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Establishing the Superiority of Religious Leaders & Deities in Paintings: Hinduism-Buddhism- Sikhism

Resham Rafiq
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Course: 19th Century Sikh Wall Paintings in the Punjab

03/04/2014

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I- Introduction – Sikh Wall Paintings

The Sikh ruler, Maharaja Ranjit Singh reigned over Punjab for forty years, from 1799 to 1839 AD. In these four decades of relative peace, Punjab enjoyed various artistic developments. Sikhism had royal patronage and the Sikhs started taking interest in exploring their artistic expressions in addition to devoting themselves to the glorification of their *gurdwaras* and *havelis*. The dawn of the 19th century saw the development of the art of painting as well. The power and wealth of Ranjit Singh's empire attracted the surrounding *Pahari* painters. Wall painting started to be employed widely to embellish *havelis*, *gurdwaras*, *dharamshalas*, and *akharas* (centers of learning), very little of which survives (Singh, 2007). The focus of this paper is the royal abode of the Sikh ruler – the Sheesh Mahal in the Lahore Fort. The Sheesh Mahal houses twelve frescoes and most of them depict stories from the life of Krishna, called *Krishna-leela*. The particular painting this paper will focus on is an illustration of the miraculous event 'Gajendra Moksha'. Through the course of the paper, the concept of how a new religious ideal attempts to undermine a previous religious concept through the usage of imagery will be discussed with a focus on two other religions that originated in India - Buddhism and Sikhism. The discussion that follows will examine how the notion of establishing superiority of one religious concept or personality over another, is a common theme in the subcontinent and a frequently used one in paintings.

The wall paintings in the Sheesh Mahal are done in the fresco-secco or the dry plaster technique (as opposed to fresco buono), where the brick walls are plastered with a mixture containing lime, which is then smoothed out. Once the surface is almost dry, the design is transferred onto it, and then painted. The frescoes in the Sheesh Mahal are placed above the dado level in niches surrounded by *aina kari*. Their placement is such that walking around, the

Maharaja could admire the beauty of these paintings, which is among the possible reasons why he commissioned them.

II- *Gajendra Moksha* – Formal Analysis

Moving on to the focus of this paper, the *Gajendra Moksha* painting, it is important to analyze the overall composition and placement of figures within the given space. The central area is dedicated to the main protagonists of the story, and we observe that the white elephant is not drawn in realistic proportions compared to the human figures in the composition, highlighting the relative importance of the Hindu deity over the white elephant hence employing the hierarchy of scale. The ground is rendered in deep red, surrounded by vegetation and the water body is shown in a pale gray shade. A lavish amount of gold applied on various parts, especially on Vishnu's *dhoti*, again highlighting the importance of his presence in the story in addition to being evidence of the riches of Ranjit Singh's empire. Furthermore, we see some European sensibilities here in terms of creating an illusion of depth by rendering buildings and the herd of elephants decreasing in size as they move away in the background [Plate 1].

Contextual Analysis

Before we delve into the contextual analysis, it is essential to understand the underlying message in the painting by briefly studying a few concepts of the Vedic religion: "Among the Aryan deities was Indra...the Asian warrior, god of the atmosphere and thunder, chief of the Vedic gods. He is usually represented riding an elephant *Airavata*, (and with) the age-old Indian symbol of the swollen raincloud" and wields a lightning thunderbolt called *vajra* (Dunstan, 2005). Vedic religion laid the foundations for modern Hinduism. One of the main gods in this shift was Brahma, known as the creator in the late Vedic period. Brahma was later eclipsed by Vishnu,

even though his caste system remained very much a part of Hinduism. Today, very few people worship Brahma as the supreme god, nonetheless, his importance is still such that no temple dedicated to Vishnu or Shiva is void of his image. Somewhere around 200 BC, the primary Vedic gods like Indra and Agni faded away to make way for the most widely worshipped Trinity or Trimurti of modern Hinduism: Brahma, Vishnu & Shiva (Rowland, 1971).

The shift in the relative importance of gods from the Vedic times to what became a part of modern Hinduism is the major theme in the painting of *Gajendra Moksha*. Gajendra, the elephant, was a king called Indraymna of Pandya, a great devotee of Lord Vishnu, in his earlier life. Owing to a curse by an enraged sage Agastya, he had to take birth in the form of an elephant. The crocodile, a king called Huhu in his last life, had also once managed to enrage a sage, causing him to become a crocodile. Upon his plea for pardon, the sage tells him that he would be liberated from the cycle of birth & death when Gajendra would be saved by Vishnu. (Sinha, 2013) This legend is narrated in the *Bhagavata Purana* (8.2-4). It tells of “the elephant Gajendra’s long, losing battle with a crocodile, Gajendra’s despair and plea for help, and Vishnu’s sudden appearance in the nick of time to save the elephant by slaying the crocodile” (Doniger, 1993). The Sheesh Mahal fresco depicts this rescue of Gajendra, who is stuck in the strong clutches of the crocodile. Vishnu is shown coming to the rescue of Gajendra with all his attributes; the club (power of knowledge), the conch shell (origins of existence), the *chakra* (powers of creation and destruction) and the lotus (Chaturvedi, 2006). Behind him, we can see his *vahana*, the mythical *Garuda* [Plates 1 & 2].

Interpretation

On the face of it, the painting merely signifies one of Vishnu's many miraculous adventures, proving his superiority as a god and establishing his undeniable power. But the painting also has an underlying mockery of the Vedic god, Indra. The white elephant in the fresco in the Sheesh Mahal under discussion could be interpreted as a reference to Indra. The fact that the elephant has to rely on Vishnu to be saved depicts the superiority of Vishnu over the previous god. During the Vedic times, Indra was considered the god of all gods, the mightiest of them all. His might is such that "He bears up or stretches out earth and sky, even that he has created heaven and earth. He is a monarch supreme among the gods, the lord of all beings, immeasurable and irresistible of power" (Barnett, 1992). The all-powerful and mighty god, the lord of all gods, worshipped vehemently in the past, is now being shown as inferior to Vishnu. And Vishnu, in the painting, is seen charging forward with all his force to help save the troubled and helpless white elephant.

A similar theme is also presented in another painting in which Krishna effortlessly holds the Mount *Gavardhan* on his little finger while a furious but helpless Indra astride a white elephant in the upper portion is much smaller in size and significance [Plate 3]. One of the Sheesh Mahal frescoes is based on this theme though Indra cannot be seen probably because of the painting's deteriorated state [Plate 4]. Hinduism is not the only religion where superiority of a particular religious ideal over the other is depicted in paintings and this paper is an attempt to trace similar themes followed in other religious streams.

III- *Buddha-Devadatta* – Formal & Contextual Analysis

Analyzing Buddhist imagery, Lal Mani Joshi in *Studies in Buddhist Culture in India*, in order to narrate the vicious disputes among the various Buddhist sects quotes a Chinese traveler Yuan

Chwang, who visited India in 629-645 AD. Buddhism, at this point, was no longer one system but had become an amalgamation of several different schools, sects and communities. Buddha was concerned by the looming hazard of internal disunity (*Sanghabheda*) and had condemned it as one of the five deadly sins. However, the history of schism in Buddhism dates back to the time of the Buddha himself. For instance Devadatta, once Buddha's close companion and a devout follower revolted against the Sangha. As a consequence his followers Shantideva refuted the systems and Joshi sums it up by stating that: "In short, the controversies among the Buddhists were as bitter as those between the Buddhists and non-Buddhists" (Joshi, 1967).

Controversies stem at various stages during the development of any religion. Enemies of the religious leaders, in a struggle to propagate their ideas, indulge in activities against these religious heads. Around eight years before Buddha's death, Devadatta became eager for power and soon conceived the idea of taking over Buddha's place as leader. He is known to have asked Buddha to allow him to lead the 'Order of the Monks,' to which Buddha refused and issued a proclamation that anything done by Devadatta was not to be recognized by Buddha, the 'Doctrine' or the 'Order'. Devadatta, subsequently, started making attempts to kill Buddha. One of these attempts was the hurling of a huge rock down while Buddha was walking in the shade of *Gijjhakuta* Hill. Buddha sustained only minor injuries as the rock was stopped by two peaks. This incident is depicted in various paintings of the time. Attached at the end of this paper is Plate 5, in which we see Devadatta pushing a stone off the edge of the hill, below which, Buddha happens to be walking by (Matsunami 329-334). Various pictorial renditions of this event are attached in the appendix, and they all portray the same idea. Another one of Devadatta's attempts was letting loose the fierce elephant, *Nalagiri* on the road by which Buddha was to come. Buddha managed to subdue the raging elephant with love and affection (to which Devadatta had

administered alcohol to make it lose self control). The theme *Subjugation of Nalagiri* is also found in the Ajanta cave paintings [Plate 6] (Thomas, 132-137).

Interpretation

As with the *Gajendra Moksha* image, there is an underlying theme of proving the superiority of one religious figure or idea over the other. We see here that Buddha is shown superior to Devadatta; Devadatta manages to unleash an enraged drunk elephant on Buddha and Buddha with his affection and spirituality manages to subdue the elephant in a peaceful manner. Even with the hurling of the stone example, we see that the Buddha manages to escape any serious injuries. These depictions emphasize the superior nature of Buddha for the viewers of these images. From the perspective of the onlookers, the devotees of Buddha, or the followers and accomplices of Devadatta and the general public, the images project a greater status for Buddha and sheds negative light on Devadatta. Imagery is used to show integrity and righteousness in Buddha's personality, representing him as someone who has the ability to maintain calm even in the face of the most unpleasant of situations. On the other hand, Devadatta is shown as a dissatisfied, jealous and infuriated wrong-doer, who is out to harm the godly Buddha.

In the image [Plate 7] we see Buddha walking with a calm and composed posture, with just his right hand raised and face turned towards the raging elephant. The effect of the raging elephant on any average human being is shown by the effect it has on the woman near the elephant, who, in fear, has dropped everything, including her child and seems to be in a hasty movement to get away from the overbearing presence of the elephant. In contrast to that, Buddha's reaction to the elephant can be interpreted as his faith in the fact that he can control the situation and subdue the elephant without the need for panic and chaos. His calm, yet concerned

expression reflects his gentle nature. On the extreme right, we see the disciplined elephant, lying at Buddha's feet, while Buddha again stands poised with a halo around his head, representing his enlightened status.

