁸⁶ Muharram is the first month of the Islamic Calendar. In this month, commemorations of the tragic event of Karbala, mostly by Shias.

²⁸⁷ For more on this: Hasan, Mushirul. "Traditional rites and contested meanings: sectarian strife in colonial Lucknow." *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 69, no. 1/2 (1995): 151–71. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41880855>.

²⁸⁸ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005, 4-7 June 1939.

The decade from 1937-47 is essential in understanding the rise of Muslim political consciousness and separatism. *Nigār* documented the era and focused on the fact how Congress ministries acted as a catalyst for alienation among Muslims. Niyaz faced difficulties as he tried to balance out his act of supporting Congress amidst the communal political climate. Niyaz wasn't the only person criticizing the Muslim League and its Pakistan scheme, most of *'ulamā* did it. However, what makes Niyaz's criticism unique was his alignment of critique within the framework of his reformist agenda. Urdu print media also offers a caveat to understanding the impact of colonial policies on print during the war. It can be used to reveal the complex relationship between colonial power, society, and religion.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Islamic modernism in South Asia has been described as this unique experience of local revivalist movements attempting to reinterpret Islam in light of the Western encounter. The process was accelerated with the consolidation of British rule in the 19th century, which resulted in the final extinction of the state structure of religious authority. It resulted in the birth of several revivalist and reformist movements that were forced to rethink Islam in light of immediate challenges. This thesis focused on one such strand of thought. It is carried through a detailed study of *Nigār* magazine. *Nigār* was edited by Niyaz Fatehpuri, who became famous for his religious views.

Niyaz Fatehpuri was the product of these times as he found himself amidst the revivalist spirit in the colonial context. *Nigār* established in 1922, started with an exclusive focus on culture, history, and literature and quickly became a hallmark of excellence in literary circles. However, within a few years after its launch, Niyaz would shift to religion and use *Nigār* as a vehicle of change to disseminate his ideas about Islam and Muslims in India. From the inception, Niyaz casted *Nigār* keeping in mind the West. The mission from the beginning was to reform the *qum* by playing the role the European literature did for its people. The content in *Nigār* attests to the fact as it featured translations of French and English literature, short stories (*afṣāna*) challenging popular themes and beliefs, debate of women, etc. Niyaz, through innovative methods such as *Istifṣār* section and quality content, attempted to make *Nigār* stand out among the other magazines. Niyaz was a prominent literary figure known for his literary criticism; however, he owed his popularity to his religious beliefs.

Given his personal experiences, since childhood, Niyaz didn't have a harmonious relationship with religion as it was taught in madrassas by '*ulamā*'. He wasn't able to reconcile the

“traditional Islam” with reason. This was very much in the spirit of the times. The Western rationality epitomized by colonial rule made traditional Islam look irrational and unreasonable. Niyaz didn’t focus on religion at the beginning of his reformer journey but soon found out that there couldn’t be any change in society without reforming religion. For Niyaz, the Western experience of enlightenment was universal and linear for every culture. He contrasted and casted Islam in this light, which had to go through this experience. Niyaz was taken in by the ‘decline’ or ‘stagnation’ paradigm. This formed the very root of his project. With this mindset, Niyaz attempted to read the Islamic past. Since the authority for religion, according to him, lied with ‘*ulamā*, they were seen as legitimate targets. Since, as a class, they supposedly held Muslims back from progress. The project for Niyaz was to salvage Muslims with a convincing system of thought that was based on reason and rationality. With this mindset, he sets out to reform Islam, making it consistent with Western reason and science for the Indian context. It is also important to keep in mind that Niyaz didn’t discard religion altogether. He was very understanding of what it meant for Indian society and its people.

Niyaz conveniently found refuge in preexisting naturalist thought of Syed Ahmed Khan. Like Syed Ahmed, he completely dismissed Islam's mystic and mythological aspects. Movements like *Ahl-e Qurān*, which refuted *Hadēs* altogether, also came to his benefit. To make his project robust, Niyaz attempted to trace the journey of Islam from its early days. The aim was to emphasize the difference between culture and core beliefs. In analyzing Islam, Niyaz reduced it to certain core beliefs that could be interpreted in any manner. The importance was given to ethics. Islam essentially became an ethical system to be emulated in a given culture. Niyaz attempted to read Islamic history keeping his project in mind. ‘*Ulamā* were at the center of criticism for allowing and aiding political interference in religious beliefs. The only uncorrupted element of Islam,

according to Niyaz, was the Qur'an. Niyaz interpreted it in a manner that fitted with his project. One important aspect of Niyaz's philosophy was the localization of Islam. He wanted to cut down any territorial imagination generated by it, and rather than emphasizing pan-Islamic sympathies and outer connections, he wanted Indian Muslims to look inward and reconcile Islamic core beliefs with local Indian culture. He praised Mustafa Kemal and Iranians for their reformist efforts throughout the publication of *Nigār*.

