

Mushirul Hasan

## Intellectual History of Indian Islam



Mushirul Hasan was born in 1949. He received his Master's in History at the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, in 1969, and completed his Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge, England, in 1977. He is the author of four books, the latest of which is *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence* (1997). He has edited *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilisation* and *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, in two volumes. His latest volumes, edited during his fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg, are entitled *My Life a Fragment: Mohamed Ali's Autobiographical Writings* (1999), *Knowledge, Power & Politics: Educational Institutions in India* (1998) and *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond* (1998). He is Professor of Modern Indian History at Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia University. – Address: 38, Dakshinapuram, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 110067.

My friends in Delhi were not sure if it made sense for a historian of colonial India to accept an otherwise prestigious fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg. “Why Berlin?” I was asked. “For somebody who doesn't read or speak German, it makes little sense to spend such a long time in an unfamiliar land,” commented a friend.

I arrived at Tegel with many doubts and uncertainties. At the end of my stay, however, I reflect on the last ten months with considerable satisfaction. I was pleased to be in Berlin. I was particularly proud to be associated with an extremely lively and dynamic institution. A big thank you to the energetic Rector and his affable colleagues for making it possible. I was overwhelmed by their courtesy, kindness and friendship. They have truly earned everybody's respect and goodwill.

I experienced and benefited from the wide-ranging activities that took place at the Kolleg. The concerts, followed by excellent meals, offered much welcome relief from the drab and routine life of a scholar. The lectures, followed by discussions, were generally stimulating, though the format of the lectures could perhaps be a little less structured. Moreover,

some sections of the scholarly community in Berlin could also be invited to the lectures delivered by the Fellows.

In general, it was a rewarding experience to talk to so many scholars who were drawn from different countries and from different disciplines. After their initial diffidence, most of my colleagues turned out to be remarkably friendly and amiable, more so after the Thursday meals when the French red wines made communication so much more easier. We often had heated discussion on a wide variety of issues, including the future of the Palestinian struggle, India's nuclear explosion, and France's victory over Israel (which did not amuse Françoise) in the World Cup.

Playing table tennis after lunch was most enjoyable, for it helped to create a sense of camaraderie which is not always the easiest thing to achieve. Yes, it was most satisfying for me to emerge as the 'unofficial' champion, a champion who did not receive a medal or a trophy. I did shed a few tears for Paolo Mancosu, Wolf Biermann, Stephan Leibfried, Tonio Hölscher and Ryôsuke Ohashi, who failed in their bid to challenge my supremacy. My only regret is that Perry Anderson was not persuaded to join us.

Let me now share with you a brief resume of my academic activities.

Soon after my arrival in Berlin, I attended a conference held at the Centre for Modern Oriental Studies in Berlin. In addition, I lectured at the Islam and Modernity Group in the Wissenschaftskolleg, the Department of Anthropology at the Free University in Berlin, and the South Asian Institute in Heidelberg. It was fun to attend a conference on "Unity in Diversity" in South Africa; and to lecture at the Department of Comparative Religion, University of Amsterdam; the Department of History, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow; the Department of Sociology, Edinburgh; and the Royal Asiatic Society in London.

Much of these lectures related to a variety of themes of my book project: The intellectual history of Islam in India from 1900–1947. The book is nowhere near completion, though my exchanges with colleagues in Germany and elsewhere have been a source of great help.

Meanwhile, I published some papers in Indian and Italian journals and edited two volumes on *Knowledge, Power and Politics: Educational Institutions in India* and *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond*. Much of the work on these books was done at the Kolleg. I was pleased they were published in June this year, just a month before the completion of the academic term.

Thanks to the marvellous support extended by Elissa Linke of the *Fellow-Dienste*, I was able to edit and annotate a major text on Muslim identity in colonial India. The text was written by Mohamed Ali, a leading

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figure in Indian politics and the chief ideologue of pan-Islamism in the early 1920s. The book has been published in February 1999.

One of my major scholarly concerns has been to analyse the colonial and nationalist narratives on Islam and the Muslim communities in India. I pursued this theme, in collaboration with my colleague in Delhi, Dr M. Asaduddin, with the aid of short stories written in a number of Indian languages. The idea behind the book is to examine, over time and space, the images of Indian Islam and its followers in the literary sources, and to analyse how Muslim identity (or identities) has been historically constructed. This work has been accepted for publication by the Oxford University Press in Delhi.

I am glad the Kolleg offered the facilities for me to complete this book.

If there is life after death, I would like to return to the Wallotstrasse 19. I would still like to play table tennis with Paolo, Wolf, Stephan, Tonio and Ryôsuke. But, Mr Rector, we could do with a new table.

Let me conclude with an Urdu couplet that nobody will understand.

*Ab to jaate hai maikade se Mir  
Phir milenge agar Khuda laya.*