IV- *Guru Nanak & Baba Wali Qadhari* – Formal & Contextual Analysis

We shall now identify similar practices in nineteenth century Sikh iconography. Sikh-Muslim relations remained somewhat turbulent throughout the time of the ten gurus, especially with their growing tensions with the Mughals authorities. During the period between Guru Nanak and Guru Arjun, there was no conflict between Sikh and Mughal rulers. However, the Fifth Guru of the Sikh faith was punished for an uprising against the Mughal Emperor Jahangir and was subsequently tortured to death in 1606. This initiated animosity between the two religions which developed further under the reign of the future Sikh Gurus. The ninth Guru was executed by Aurangzeb in 1675 for refusing to accept Islam and Guru Gobind Singh's two sons were cruelly killed by the Mughal Governor of Sirhind.

Even though the general Sikh-Muslim relations were strained, it must be noted that Guru Nanak was fairly peaceful towards Muslims and Islam. Dr. Muhammad Jahangir Tamimi's work focuses on the cultural and religious setting of India that has had a tendency of not letting newer religious ideas emerge and prosper easily. Given the atmosphere where inter-religious harmony was not fostered, the author speaks of the all encompassing nature of Guru Nanak's teachings. Mohsin Fani, a seventeenth century Persian historian and author of *Dabistan-e Mazahib* who conducted religious studies in India and was a friend of the sixth Sikh Guru Hargobind Singh, notes that Guru Nanak believed in the some ideas propagated by Islam and its Prophet (PBUH), and was against idol worship and caste systems (Tamimi, 316-319). Even though Guru Nanak

was a general supporter of the ideas of piety and humility that Islam proposed, he vehemently attacked those Sufi *shaikhs* who were egoist and thought too much about themselves. Sunita Puri discusses these Muslim *shaikhs* in the following words:

“Presuming to be sure of his own place of honor with God, the sheikh gave assurance to others as well, he was like a mouse which was itself too big for the whole and yet tied a winnowing basket (*chajji*) to its tail” (Puri, 25-27).

In Guru Nanak’s opinion, these were imposters, particularly the *qalandars*, who made a living off religion. Guru Nanak disapproved of all the Sufi saints who got social recognition through mass mobilization rather than through humility and piety (Puri, 25-27). His dismay with Muslim Sufis is an underlying theme in the images under discussion here. One such Sufi is presented as Wali Qadhari of Hasan Abdal, central to the legend of *Panja Sahib*.

In April of every year, *Panja Sahib* in Hasan Abdal attracts thousands of Sikh devotees from all over the world to celebrate the birth of *Khalsa* (the pure). *Panja*, translates to the five fingers of the hand and *Sahib* is a term reserved for the most revered Sikh personalities. The story of *Panja Sahib* is about Wali Qadhari, a saint, who had heard of Guru Nanak and his rapidly spreading popularity. Some of the Wali’s own disciples spoke very highly of the Guru’s spiritual greatness, which filled him with jealousy. He vowed to teach them a lesson by cutting off their water supply and making them suffer. People went to him and begged him to let the spring water flow down as before. He refused to listen to them, and pointing to Guru Nanak, he said, “Go to him whom you have begun to prefer over me.” Guru Nanak, upon hearing this, wished to cure the Wali of his arrogance and pride, and provide relief to the people. The Guru sent Bhai Mardana, his constant companion, who was awfully thirsty up to the hill to ask the

Wali for water in the name of Allah. Even then, Wali refused. Instead, he haughtily said to Bhai Mardana, “Go to him who has sent you. If he really does possess the powers which the people think he has, let him start another spring. If he has no such powers, tell him to give up deceiving people, come to me in person, and beg to be forgiven”. After several such attempts to get the Wali to give up, the Guru saying “*Sat Kartar*” lifted a stone and asked Mardana to dig a little. Mardana obeyed, and soon a stream of cool water flowed from that place. Simultaneously, Wali Qadhari’s stream of water ceased to flow. The people were therefore, released from the Wali’s tyranny (Hemkunt, 98-99).

Qadhari saw this happening from the hilltop and annoyed at the achievement of a miracle by Guru Nanak, and further angered by his dried up stream, pushed a large boulder down the hill in the direction of the Guru in hopes of crushing the Guru and the people around him [Plate 8 & 9]. People around the Guru panicked and started moving away but Guru Nanak maintained his ground and remained calm. When the boulder came close to him, he raised his right hand to stop the rock and effortlessly managed to halt the huge boulder with just this motion and the Guru’s hand left a deep imprint in the stone. With this, the Wali needing no further proof of the Guru’s supremacy, came down and joined the devotees.

Interpretation

This episode and its use in paintings is an example that shows how Guru Nanak’s power is unmatched, in comparison with that of another religious figure, a Muslim Sufi *shaikh*.

Reinforcing the argument above, the Guru exhibited his contempt for saints and *pirs* who claimed to have occult powers. He showed his disapproval of Wali Qadhari and Hamza Gaus of Sialkot (another saint featured in several paintings) who were proud of their powers and were not

pious at all. The idea of ‘teaching a lesson’ to someone who is shown as intellectually inferior and does not understand the concept of greater well-being of the humanity, again falls in line with the discussion of establishing superiority of certain religious figures.

V- Conclusion

India is a land of many religions. Some originated here, such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, whereas some, like Islam, were brought about by the advent of outside individuals. With such great diversity, there is bound to be controversy. Various religious ideas contradict each other and therefore, become a cause for conflict and disagreements. Whether it is concepts within the realm of the same religion, or comparative differences between more than one religions, the sensitive nature of the matter does not allow a smooth resolution of the issue. As a result of this, we see the differentiation between superior and inferior, depicted in various religions, utilizing the powerful tool of pictorial representation. This paper analyzed the Sikh wall painting showing the narrative of “*Gajendra Moksha*” from the Sheesh Mahal, Lahore fort and discussed its iconology to understand the preference of one religious ideal over the other. To draw comparisons with other religions and to investigate this idea of superior and preferential treatment of some religious concepts or personalities over the others, Buddhist paintings and some of their themes were presented. The conflict between Buddha and Devadatta was used to emphasize the greater stature of Buddha. Another parallel was drawn by comparing the concept of superiority in Sikhism to examine the existence of this idea within the development and spread of this religion as well. The image chosen for this purpose was that of Guru Nanak teaching a lesson to a Muslim saint. Again we see that the prominent theme here is that of the

Guru's greatness and his elevated standing as compared to the Muslim saint, who is shown as being clearly misguided. Through this analysis, it can be established that within the main Indian religions (religions that originated in India) namely Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, the concept of representing preferred deities or leaders in a superior way through the use of imagery, is a widely practiced notion. Kabir, the fifteenth century Bhakti poet sums up the diversity of religion in India beautifully in the following words:

“The Jogi cries: Gorakh, Gorakh!
 The Hindu utters the name of Ram
 The Muslim repeats: God is One!
 But the Lord of Kabir pervades all.”