Niyaz shouldn't be read in isolation; his project attests to the colonial mentality and sense of decline felt by a section of Indian Muslim intelligentsia. His ideas and beliefs were sustained and inspired from people around the world. He keenly shared the updates taking place in Turkey, Iran, and the Arab world. For instance, when he learnt about the Azan (call to prayer) and Qur'anic reforms in Turkey, he was delighted. He learnt it from *Muṣṣavir* paper published from Egypt.²⁸⁹ He was convinced that religion in the future would have much less of a role in an era of nationalism and socialism. He constantly referred to and praised the achievements of the Soviet Union for keeping religion at bay. However, it didn't turn out to be the case; he couldn't grasp the significance of Islam and 'ulamā in this regard. It was visible in his frustration regarding the Khilafat movement and the Pakistan movement. Much in tune with his times, he advocated for a powerful state that would keep religion at bay. Mustafa Kemal and Stalin were seen as perfect examples. Since it was not possible in the Indian context (as Muslims were in minority), he advocated for the reform of Individuals who, under the light of reason, would challenge 'ulamā and their grasp on Islam. It is in this sense that Niyaz was very individualistic. It is important to remember that Niyaz wasn't completely in favor of unconditionally emulating Western society.

²⁸⁹ *Nigār*, Lucknow Shumara Number-005, 2-9 March 1932.

He was critical about it as he saw western progress individualistic and mechanical. He didn't unconditionally approve the idea of freedom envisaged by Western society. Freedom had to do with ethics and to shape an ideal society based on proper values. Freedom needed to be responsible. That is the reason Niyaz was critical of the Progressive Writers Association in South Asia for their flawed understanding of freedom. He was very much in favor of freedom for women, but that freedom came with constraints. A woman was at the root of his project, someone who should raise a family with the necessary values.

Niyaz was isolated in advocating his project as he was forced to shift from Bhopal to Lucknow. Constant pressure from a united group of '*ulamā*' also made his life difficult. However, in his critique of the Muslim League, he found support from other magazines. Medina magazine was an example in this regard. Not having the institutional support like Syed had from British or as '*Ulamā*' had in forms of their networks and Madrasa, Niyaz wasn't able to implement his program or even make an institution that would further perpetuate his philosophy.

Niyaz, through *Nigār* fiercely contested the rise of Muslim league and Pakistan scheme for practical and ideological reasons. The idea of emphasizing Muslim solidarity – a separate identity- was seen as a threat. A step back in time that would push Indian Muslims into oblivion. He constantly urged Muslims to support the Congress party to reduce the influence of Hindu extremists. Niyaz was a supporter of Congress, particularly the section represented by Nehru for his socialistic leaning. Gandhi was seen as an irrational dictator for his religious overtones and his control of the Congress party. Niyaz saw the Pakistan movement as a death blow to his imagined India as it would separate Muslims into two groups; one under Pakistan would be subjected to foreign interference and would face constant threats from India. The other group would live under

the perpetual domination of Hindu extremists who would be emboldened by the formation of Pakistan and would make a case for a Hindu India. Niyaz was prophetic in this regard.

Nigār was one of the prominent Urdu magazines in the 20th-century South Asia. It wasn't limited to religion and should be studied also for its literary offerings. It immensely contributed to the Urdu language and literature. It should be read as a pivot to understanding an important era in South Asian history. Apart from religious debates, other topics related to economics, politics, and palmistry were debated in this magazine. Its unique structure of including *Istifsārat* section made it stand out for among its peers. A person from as far as Burma would ask a general question which Niyaz would answer. Given the nature of the question and answer, other magazines would pick on it, resulting in a debate among magazines. *Nigār* was received well by a diverse section of Urdu speaking population, most of whom were Muslims. Particularly those who advocated for progress. The special issue attests it in 1963, written to honor Niyaz for his works. The diversity and prominence of writers is remarkable.

This thesis attempted to understand Islamic modernism in colonial South Asia through an Urdu magazine. Given the limited resources and time, this thesis focuses only on certain aspects of *Nigār*. It would be interesting to study *Nigār* with other Urdu magazines at the time to understand the mentality of people. Urdu print media hasn't received its due attention compared to the Hindi print sphere. In the future, further studies can be conducted in this regard.

APPENDIX

Special issues/issues of *Nigār*.

Date	Theme/Topic
Jan. 1928	Mōmin Number This issue was dedicated to one of the prominent Urdu classical poets, Mōmin Khan Mōmin. Mōmin was a contemporary of Ghalib. According to Farman Fathehpuri, it was because of this issue that Momin's popularity rose, and his name began to be taken with Mirza Ghalib. The essays in this issue are so well-researched that no book on the Poet can be written without referring to this issue of <i>Nigār</i>.
Jan. 1929	<i>Nigār</i> Number. This issue focuses on the first year of publication of the magazine. It features selected essays from the first year. By far and large, it features the writings of Niyaz.
Jan. 1930	Bahadur Shah Zafar Number. This issue focuses on the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar. The contributions critically examine the emperor's life, personality, and poetry.