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PLATES



Plate 1



Plate 2

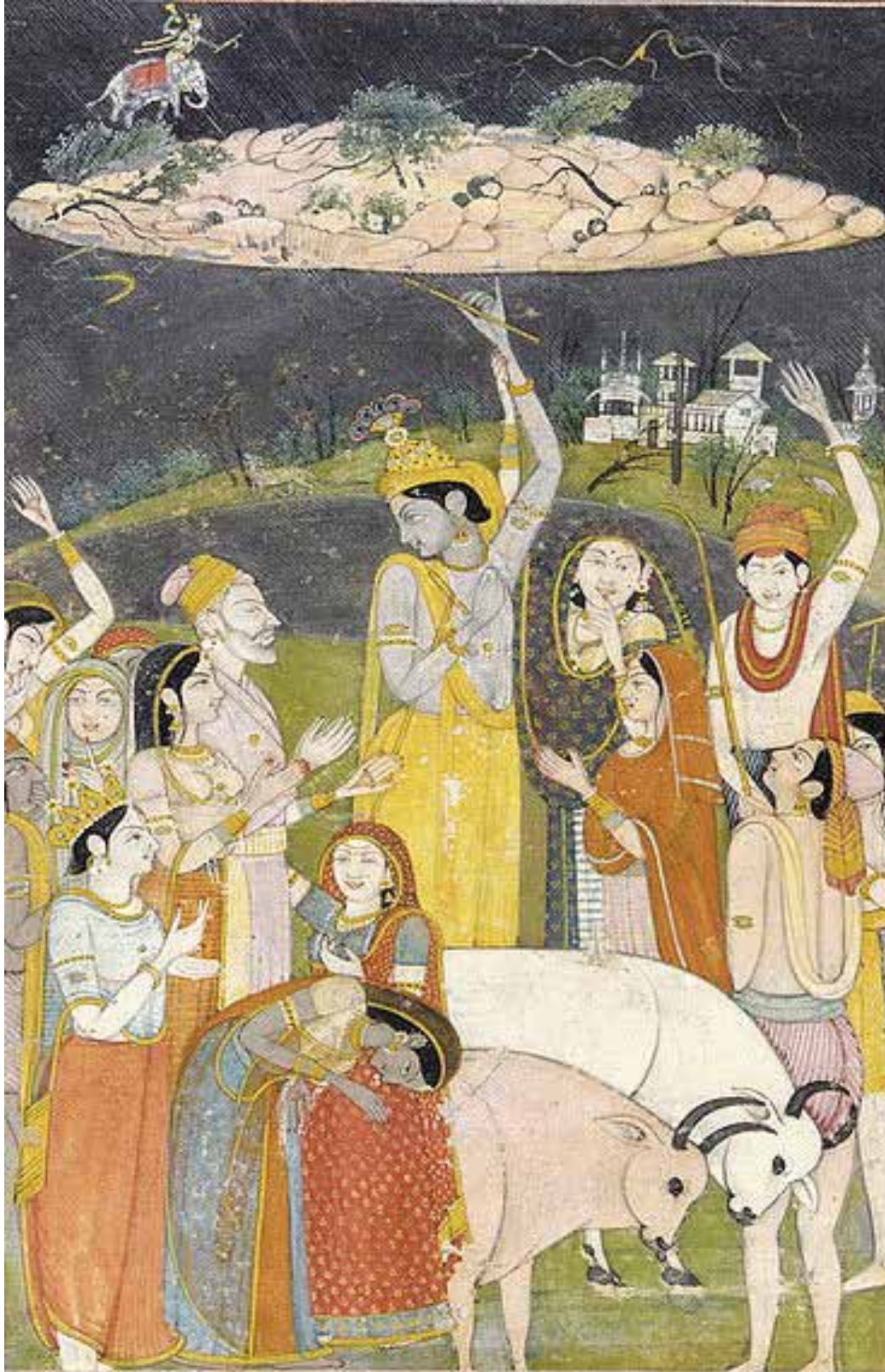


Plate 3



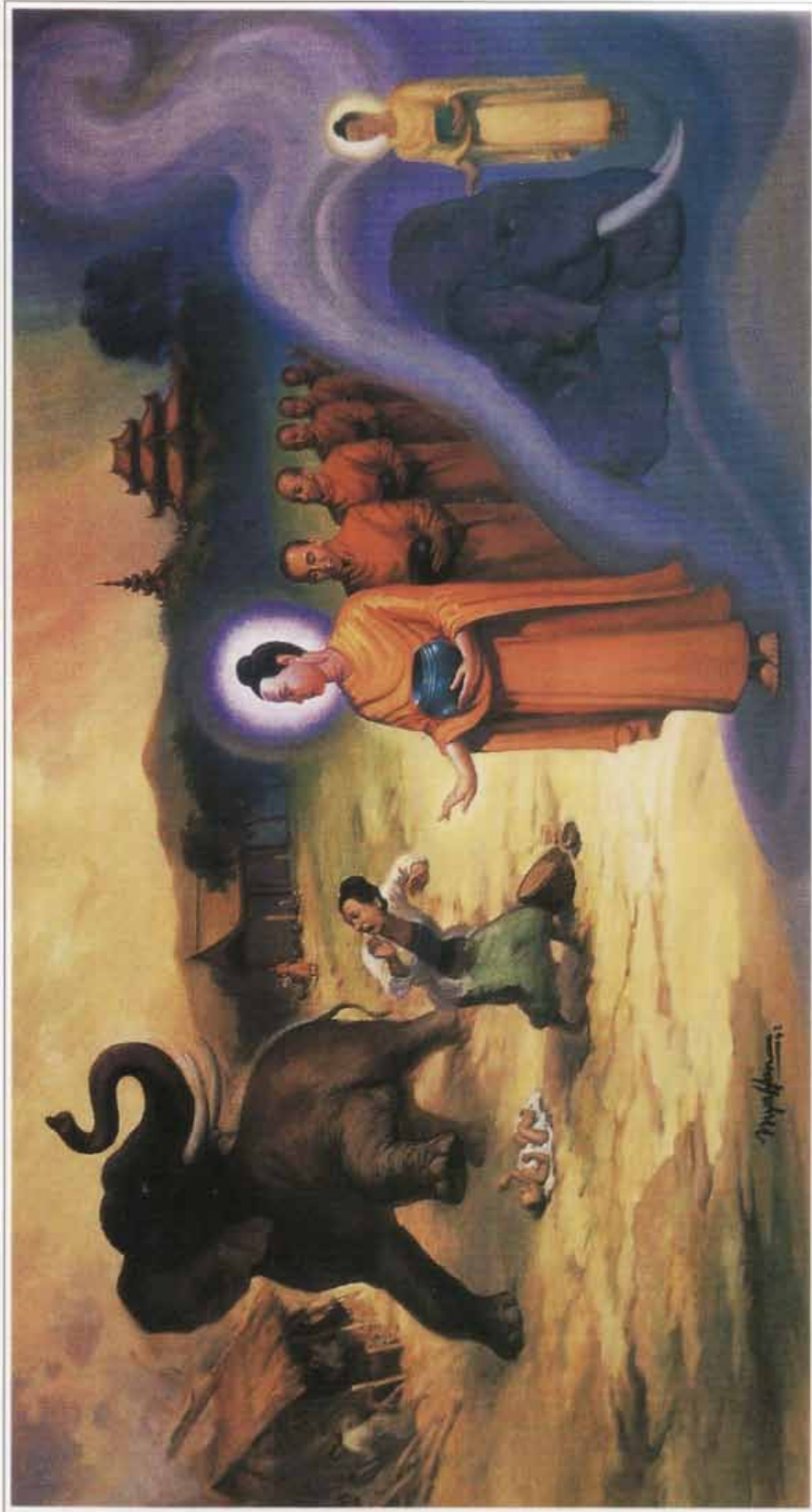
Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



The Buddha subduing the fierce, drunken elephant, Nalagiri; released by the wicked Devadatta.

Plate 7

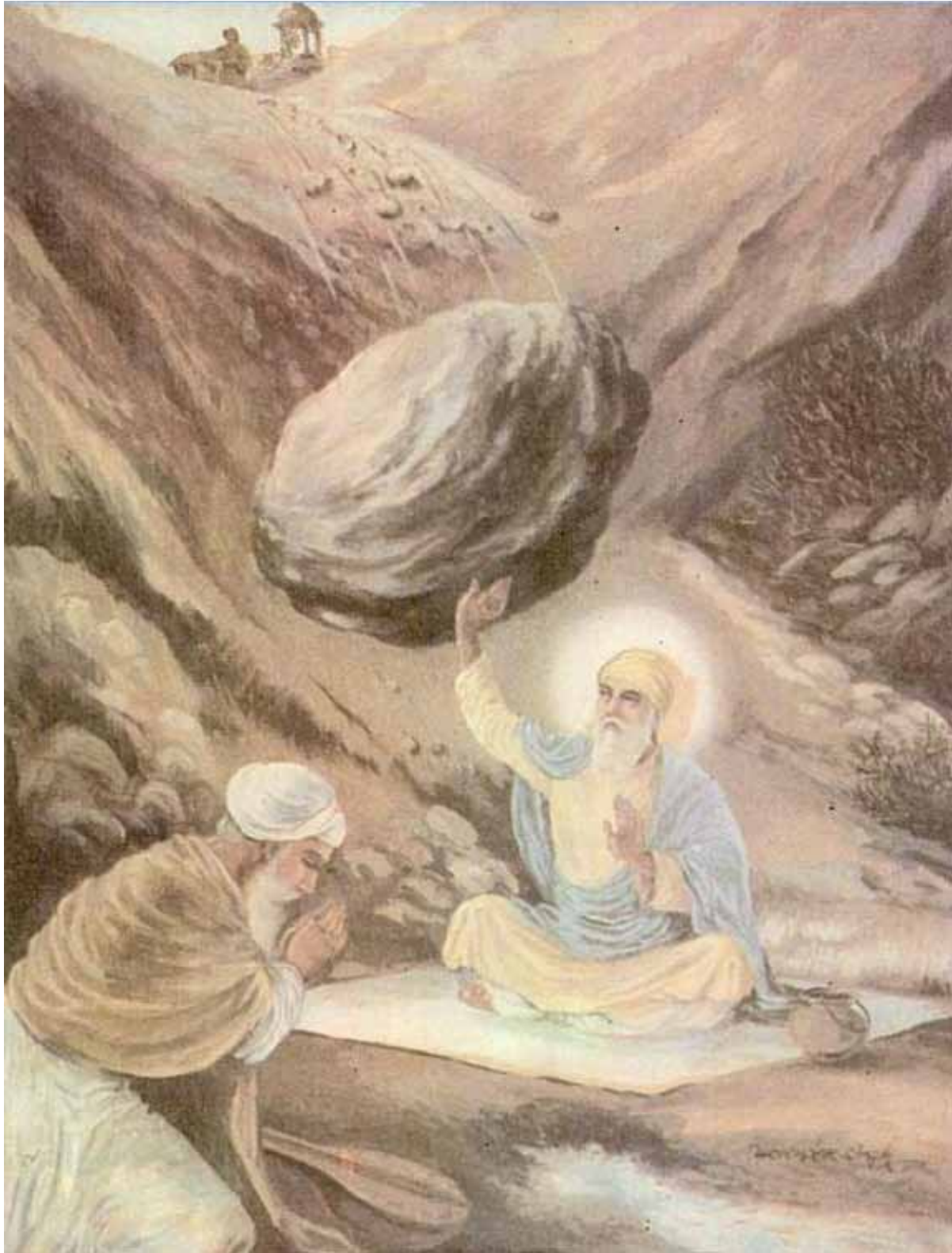


Plate 8



Plate 9

Maidah Khalid

Essam Fahim

HIST 334

Final Essay

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Introduction

The entire Islamic intellectual tradition can be envisaged as a piecemeal response-galvanized by key transformations in the material conditions of the *Ummah*- to the ultimate concern of the ulema regarding correct belief and action, and their engagement with revelation to discover the former. However, belief as merely a set of theoretical propositions was alien to the Quranic worldview, which instead stressed faith-in- action.¹ Such faith implied a “keen and vivid awareness of a God who enjoins good and forbids evil”², thus naturally necessitating urgent, practical engagement. This simplistic, pragmatic practicality was first compelled into a creedal transformation, with respect to the interplay of faith and human deeds, by the religious and political turmoil caused by the climactic conflict between the two rightly guided Caliphs- Uthman and Ali. The pious Medinese ulema, helplessness in the affair, after initially adopting a politically neutral stance, eventually, in order to thwart further disruption and dissention, theologically endorsed pure determinism, which naturally became a legitimizing tool for the ruling Umayyads. Aside from internal discord, within regions outside the comparatively isolated Hejaz, practical piety was further molested by an assortment of foreign heretical theories and ideas, encouraging philosophical, religious and moral speculation³. Thus it was internal struggle that conjured reflective tendencies within Islam and outside influences that bestowed such propensities with the speculative impulse. Indeed it was within this regional context that the Mutazalia emerged, who in their ferocious defense of Islam, became discontented with the

¹ Rahman, Fazlur, “Dialectical Theology and the Development of Dogma” *Islam*, 1st Ed., 85.