Jan. 1931	Selected essays on ‘ilm <i>farāsat al-taḥrīr</i> (Graphology).
Jan. 1932	This issue focuses on the poetic sensibilities of Mirza Ghalib by analyzing his Persian and Urdu works. It is done completely by Abdul Bari Aasi, a renowned scholar on Ghalib.
Jan. 1933	<i>Mulāḥizāt</i> Number This issue analyses the <i>Mulāḥizāt</i> (Editorial) section of <i>Nigār</i> from 1926-31. <i>Mulāḥizāt</i> continued to be an important part of <i>Nigār</i>. Niyaz would use this space to comment on the topics in the present issue and what to expect in future issues while passing remarks on the country's current political, religious, and social issues.
Jan. 1934	This issue consists of two essays. The first essay, titled “ <i>Labūṇ kē dāstān</i> ” (the tale of Lips), is by Syed Yameen Hashmi. This 80-page essay gives the historical and literary context about the topic. The other essay is by Niyaz, in which he discusses his opinion on various general issues.
Jan. 1935	Urdu <i>Shā‘irē</i> (Poetry) Number This issue focuses on Urdu poetry. It gives historical and literary context to various genres of Urdu poetry. It compares various schools, i.e., Delhi, Bihar, Agra, Deccan, Lucknow, etc. The issue lists Urdu poets from all times and provides their biographical details.

Jan. 1936	<i>Hindi Shā‘irē</i> (Poetry) Number This issue is remarkable as it focuses on Hindi poetry. Niyaz attempts to give an overview of Hindi poetry, its debates and discussions, its history, movements, and biographical information of various Hindi poets. The audience is Urdu readers.
Jan. 1937	<i>Aṣḥāb-e Kahf</i>²⁹⁰ Number Compiled entirely by Niyaz, this issue consists of a drama titled <i>Aṣḥāb-e Kahf</i> and also includes other wide-ranging topics such as The Issue of Khilafat and Imamate,²⁹¹ Letters of Oscar Wilde etc.
Jan. 1938	<i>Islāmē Hind</i> Number. This issue, written entirely by Niyaz, discusses the rule and lives of various Muslim rulers in India.
Jan. 1939	<i>Muṣḥafē</i> Number.

²⁹⁰ *Aṣḥāb-e Kahf* means people of the cave – a reference to a chapter from the Qur’an.

²⁹¹ Khilafat refers to the institution of the Caliphate in Islam. Here, it is used as representation as compared to Imamate, which means leading. The contrasting terms refer to the historical political differences between Shia and Sunni schools of thought.

	This issue focuses on the Urdu poet <i>Muṣḥafē</i>. With essays and analysis from eminent poets Firakh Gorakhpuri and Majnou Gorakhpuri, it explores <i>Muṣḥafē</i>'s poetry and life. It is one of the first detailed works on the poet.
Jan. 1940	<i>Naẓēr</i> Number. It focuses on the works and life of the Urdu poet Naẓēr Ābādē. It promotes Nazeer as one of the finest Urdu poets. The issue is an example of how <i>Nigār</i> promoted and researched unpopular figures and brought them to the limelight.
Jan. 1941	In this issue, popular contemporary Urdu Ghazal poets have written about themselves and presented their works in the magazine. Various poets include Fani Badauni, Firakh Gorakhpuri, Yagana Changezi, Hasrat Mohani etc. This special issue offers insights into the mid-20th century Urdu Ghazal poetry. On the cover of <i>Nigār</i>, it is mentioned that this issue is copyright protected and no journal should copy it without permission.
Jan. 1942	This issue is connected to the 1941 special issue. Thirty-five prominent critiques assess the 1941 issue, making it one of the important documents in Urdu Ghazal's critique.
Jan. 1943	<i>Riyāz Khaērābādē</i> Number.

	One of the first documents to analyze the works and life of Riyāz <u>Khaērābādē</u>. Various eminent poets and critiques participate in this issue.
Jan. 1944	<i>Jadēd Shā‘irē</i> (Modern Poetry) Number This issue analyses the theme or movement of modern poetry. It examines its rules, aims, motivations, and inclinations. It also analyses the free verse western poetry.
Jan. 1945	Qur’an Number Niyaz, in this issue, answers Tisdall’s²⁹² criticism regarding the Qur’an. Niyaz urges the people to keep this issue as he expects backlash and reaction from the ‘<i>ulamā</i>. He also urges ‘<i>ulamā</i> to express their opinions on the same issue.
Jan. 1946	<i>Intiqād</i> (Critique) Number. Focuses on the essence and rules of literary criticism. Contributions are from eminent literary scholars, i.e. Ahtishaam Hussain, Majnooh Gorakhpuri, Dr. Showkat Sabzwari, etc.
Jan. 1947	Majdouline number.