² Rahman, Fazlur, “Dialectical Theology and the Development of Dogma” *Islam*, 1st Ed., 85.

³ Rahman, Fazlur, “Dialectical Theology and the Development of Dogma” *Islam*, 1st Ed., 87.

inadequacy of the pietistic programs presented by Medinese figures such as Hassan-al-Basra, and instead developed a thoroughly systematic mechanism of establishing Islamic doctrine. Although their program was remarkably successful against external, speculative assaults, within Islam, the Mutazalia soon transgressed the bounds of traditionalism with their rigid Hellenistic rationalism, effectuating their eventual demise.⁴

As stated earlier, within the Quranic worldview, faith and action are intrinsically related, and thus systematic reasoning regarding doctrine not only led to knowledge of God but moreover necessitated a covenantal encounter with the Him resulting in the imposition of divine sovereignty on every consciousness. It is this covenant between the Creator-Lord and the subordinate-creature that necessitated the Shariah-mindedness of the ulema, who attempted to provide the “totality of specific terms that the creature must fulfill as party to this covenant”⁵. Due to the in-built all-pervasive, egalitarian and drastically universalistic attitude of Islam, such total transformation implied religious contouring of *all* aspects of society- unlike Christianity and Buddhism, where such a scheme remained confined to the monastic minority.⁶ The challenge for the early legists was to discover a pattern of social arrangement that could sufficiently balance the Islamic emphasis on equality and individual, unmediated human responsibility before God on the one hand, with the concept of the *Ummah*, the community of the faithful, on the other. There was thus the need for common social institutions that could hold the Muslims together without absolving any particular individual, or group, from direct accountability.⁷ Secondly, there was the desire amongst the ulema to preserve the uniformity of the original Medinan community, perfectly aligned towards the godly life, in lieu of the unrelenting expansion of the *Ummah*. Indeed it was this insistence upon standardization that ultimately led to the development of the entire Hadith corpus during the Marwani times. Moreover, as personal contact diminished, the

⁴ Rahman, Fazlur, “Dialectical Theology and the Development of Dogma” *Islam*, 1st Ed., 88-89.

⁵ Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 6 (Weiss, Bernard , “Divine Sovereignty and Human Subordination” *The Spirit of Islamic Law*,24-38)

⁶ Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 4(Hodgson, Marshall, “The Shar‘i Islamic Vision, c. 750-945” *The Venture of Islam, Volume I: The Classical Age of Islam*, 315-358.

⁷ Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 4(Hodgson, Marshall, “The Shar‘i Islamic Vision, c. 750-945” *The Venture of Islam, Volume I: The Classical Age of Islam*, 315-358.

search of *ilm* knowledge from reputable, pious Muslims in various Islamic centers became imperative. During the Abbasi Period however, with further expansion, the informal system of personal quest with pious mentors no longer sufficed. The program had to thus be institutionalized, *ijma* completely substituted with *hadith* and the ulema themselves transformed into a distinct, specialist class.⁸ Which later amalgamated into various *madahib*, or schools, with varying interpretations of divine law-four of these schools have gained widespread recognition within the Sunni tradition⁹

Kalam

As previously mentioned, the Islamic tradition assumed a particularly straightforward relationship with God, in the form of a covenantal encounter. Indeed in the “eyes of a small but persistent margin”¹⁰, such simplicity implied a complete negation of theology or *Kalam* in its entirety. The vast majority of ulema, did however, acknowledge that inherent within the Quranic revelation itself were certain implicit tensions that not only sanctioned abstract intellectual thought, but without the presence of an overarching hierarchal authority, also validated profound differences in law, mysticism and doctrine.¹¹ Indeed it was the key Quranic tension regarding reason (*aql*) and revelation (*naql*) in acquiring knowledge of God that distinguished the Kalam tradition from other Islamic disciplines that also dealt with the study of God i.e. Sufism¹². In addition to the traditional sources of the Quran and the Hadith, the *Mutaqalimun* employed their own reasoning- albeit acknowledging its limitations with respect to certain religious issues i.e. eschatology- in attempting to approximate Divine Will. One of the primary bones of contention pertaining to the actual nature of God on the other hand, was the fundamental Quranic tension between His transcendence (*tanzih*) and immanence (*tasbih*).¹³ Moreover, the status of grave sinners, existence of God’s attributes and human free will versus predestination were other

⁸ Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 4(Hodgson, Marshall, “The Shar‘i Islamic Vision, c. 750-945” *The Venture of Islam, Volume I: The Classical Age of Islam*, 315-358.

⁹ Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 5

¹⁰ Winter, Timothy, “Introduction”, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 5.

¹¹ Winter, Timothy, “Introduction”, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 7.

¹² Winter, Timothy, “Introduction”, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 10.

¹³ Winter, Timothy, “Introduction”, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 8.

particularly salient points of discussion. The following section will elucidate the diverging positions of the primary theological schools regarding these issues of revelation, broadly speaking.

One of the first theological schools, discussed in the introduction, to emerge within the Islamic Intellectual tradition, were the Mutazalites. The central principle of this rationalistic group, often regarded as the first philosophers of Islam, was the Unity of God. According to the Mutazalia, the affirmation of God's oneness- not only with respect to his uniqueness but also with regards to his transcendence beyond any semblance of multiplicity- was of the utmost consequence.¹⁴ It is for this very reason, that within the Mutazalite doctrine, God's numerous attributes were denied any independent, distinct reality from his essence. Despite internal differences, the Mutazalites generally endorsed the theory that God connects certain attributes to atomic bodies- these atoms are indivisible bearers of properties which are distinct from the atoms themselves. According to the Mutazalites, with respect to God however, since he is unlike his creation, this dichotomy between essence and attribute ceases to exist.¹⁵ The dissociation of attributes from essence however presented another problem pertaining to the createdness of the Quran. The Mutazalites claimed that since the Quran was regarded as the Word of God, it too was an attribute of the All-Mighty, and thus ceased to possess a separate, co-eternal existence like him, for that would imply a dualism that was thoroughly in opposition to the Oneness and Unity of the All-Mighty, thereby leading to *shirk* or 'associating partners with God'. It thus becomes evident how a seemingly abstract intellectual debate regarding the createdness of the Quran, had terribly real, practical consequences for Muslims. Indeed it was precisely because of this Mutazalite doctrine that al-Mamun persecuted and imprisoned all those that diverged from this stance, and thus were *mushrikun*¹⁶ or polytheists-amongst those detained included Imam ibn Hanbal.¹⁷

¹⁴ Adamson, Peter, "121 - This is a Test: The Mutazalites", *History of Philosophy without Any Gaps*.

¹⁵ Adamson, Peter, "121 - This is a Test: The Mutazalites", *History of Philosophy without Any Gaps*.

¹⁶ Adamson, Peter, "121 - This is a Test: The Mutazalites", *History of Philosophy without Any Gaps*.

¹⁷ Blankship, Khalid, "The Early Creed", *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 51.

The second key principle of the Mutazalite doctrine pertained to the Justice of God. Their basic assertion in this regard was that no human being could be morally responsible for acts performed without free will, since that would be contrary to God's Justice.¹⁸ Abd al-Jabbar, in his ultimate defense of human free will, states in response to the Quranic verse, "And they will breed none but wicked ungrateful ones" (Q. 71:27), that "God intends [in this verse] that only those who become wicked and ungrateful, when they mature, should not breed; He does not mean that they have this attribute (sifa) when they are born."¹⁹ It thus becomes clear that the Mutazalia, were willing to manipulate even seemingly plain, straightforward Quranic verses in order to align the message of the book with their particular reasoning.

The importance of God's justice for the Mutazalites further becomes manifest from Abd al-Jabbar's reply to the question of whether God has indicated the truth to every human being. Jabbar affirms, "it would not be possible for Him to impose on us [what He requires of us] unless He has indicated to us what He will impose; and it would not be possible for Him to prohibit us from disobedience unless He has warned us about it so that we could avoid doing it, because He has willed our well-being."²⁰ Thus the Mutazalites assumed there were moral laws, which humans could discover through their reason, and more importantly to which God was equally bound as well, thus making it impossible for Him to do what is unjust. Furthermore, it implied a certain unambiguous understanding of the language of Quranic language, to be discussed subsequently in the essay.

Although most religious scholars accommodated reason or *aql* in varying measures within their legal and religious framework, Imam ibn Hanbal in his antagonistic reaction to the Mutazalite movement, attempted, as far as possible, to adhere to a strictly literalist interpretation of the Quran²¹, completely undermining the entire process of Kalam. In his oppositional response to the Mutazalites however, Imam ibn Hanbal was compelled to take definitive, alternate

¹⁸ Adamson, Peter, "121 - This is a Test: The Mutazalites", *History of Philosophy without Any Gaps*.

¹⁹ Martin, Richard C., Mark R. Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja, "Kitab Al- Usul Al-khamsa (Book of the Five Fundamentals) A Translation", *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*, 100.

²⁰ Martin, Richard C., Mark R. Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja, "Kitab Al- Usul Al-khamsa (Book of the Five Fundamentals) A Translation", *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*.