²⁹² William St. Clair Tisdall was a British Anglican priest who served as the Secretary of the Church of England.

	This issue consists of a translation of Alphonse Karr's famous French novel “Sous les tilleuls” in Urdu. Hakim Rasheed Ahmad Mutasim translates it to Urdu from an Arabic version.
Jan. 1948	Pakistan Number Published four months after the partition of the Indian Subcontinent, in this issue, Niyaz urges the people of Pakistan to continue professing the values and practices of their ancestors, which included mercy and tolerance. Niyaz highlights Muslim rulers’ role in India, from Mohammad Bin Qasim to Bahadur Shah Zafar, and highlights that Islam was spread through humane values rather than the sword.
Jan. - Feb. 1949	<i>Afsāna</i> Number In this issue, Niyaz selects the top twenty-five <i>Afsāna</i> published in <i>Nigār</i> till 1948 and reproduces them in this issue.
Jan. - Feb. 1950	<i>Tanqēd</i> (criticism) Number This issue focuses on ‘<i>amlē Tanqēd</i> (criticism) in Urdu language and literature. It analyses various literary movements in Urdu and traces their evolution. Contributors include famous literary figures, including Azad Ansari, Meer Mamnon, Fani, Aatish, etc.

Jan. – Feb. 1951	This issue consists of two long essays. First is a translation of Mark Hinds’s “In Search of a Future”. The book analyses the worsened economic condition of Muslim countries of Iraq, Iran, Egypt, etc, and predicts a hopeful future for these countries. The second essay is by Niyaz. Niyaz analyses the history of revolutions and their failure in post-WW1 Muslim countries.
Jan. – Feb. 1952	<i>Ḥasrat</i> Number This number was dedicated to the famous Urdu poet Hasrat Mohani. Published a few months after his death, prominent literary figures of India contributed to this issue. They discuss his life and poetry.
Jan. – Feb. 1953	<i>Dāg</i> Number Dedicated to Urdu poet Daag Dehlvi. The discussion is on Daag as a Ghazal writer.
Jan. – Feb. 1954	<i>Farmānrawān-e Islām</i> (Rulers of Islam) number. This issue, written entirely by Niyaz, focuses on the history of Muslim kingdoms all over the world from the inception of Islam to the present day.
Jan. – Feb. 1955	<i>‘ulōm-e Islām-ō- ‘ulamā-e Islāmē</i> (Islamic sciences and <i>‘ulamā</i> of Islam)

	This issue, written entirely by Niyaz, focuses on the scientific achievements of Muslims from the inception of Islam to the present.
Jan. – Feb. 1956	<i>Khudā</i> (God) Number. The issue, entirely by Niyaz, tries to understand the concept of God in various religions and cultures across time and place.
Jan. 1957	<i>Aṣṇāf-e Sukhan</i> (Genres of poetry) Number. This issue discusses the evolution of various genres of Urdu poetry, including Ghazal, Masnavi, Qaseeda, Marsia, Rubayi, Nazm etc.
Jan. 1958	<i>Ma ‘lūmāt</i> (Information) Number. <i>Nigār</i> had a separate section for <i>Ma ‘lūmāt</i> which served to share informative facts about various things to the Urdu audience. However, this issue, entirely by Niyaz, consists of the <i>Ma ‘lūmāt</i>.
Jan. 1959	<i>Tanqēḥ-e Islām</i> (Inquiry into Islam) Number. In this issue, Niyaz discussed the concept of religion and its meaning for society and individuals. Niyaz assesses Islam and evaluates it among the various religions. This

	issue is the culmination of Niyaz's lifelong interest in examining the role of religion in the world.
Jan. 1960	Aisha Khan writes this issue. Khan discusses Niyaz's life and literary works. Through the selection of Niyaz's letters, he demonstrates his place in Urdu's romantic prose.
Jan. 1961	Ghalib Number. This issue, written entirely by Niyaz, focuses on the life and works of Mirza Ghalib. Niyaz critically examines Ghalib's Persian and Urdu poetry along the theme of modernness and innovation. He restates here his regard for Momin compared to Ghalib; he had mentioned the same in 1928's Momin Number.
Jan. 1962	Iqbal Number. This issue focuses on the life and works of Muhammed Iqbal.
Jan. 1963	Niyaz Number Published in two volumes, compiled by Farman Fatehpuri, this issue discusses the life and works of Niyaz Fatehpuri. Analyzing his role as a literary figure and his views on Islam, these two volumes provide complete detail about his life.

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