²¹ Blankship, Khalid, "The Early Creed", *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 51.

positions himself, which eventually culminated in the formulation of a traditionalist, Hanbali creed. Thus in the case of God's physical appearance for instance, although the Mutazalites advocated a reasonable figurative understanding, Imam ibn Hanbal accepted only a plain sense reading of the Quranic verses, and thus advocated anthropomorphism, which was thoroughly rejected by the Mutazalites. Such Hanbali anthropomorphic conceptions, ventured beyond the Quranic text, and included vivid descriptions of resurrection, judgment and, heaven and hell.²² Ibn al Jawzi states, "Only those attributes should be ascribed to Him which He has Himself ascribed or those which his Prophet's ascribed to Him and every one of the attributes which He has Himself ascribed is a real attribute and His being, not a metaphorical one."²³ Secondly, on the question of the createdness of the Quran, again Imam ibn Hanbal asserted that "not only was the Qur'an uncreated and therefore coeternal with God, but that its oral recitation was likewise uncreated"²⁴, an extreme stance even for his fellow traditionalists. The Hanbali project, characteristic of Sunni traditionalism in general, further discarded human free will. According to the Hanbalites, human agency was a mere illusion, since God could not be constrained by his own justice, or of any other attribute. According to them, it was naively perfunctory to reduce divine processes to mere human calculations of appropriateness. Eventually however, contrary to their original founder, Hanbali scholars began to engage in dialectic argumentation, with respect to the finer details of Muslim belief.²⁵

The last, and indeed the most decisive theological group that emerged within the Sunni tradition- particularly amongst the Malikis and Shaafis, were the Asharites. Abu'l- Hasan al-Ash'ari, founder of this group, was himself originally a Mutazalite scholar however, after undergoing a spiritual conversion around 913²⁶ he began to promulgate the standard Hanbalite positions regarding the various dimensions of divine revelation. However, unlike Imam Hanbal, al-Ashari vindicated his stance by means of a thoroughly sophisticated system of argumentation-

²² Blankship, Khalid, "The Early Creed", *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 52.

²³ Al- Jawzi, "Muntazam", *The Qadarite Creed*, 3

²⁴ Blankship, Khalid, "The Early Creed", *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 52.

²⁵ Blankship, Khalid, "The Early Creed", *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 52.

²⁶ Blankship, Khalid, "The Early Creed", *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 53.

indeed he presented a contending theory to the Mutazalites, yet retained their rational approach and conceptual tools, and thus the synthesis and critique of the Mutazalite theological positions presented within his work, possessed enormous originality.²⁷ Furthermore, al-Ashari although logical, remained strictly anchored within the Quranic text, and his work often took the form of divine commentary. With respect to God's description, al-Ashari argued that the descriptions present in the Quran and Hadith were indeed 'actual' in nature, but were to be understood "amodally"²⁸. Secondly regarding the issue of human free will, al-Ashari again accepted the Hanbali position however stated that, "God makes human action 'actual' by creating within the individual ability to perform each act at the time of the act."²⁹ Thirdly regarding the topic of God's essence and attributes, Ashari proposed a slightly unconvincing theory, which can be summed as following: attributes of God are not the same as him, neither are they other than him³⁰ - for only in such a theory did Ashari feel that God's unity was truly upheld.

In any case, as mentioned earlier, it was the Ashari conception of revelation that eventually became the mainstream position in Sunni Islam. A number of social, political and religious reasons can help explain the rationale behind this theological trend. For example, one of the more obvious reasons instigating the *Ummah* to sideline both Mutazalism and Hanbilism- despite its strict Quranic foundations- was due to the historic, persistent violence associated with these groups. Furthermore the Mutazalites for instance, deeply grounded within the ancient Greek rationalism, presented an extremely abstract image of God, that could never gain long-term, sustained support of the traditionalist masses. However the primary reason behind the ultimate popularity of Asharism, and the disillusionment with the other two approaches, can be explained through the legal principle of *ijma*, or consensus of the believers. As mentioned earlier, the Muslim community possessed no rigid, ecclesiastical authority to impose dogmatic conformity, instead the community as a whole adopted the *ijma* principle, and although the ulema disagreed regarding the specificities of its actual application, all operated on the same, fundamental theological assumption- that God was with the congregation and thus true belief

²⁷ Adamson, Peter, "122 – God Willingly: The Asharites", *History of Philosophy without Any Gaps*.

²⁸ Blankship, Khalid, "The Early Creed", *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 53.

²⁹ Blankship, Khalid, "The Early Creed", *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 53.

³⁰ Al-Ashari, Kitab al- Luma

would always be that of the majority,³¹ thus all marginal opinions were by their very nature were incorrect, potentially facilitating heresy. According to the Muslim majority, a median position that would maintain a plain reading of the Quran on the one hand, but allow for creedal formation on the other, seemed most expedient- and thus it is this position that became most prevalent. It therefore becomes obvious that elite Muslims formulating advance theories were dependant on the masses for their legitimacy, for it was the masses, and their median position, that defined the mainstream.³²

Fiqh

The term *Fiqh*, literally meaning ‘understanding’, refers to the highly formalized, regimented procedure through which the roots, or *usul*, of Revelation are transformed into a legal and moral standard, culminating with the materialization of contextually specific determinations, or *ahkam*. The term is often conflated with *Shar* and *Shariah* which actually refer to the way in which this moral law is knowable in the first place. *Shar* can be understood as the ‘entry’ by God into the worldly realm of revelation, which provides a means, *Shariah*, to Him, discovered through *Fiqh*.³³

Although Imam al-Shaafi is often considered as the founder of the science of *usul-ul-fiqh*, various ulema had already before him, explored, and explicated upon questions regarding the fundamental sources of law³⁴- the Quran, Sunnah, Ijma and Qiyas, their concern always to align human action with the Shariah, or Divine Will. These ulema did not however draw universal legal principles following their inquiry, a shift brought about by al-Shaafi. Indeed before al-Shaafi’s explosive renovation of the very foundations of Islamic law, the *fiqh* program was principally a regional enterprise based on communal practice. The strikingly divergent legal tendencies that existed, for instance, in the symbolic heartland of the Muslim world- Hejaz, and the in the intellectual centers of periphery i.e. Kufa and Basrah, despite their particular legal distinctions, filtered revelation in precisely the same way- through the lens of their own isolated,

³¹ Winter, Timothy, “Introduction”, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 8.

³² Winter, Timothy, “Introduction”, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 8.

³³ Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 5

³⁴ Makdisi, George, *The Juridical Theology of Shâfi’î: Origins and Significance of Usûl al-Fiqh*, 9

local practices. The differences present amongst these varying legal tendencies largely centered on the question of whether divinely ordained law should be based on *ray*, or personal, considered opinion or should it strictly rely on the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, as established through a systematic collection of Hadith reports.

The main proponents of the former group, known as the Ahl-e-Ray, were Imam Abu Hanifa and his followers, who would not only subjectively, according to their own convenience, employ, ignore- through the imposition of analogical reasoning or Qiyas, and re-write particular Hadith reports, but generally preferred the application of their own rational faculties in the formulation of law, resulting not only in inconsistent, often changing legal positions but also an explicit distance from the revealed text. The Ahl-e-Hadith, or the traditionalists, on the other hand, were guided by Imam Hanbal's literalist project. This program, as the name suggests, required rote memorization of thousands of Hadith reports, which could then be utilized, in addition to the Quran, as sources of law. The entire scheme was however quite unsystematic and impractical, with each generation of scholars required to start with scratch and memorize the entire body of Hadith reports along with their *isnad*, or chain of transmission. Furthermore ibn Hanbal's approach lacked any precise tools for legal reasoning or a procedural efficiency- focusing instead on mere remembrance.

Apart from the above mentioned positions, there also existed a third, comparatively less prevalent legal discourse propounded by the Medinan scholar Imam Malik, often referred to as the- Ahl-e -urf. Indeed, Imam al-Shaafi was initially an adherent of this very legal school before formulating his own legal theory. Moreover, of the three legal movements mentioned, it was the Ahle-e-urf that were embedded most deeply within the Medinan local practice and customs. Their entire program was essentially based on the assumption of traditional continuity with the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, thereby creating a link with him, and with revelation itself. It was precisely because of this traditional orientation, that Imam Malik only recognized a Hadith if it had been generally accepted by the Medinan community as a valid report. Any foreign Hadith report, regardless of its *isnad*, would be rejected if the community was unfamiliar with it. Thus the criterion for Hadith authenticity was the community itself, and thus it was within traditional authority, through which divine law gained its foundational pillar, that legitimacy could be established.

As mentioned earlier, although Imam al-Shaafi was an adherent of this communal practice, after encountering the more systematic legal thought and principles of interpretation in Iraq, and later in Egypt³⁵, he was eventually compelled to abandon Malik's communal program, and establish a more systematic and universal legal system. In Iraq, for instance, al-Shaafi's interaction with Shaybani introduced him to a particular theorization of Hadith, as a form of secondary hermeneutic tool of the Quran, which clarified the divine intention of the book, which was an alien conception to the Maliki legal approach³⁶. In Egypt on the other hand he encountered the rationalist Mutazalia, or as al-Shaafi refers to them as the Ahle-Kalam³⁷, and was certainly left particularly suspicious of rational thought after meeting an extremist Mutazalite scholar who propagated complete rejection of the Hadith tradition. Indeed Shaafi's program in many ways can be envisaged in opposition to these Egyptian Mutazalites, who according to al-Shaafi held their own reason or *aql* at a higher pedestal than revelation itself. Shaafi's purpose was thus to basically establish a "science within traditionalism that could be used as an anecdote to the Kalam trends mentioned above".³⁸

Practically his program entailed, firstly the development of a completely new legal theory founded on the Quran and the Hadith and secondly, complete identification of the Sunnah of the Prophet with the Hadith reports³⁹. Al-Shaafi rejected the various, regional Sunnahs that had emerged within the Islamic world, and it was his own personal experiences and cosmopolitan nature, that allowed him to transcend this regionalism, and develop a coherent, universal legal system that would maintain consistency within Islamic law. Shaafi ultimately realized that tradition was not a static entity, but changed and evolved with time, therefore in order to maintain authenticity; relationship to the actual revelation had to be preserved. It is this obsession with the actual text, and revelation in terms of language, that fundamentally altered the study of jurisprudence after al-Shaafi, transforming it into a paradoxical legal hermeneutic- al-Shaafi claimed that language was indefinite enough to be molded into a coherent set of legal

³⁵ Shamsy, Ahmed, Canonization of Islamic Law.

³⁶ Shamsy, Ahmed, Canonization of Islamic Law.

³⁷ Makdisi, George, The Juridical Theology of Shâfi'î: Origins and Significance of Usûl al-Fiqh, 12

³⁸ Makdisi, George, The Juridical Theology of Shâfi'î: Origins and Significance of Usûl al-Fiqh, 12

³⁹ Makdisi, George, The Juridical Theology of Shâfi'î: Origins and Significance of Usûl al-Fiqh, 12

rules, and yet the rules themselves were the obvious, plain meaning of the text. It was this paradoxical hermeneutic that compelled all the rest into oblivion, eternally sacralized legal rules, and guaranteed law-makers both uncanny interpretative power *and* flexibility simultaneously.⁴⁰ In addition, it was also because Shaafi argued that it was incorrect to simply assume an unchanging communal link that the systematic collection of Hadith reports became so crucial. Unlike the Hanbali project however, which had fused Hadith and fiqh, al-Shaafi continued to engage with legal theory and indeed amongst the four sources of Islamic Law, he introduced a hierarchy which ultimately curbed the arbitrary power of the Qiyas principle. Thus al-Shaafi's program not only represents a de-regionalization of Hadith, but also represents the generally favored 'median position', very much in alignment with the Ashari median discussed in the previous section, that won mass popularity.

Hadith

It has already become sufficiently evident from the above discussion that Hadith, as a universalized preservation of the Prophetic *Sunnah*, is intrinsically related to Fiqh, since Hadith itself is one of the most important sources of Islamic Law. The Quranic revelation, as was mentioned in the introduction, is not an explicit legal treatise, but rather consists of only a few universal legal injunctions, and several more context-specific, evolving commandments. Thus the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, from the beginning, was recognized as a necessary legal tool.⁴¹ However unlike the Quran, which benefitted from error-free transmission, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet remains at best probable, which further highlights the colossal limitation to certainty inherent within the Islamic legal project that is determined to accurately discover divine intention. With regards to the Prophetic precedent, even after the negation of separate localized *Sunnahs* that existed before al-Shaafi and the development of an elaborate discipline which relied on established chains of transmission, or *sanad*, of hadith reports, particularly focusing on the upright character and thus the trustworthiness of those transmitting as a means of accepting and rejecting particular reports, the venture was inherently subjective in nature. For instance, establishing an individual's trustworthiness through a minimalist approach was only accepted by the more liberal jurists. The maximalist approach, although more rigorous, had its own set of

⁴⁰ Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 5

⁴¹ Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 4

problems, and uncertainties.⁴² In contemporary Islamic studies, the problem of the authenticity of the Hadith literature continues to remain a bone of contention within the academy, and has divided scholars into those that completely reject the literature, those that acknowledge its limitations but recognize its historic usefulness, and those that transcend these two arguments and recognize the Hadith literature as the *Ummah's* memory of the normative figure of the Prophet- a model for every pious Muslim regarding how to align himself with divine will.

Conclusion

The present essay has demonstrated the shared objective of all religious sciences that developed within the Islamic tradition- namely to live a godly life. It is thus no surprise that there are fundamental linkages present within the different disciplines. Although law and theology are currently conceived as two separate fields, it is indeed from theology that law draws its most foundational postulate- the existence of God. The specificities of His existence greatly determine i.e. with respect to his attributes and essence, a number of related theological and by extension legal issues. Indeed as David Vishanoff states, every legal theory is based on a very specific imagination of the relationship between text, author, reader and law, at four varying levels- (1) specific texts and laws, (2) general interpretative rules, (3) a theorist's overall hermeneutical paradigm, and (4) a theorist's abstract model of how revelation communicates law. Al-Shaafi's hermeneutical program, for example, affirmed that it was revelation that dictated law, rather than law impacting the interpretation of scripture.⁴³ It is thus becomes evident why it was Ashrisim, and not the other competing theological frameworks, that found its greatest following within the Shaafi's legal construction. The development of Hadith also became necessary in this larger trend, for within the Quranic revelation specific injunctions for daily life, were not present.

⁴² Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 6

⁴³ Khalid, Maidah, Assignment 5

Title: ***Vishnu's Vaikunth: An analysis of significance of Heaven in Hindu Myth***

Student : MehlabJameel

Instructor : Nadhra S N Khan

Course : 19th Century Sikh Wall Paintings in the Punjab

Code : HIS 314

*“Glory to the supreme Vishnú,
the cause of the creation, existence, and end of this world;
who is the root of the world, and who consists of the world.
To Vishnú, the cause of final emancipation”¹*

This eloquent set of verses taken from the *Vishnu Purana* is a humble attempt to capture the essence of Lord Vishnu whose grandiose and magnificent *maya* transcends the bounds of cosmos and its comprehension is considered to be beyond the intellectual capabilities of an ordinary man. Even the eternal devotion of Narad to his *Narayanawas* not enough to convince Vishnu to divulge the secret of his *maya* (Zimmer 23-35).

The Indian subcontinent is home to very diverse religious traditions and an associated plethora of mythological literature, which have played a crucial role in shaping a distinct cultural and political identity of the people. While taking a course on 19th century Sikh Wall Paintings in Punjab, I had the wonderful opportunity to study several brilliant paintings depicting myths from the vast corpus of Hindu mythology and thus delve deeper into Hindu philosophy of existence, *dharma* and *moksha*. In this paper, however, I will focus on Hindu concept of afterlife. Through an in-depth analysis of one of the frescoes in Sheesh Mahal, Lahore Fort depicting Vishnu’s Vaikunth I will reflect on the construction of concept of heaven in the Hindu tradition and its development under the influence of Bhakti movement and rise of Vaishnavism. The bulk of this paper will focus on a critical analysis of the myths associated with after-life followed by a comparative analysis of Vishnu’s Vaikunth with similar myths from other world religions. *Vishnu’s Vaikunth* refers to the eternal abode of Vishnu in which he resides with other gods and demigods and the virtuous few who manage to achieve *moksha* from the cycle of rebirth are allowed entrance in the Vaikunth. (Refer to figure 1. In Appendix)

The first section of the paper focuses on a formal and contextual analysis of the fresco and its significance in the Lahore Fort. The latter part presents an anthropological analysis of the myth and comparison with other myths about afterlife. Through this paper I intend to establish that (a) myths play a crucial part in producing a distinct cultural and religious identity of the people and (b) that there exists a dialectical relation among the rituals, customs and beliefs associated with these myths and a juxtaposition of these religious-cultural elements shapes a distinct world-view for the people in the larger social system. Moreover, that (c) despite the many differences among them, myths about after-life in many world religions share certain common features which leads me to posit the overarching question for the readers of this paper: do the common patterns among myths say something about the general human nature?

Theoretical Paradigm: The theoretical paradigm of my analysis is generally Foucauldian in nature. Nietzsche’s philosophical reflections on Truth and Knowledge assert that claims of objective truth are absurd and that whichever knowledge prevails is more a function of power

than any objective measure of truth (see Nietzsche 1870). Foucault being one of the pioneers of post-structuralist, post-modernist turn in the literature (highly influenced by Nietzsche) is more spot-on in his sociological theory about relationship between knowledge and power. “Power is everywhere” (1998: 63), says Foucault, “truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991). Since I am doing a comparative analysis of myths in this paper, I find Foucault’s view of discourse being shaped by power most relevant, especially when discussing the rise of Bhakti movement.

Another important author in this regard is Edmund Leach who is well known for his structural interpretation of Biblical texts. I will be using the approach followed by Edmund Leach and thus regard these narratives as completely mythical (in the literal sense of the word) as well as ‘a sacred tale’ but not history (Leach and Aycock 8-10). I will rely on concepts highlighted by Leach in *Genesis as Myth, and Other Essays* in which he analyzes the myths using structural interpretation – first applied by Levi-Strauss in “The Structural Study of Myth” in the classic text *Structural Anthropology* (Levi-Strauss 206-231) and later adopted by Leach, Pitt-Rivers, Aycock – by treating their events as simple independent units (mythemes) irrespective of a chronological order (or in a partial temporal framework) and endeavor to locate parallels in them to pinpoint some of the many significances of these myths in Bible and their relation with the social context in which they emerged. Through this comparison of narratives I intend to essentially emphasize Leach’s argument that myths “do not exist as single stories but as clusters of stories which are variations around a theme” (Leach and Aycock 25).

As regards to a sociological analysis of significance of myths in societal structures, Bronisław Malinowski is quite relevant. “Myth [...] is society's narrative life/reality. Myth is nothing less than the community's 'common sense' or reality” (Malinowski; in Walsh 74).

Background and the Social Context: The Hindu tradition is rooted in the Vedic age, the period extending in Indian subcontinent from 1500 BC to 600 BC. Chronologically, the development of the tradition is usually attributed on the one hand to the disappearance of Harappan civilization and advent of the Aryans and on the other by the establishment in the 6th century BC of important kingdoms in North India. A large tradition of organized political life has been undergoing developmental changes marked especially by a fusion of many cultures. This period is marked by the production of a body of literature: the *Vedas* and the crown of the Vedic age are the *Upanishads* (Theodore De Bary 3-8). The period between 550 BC and 300 AD is important for the growth of the tradition and development of a social order and the hierarchies resulting in a vast corpus of sacred texts, the highlight being the great epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (66-74). The time period of 300 to 1200 AD which Theodore De Bary refers to as the “flowering

of the tradition” is a classical age that saw a rapid development in arts and literature. The Vedic texts were still fundamental and the Brahmin priesthood unchallenged but the old rituals were replaced by forms of worships that emphasized the veneration of specific deities and the culture of image worship and temples become even more significant during this time. In this context, the *Puranas* became quite significant which although had been there for quite some time but were compiled for the first time (151-156). The *Vishnu Purana* discussed above is dated by Wendy Doniger to 450 CE (Collins 36). This is especially significant in the context of development of competing cults of specific deities and the development of Vaishnavism in Punjab (Flood 359) where temples of *Lakshmi-Narayan* or any incarnations of Vishnu were very much in vogue (Grewal 23-27). The post-7th century period is quite crucial in the development of Bhakti movement. The typical hierarchies and systems of social castes, ideas of ritualistic salvation were being challenged and the core idea behind the movement was of salvation being achieved by all and sundry depending on their devotion. The time saw the movement of deity-cults (Vaishnavism, Shivaism, Shaktivism) from the South (Tamil Nadu) region towards North. It won't be wrong to argue that in a later time period, there was a significant influence of Islamic Sufism on the movement. In 14th and 15th century, Ramanand and Chaitanya gave the Bhakti movement in North a new turn by making the Ram and Krishna (human incarnations of Vishnu) bhakti more famous. Accompanied by the *Santh* movement and teaching from reformers like Kabir, Meera Bai, Guru Nanak, Ravidas, Tulsidas and many others, the religious tradition in the North took a very different form leading to the development of Sikh tradition (Grewal 28-41; Theodore De Bary 225-231).

The geographical location of Punjab is very important while we are considering the social context since the area has been the center of major political activity and social conflicts from the time of Mughals to the invasions of Ahmad Shah and then the Sikh Empire (1799-1849). All these factors shaped any activity taking place in the fields of arts, literature and language. During this time the Sikhs had been gaining strength and the Punjab region formally came under Sikh power by 1799 through Ranjit Singh who united all the *misl*s. Although Sikhism had a puritanical stance especially when it came to image worship and polytheism, the period of Ranjit Singh saw a more unifying effort and arts from all traditions were very much promoted under his rule. This was further supplemented by the influx of local artists into Punjab. The Mughals were a major source of patronage and sponsorship for arts and the local artists were centralized for a long time under the Mughal rule practicing a specific mixture of Indian miniature, Persian and Muslim art. However, other schools were also developing, especially the Pahari and Rajasthani schools each specializing in their own stylistic techniques. The post-Mughal time saw a dispersion of artists and strengthening of more local school of arts. The foreign influence from the early traders (read colonizers) also started showing its impact. Under Ranjit Singh's rule, the local artists found centralized patronage once again. The themes from Bhakti movement especially *Krishn-leela* has been a major theme in the local schools of Pahari paintings, thus developed the styles from centers like Basohli, Guler, Jammu, Kangra etc., each with its own specifications. Ragmala paintings also became the most popular mode of depiction of romance,

love, female beauty in a paradigm of music, seasons etc. Ranjit Singh encouraged arts and when he made Lahore the capital of his empire, he made many developments, one of which is the renovation of Lahore Fort and Sheesh Mahal. The frescoes in Sheesh Mahal thus show a combination of multiple themes and stylistic renditions. The general focus on Krishna and Ram Bhakti and Vaishnavism can be detected clearly. The scenes from courts and veneration of Sikh Gurus constitute a major part (Kang 1-15; Aijazudin xxiv- xxviii; Srivastava 1-2, 5-8). In this regard Srivastav says that the relationship of the artist with the social setting is very important, “how he reconciles his sentiments and emotions with royal behavior and attitude is worth studying... It is a pity that the artists who did beautiful paintings for the big kingdoms had to loiter far and wide in search of alternative patrons in the neighboring areas... It goes without saying that the output of these artists conformed to the social and historical forces which were dominant in the era” (Srivastav 35-37). The local artists in 19th century found new patronage that was more tolerant of diversity with more amicable Hindu-Sikh relations and even more participation by Muslim artists, thus the arts found a new meaning, which is why the art and architecture of the time very vividly represents the social conditions of the time.

Note on formal aspects of the Vishnu’s Vaikunth:

Now that we have a good understanding of the social context in which these particular artistic traditions are developing, we can move on and analyze this work of art with respect to its formal elements, techniques and material and stylistic rendition.

On first sight alone, the fresco exudes a radiant, awe-inducing sense of glory, magnificence and royalty. Observing the grandeur of Sheesh Mahal – the jewel of Lahore Fort – when you come across this fresco, it very much resonates the sentiments of envy and awe that the royal element of Lahore Fort very effectively installs in the minds of the ordinary person. The excessive use of gold in the rendition and its elegant contrast with the whites of the figures adds a divine touch to the already-regal picture.

The fresco has been rendered inside a niche whose glass mosaic border induces an elegant contrast and directs the eye of the on-looker immediately to the shimmering gold in the fresco. The spandrels probably had precious gems that have been gouged out. It is speculated that Ranjit Singh himself was so over-awed by the beauty of Sheesh-Mahal and surrounding architecture that he ordered transfer of entire gem-inlaid slabs to Amritsar. Visitors in the area over a period of more than 200 years perhaps also partly share the blame.

The fresco itself is not in a very good state. The paint is flaking off and once beautifully rendered miniature details are too smudged to discern now. However, this happens to be one of the better-preserved frescoes and wall paintings I have observed in Sheesh Mahal and Ranjit Singh’s Samadhi right across it.

The fresco has a mixture of various styles. One can see a major divide of the foreground from the rest of the painting through the gold-wall, on which both sides stand men facing the figures in the

top row. The middle ground comprises of two rows of men, with light-blue colored bodies and all dressed similarly. One can see a large number of human figures filling the entire space. The faces of most of the people in the fresco happen to be generic with the exception of a few (explained later). It is interesting to note that majority figures in the fresco are men. The men in the upper row are holding musical instruments while the ones in the lower row stand with other gold-colored objects (vessels most likely). Many of them can be seen with clasped hands – the characteristic *pooja*/worship pose. The foreground has another row of men facing the wall or the gate in the center holding rosaries or other objects. In the very center, one can see a gate guarded by two gatemmen sitting facing each other. All these male figures have composite body angles. Most have profile faces, with torsos in profile of three-quarter or even in frontal mode. All of figures in the middle ground and most in the foreground are crowned with the characteristic three-pronged royal crowns. Apart from the generic male figures, three or four small-sized male figures can be seen next to each other near the gate in the center, all with clasped hands.

The top-most row comprises of a central figure seated on a gold throne, slightly larger than figures surrounding him and others in the foreground and middle ground. The figures on the right and left have different features but are shown in similar poses, mostly with clasped hands and facing the central figure on throne (which is Vishnu). Vishnu is accompanied by another blue-bodied figure in a yellow/gold *pitambar* bearing the chowry. Vishnu can be seen with a halo behind his head. The background comprises of architectural structures – depicting a segmented-dome pavilion – which is very similar to the canopy one sees in Ragmala and Kangra paintings. Its bold and pervasive depiction does remind one of the Mughal style architecture exhibiting royalty and grandeur.

One of the key features in this fresco is the idea of hierarchy. The difference in sizes and the positioning of figures is so characteristic of the earlier Persian and Mughal idiom in which the most important figures are on the top – something very different from the rules of perspective practiced by European artists. The way all figures are looking towards Vishnu seated on throne and the positioning of Vishnu in the top-center above all figures conveys the internalized idiom of hierarchy in Indian painting. Immediately manuscripts and illustrations from *Babarnama* and *Padshahnama* come to mind.

In addition to the Mughal idiom of hierarchy, the stylistic rendition is a mixture of Basohli style and to some extent Kangra style as well --- its rendition is very characteristic of Pahari paintings. The Basholi paintings are famous for the bold use of gold and silver but the distinguishing feature is the excessive rendition of white to highlight the contrast. This is usually done through small beads (points) which are visible very much in the jewelry on human figures (Chaitanya 23-24). This trend can be clearly seen in this painting especially the contrast of white with gold produces a very regal effect. Moreover, Basohli paintings are also embellished with beetle wings to produce a shimmering effect (Chaitanya 23-24). One cannot say if same was done in this painting too. Basohli artists along with artists from Guler and Kangra are the ones who were deeply influenced by the Vaishnava Bhakti. The themes surrounding Vishnu's incarnations

became a major area of interest. The focus on Krishna-Radha in Ragmala paintings and in general the Pahari paintings have been great (Aijazudin 1977). As discussed before, there is a dialectical relation among the artists and the social conditions in which they are living, which is why the *Vishnu Purana*, *Bhagavata Purana*, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* were the focus in the VaishnavaBhakti movement and all the major themes discussed in these sacred texts have been the area of interest for the artists themselves (Kang 1-15; Aijazudin xxiv- xxviii; Srivastava 1-2, 5-8; 32-35). A vague idea of depth and perspective is also there in the fresco (for example, the throne is not show like suspended in midair or like hanging on a wall) which indicates attempt at incorporating the European idiom as well.

Gold has a very specific “auspicious” character of its own and it conveys a specific message which is why it is very commonly associated with royalty and divinity (Gonda 1-6). Gold is a manifestation, form, or ‘symbol’ of the gods. The Vedic Indians were not alone in regarding the various possessions of gold being divine. Gods and especially gods of light and the heavens are often closely associated with gold e.g. Apollo and Aphrodite. The gods of Homer held assembly on golden floor holding golden goblets. Indra is often depicted with gold weaponry, Lakshmi’s wealth and abundance is mostly shown with gold and so on (Gonda 47-54). Similarly, one can also recount examples from other religions where gold is one of the characteristic feature of divinity and heaven. It won’t be wrong to say that it is gold that gives Vishnu’s Vaikunth its true meaning. The royalty, divinity and festivity in this context need a uniqueness to express itself and that is manifested through a rare element like gold.

A Contextual Analysis of the Fresco:

Now that we have explored the formal elements and stylistic rendition of the painting we can move on to the myth behind the painting. Vaikunth is described as the eternal celestial abode of Lord Vishnu in various scriptures but more specifically in *Bhagvata Purana* and *Vishnu Purana* (Bhalla 34-35; Sarvasvati 580-581; Bahadur 9-15). Following are some verses describing Vishnu’s Vaikunth:

The Rigveda states, *Om tad viṣṇoḥ paramam padam sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ: "All the suras (devas) look towards the Supreme Abode of Lord Vishnu"(1.22.20)*

From Bhagvata Purana:*The Personality of Godhead, being thus very much satisfied with the penance of Lord Brahma, was pleased to manifest His personal abode, Vaikuntha, the supreme planet above all others. This transcendental abode of the Lord is adored by all self-realized persons freed from all kinds of miseries and fear of illusory existence (Bhagvata Purana 2.9.9)*

In that personal abode of the Lord, the material modes of ignorance and passion do not prevail, nor is there any of their influence in goodness. There is no predominance of the influence of time, so what to speak of the illusory, external energy; it cannot enter that region. Without discrimination, both the demigods and the demons worship the Lord as devotees. (Bhagvata Purana 2.9.10)

The inhabitants of the Vaikuntha planets are described as having a glowing sky-bluish complexion. Their eyes resemble lotus flowers, their dress is of yellowish color, and their bodily features very attractive. They are just the age of growing youths, they all have four hands, they are all nicely decorated with pearl necklaces with ornamental medallions, and they all appear to be effulgent (2.9.11)

Some of them are effulgent like coral and diamonds in complexion and have garlands on their heads, blooming like lotus flowers, and some wear earrings (2.9.12)

The Vaikuntha planets are also surrounded by various airplanes, all glowing and brilliantly situated. These airplanes belong to the great mahatmas or devotees of the Lord. The ladies are as beautiful as lightning because of their celestial complexions, and all these combined together appear just like the sky decorated with both clouds and lightning (2.9.13).

The goddess of fortune in her transcendental form is engaged in the loving service of the Lord's lotus feet, and being moved by the black bees, followers of spring, she is not only engaged in variegated pleasure -- service to the Lord, along with her constant companions -- but is also engaged in singing the glories of the Lord's activities (2.9.14)

Lord Brahma saw in the Vaikuntha planets the Personality of Godhead, who is the Lord of the entire devotee community, the Lord of the goddess of fortune, the Lord of all sacrifices, and the Lord of the universe, and who is served by the foremost servitors like Nanda, Sunanda, Prabala and Arhana, His immediate associates. (2.9.15)

The Personality of Godhead, seen leaning favorably towards His loving servitors, His very sight intoxicating and attractive, appeared to be very much satisfied. He had a smiling face decorated with an enchanting reddish hue. He was dressed in yellow robes and wore earrings and a helmet on his head. He had four hands, and His chest was marked with the lines of the goddess of fortune (2.9.16)

The Lord was seated on His throne and was surrounded by different energies like the four, the sixteen, the five, and the six natural opulences, along with other insignificant energies of the temporary character. But He was the factual Supreme Lord, enjoying His own abode (2.9.17)

Lord Brahma, thus seeing the Personality of Godhead in His fullness, was overwhelmed with joy within his heart, and thus in full transcendental love and ecstasy, his eyes filled with tears of love. He thus bowed down before the Lord. That is the way of the highest perfection for the living being [paramahansa] (2.9.18)

In the fresco, Lord Vishnu is seated on a golden throne surrounded by other important deities. As discussed before, the hierarchy is one of the key concepts in the fresco where the gods are shown on the top most row indicating their higher status. Vishnu is shown seated in a calm posture,

cross-legged, wearing a *pitambar*. Although it is difficult to discern the details, his four hands, and characteristic attributes can be seen. In his right hand he holds the lotus flower, in the left hand the conch shell and the other left hand he holds the *chakra* – which signifies the cycle of life and death. Circle has great significance in South Asian myth, for instance, time itself is circular. The cycle of birth and destruction follows a circular path with no beginning and no end (in the linear understanding of the concept). The theme of circle is incorporated in *Ramayana* when Lakshman draws a circular *rekha* around Sita for protection. One can argue that this spirituality extends even to current times since many South Asian women wear bangles which are considered to symbolically and spiritually represent the protection of their husbands. They ritually break or remove these bangles when the husband dies (Mills *et al.* 51). The halo behind his head – also circular – is indicative of his divinity. In his eternal abode, Vishnu is also often called *Narayan*.

Vishnu's chowry-bearer could be Ram or Krishna since the figure is also shown with four arms, blue body and yellow *pitambar*. Comparing this to the Rajasthani version of the painting (figure 2), it is easier to make a comparison. Next to the chowry-bearer is another figure which I believe to be Indra – the king of the pantheon of gods and demigods. The Vaishnava bhakti movement played a very crucial role in displacing Indra from top of the hierarchy. The symbology of Indra includes a white elephant and four arms. He is often shown with hundreds of eyes drawn on his body (for example, see the figure of Indra in the Rajasthani version of Vishnu's Vaikunth). A legend says that when Indra viewed a sage's daughter in a wrongful manner, the sage cursed Indra and thousands of vaginas appeared on his body. Indra begged for mercy and the sage conceding his pleading, turns those vaginas into eyes (Doniger 84–6, 294–5).

The Vishnubhakti movement placed Vishnu the creator and preserver in the central position, so paintings in Pahari traditions often depict Indra in a secondary position (e.g. Ragmala painting depicting Krishna holding Mount Govardhan). As discussed before, the Vedic age comprised of a time with great “social order” with highly defined social castes, hierarchies and rituals with Brahmins at the top and having access to the scriptures but later the Bhakti movement saw a paradigm shift which emphasized the ideology that salvation is attainable by everyone. And this change in ideology was accompanied by veneration of specific gods. Vishnu paintings, myths and traditions often depict Indra in a secondary position to legitimize the authority of Vishnu as the Supreme Lord. (Hopkins 242; Lorenzen 1-35). Another legend in *Brahmanvaivarta Purana* about Indra and the ants also depicts Indra in all his prideful vanity being shamed into humility by Vishnu (Zimmer 1-11). In the Sheesh Mahal fresco, if the royal figure standing next to the chowry-bearer is interpreted as Indra, then his depiction as a figure shunted towards the side with clasped hands and venerating Vishnu is very much reflecting of the social changes occurring because of the Bhakti movement.

Next in line stands Brahma. His 4 heads and multiple hands can be seen (Hopkins 189-198). The 4 figures standing behind Brahma can be seen as rishis or the humanly representation of the

four *Vedas*. This further enhances Vishnu's importance as the Supreme Being and even the Creator Brahma is given secondary importance in the ensuing mythology.

Towards the right side of Vishnu stands his consort Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. She is one of the only female figures shown in the painting. In this fresco she is shown with clasped hands, in the Rajasthani version she is seen sitting in Vishnu's lap, much smaller than Vishnu --- not only indicating Vishnu's supremacy but also in terms of gender politics Lakshmi is shown embracing domesticity and passivity.

Next to Lakshmi stands Lord Ganesh. His elephant head is facing Vishnu and he is also shown venerating the Lord with clasped hands. Behind him stands his father Shiva. Shiva is the ascetic Lord who completes the *Trimurti* (the other two Vishnu and Brahma). Shiva is the lord of destruction and since he resides in crematoriums he is shown with white skin (smeared with ashes). In the fresco, the white body is quite distinguishable. He is usually shown with three eyes, wearing a wild animal skin, a snake around his neck (Neel Kanth) and with matted hair often accompanied by a crescent on his head or River Ganges flowing out of his hair (Bahadur 15-25; Theodore De Bary 232-246; Zimmer 123-185, Hopkins 219-231). Not all of these features are visible in this fresco. Although the miniature details are almost indiscernible, we can see Shiva holding his hand in blessing. For comparison, see the Rajasthani version. Next to Shiva the female figure with the face turned back is probably his consort Parvati/Durga. Similarly, other gods standing behind these main gods can be seen venerating Vishnu.

The specific depiction of this painting in this way conveys a very clear idea about how the artist perceives heaven. I have already presented the verses of *Bhagvata Purana* earlier that present how magnificent and glorious Vishnu's Vaikunth would be. One of the salient features was the immaterialism of the Vaikunth, however, since it could be hard to conceive immaterialism and project it in material form, the artist chooses to represent heaven through his own imagination. For the artist, the idea of heaven is associated with royalty. One could assume that the royalty in this time induced an awe in the ordinary people and the highest they could conceive of in material terms, is a worldly luxury. So, very familiar themes of music, expensive clothes, jewelry, beautiful women and servants are visible in the Sheesh Mahal fresco. The gold can again be interpreted as representing the royalty and riches. Similarly, the setting in the background is that of a royal palace (very similar to Mughal architecture) which indicates the artist's conception of heaven in terms of how he has been socialized into constructing this image in his head. Here I would like to contrast the Sheesh Mahal fresco with the Rajasthani painting which shows more female figures (the *apsaras*) as compared to the Sheesh Mahal painting which is all men. It says something about the artist himself/herself. This can be further contrasted with another painting of Vishnu's Vaikunth (figure 3) in which the *apsaras* are the only figures surrounding Vishnu, and it is strongly reflective of the artist's imagination and worldview.

Last but not least, the concept of proximity with God is one of the central themes in the fresco. The heaven is conceived of as a place where all the distances and spaces between the divine and

human diminish. Although, Vishnu's Vaikunth exhibits god available for *darshan* and blessing, the divide between divine and human is still maintained through the concept of hierarchy. So the closest ones to Vishnu the Great are other gods and demi gods and even they are in a certain hierarchy.

It is important how space is constructed in the fresco. Depictions of festivity and royalty which are so common in Pahari paintings especially in Basholi and Kangra paintings is conveyed in this painting through the congregation of men. However, this is very different from other Ragmala, Kangra and Rajasthani paintings in which space is constructed in a different manner. The crowdedness of this fresco can again be interpreted as abundance and festivity.

Analysis of the myth:

“Myth saves primitive humans from fear, demoralization and death by conferring social meaning on natural facts, like death. Myth creates for humans a 'sacred canopy', 'a shield against terror', which asserts that the universe is humanly meaningful. Myth performs this function and others only as it is society's narrative life/reality. Myth is nothing less than the community's 'common sense' or reality” (Malinowski; in Walsh 74). Myths – stories that have cosmological influence – have been an essential part of every culture and if one follows Malinowski's approach their presence and celebration in every culture is of utmost significance in terms of defining the social reality. Such functionalist approach for understanding myth might be insufficient, but one can nonetheless contend that myths play a pivotal role in shaping religious traditions and ultimately defining the world-view of people. Therefore, it is equally important to analyze the content and development of a myth in any culture and if there is one thing one can find in abundance in human history, it is the gargantuan plethora of myths from all and sundry cultures.

In the Hindu myth under consideration, there are certain themes that we need to break down and analyze separately. Firstly, the concept of existence and time itself needs to be understood. In most cultures of the world, the time follows a linear pattern. Given that we live in a time where claims by scientific advancement about the nature of objective truth are considered to be valid because of being supported by empirical evidence, this largely shapes the world view we live in. There is a hegemony of science over other world-views and this hegemonic paradigm compels us to believe that there is one objective truth and that science can lay claim to it. Sociological literature is teeming with analyses of narratives of resistance or syncretism when a Western form of science confronts the local cultures. When observing the structures and myths in other cultures it is important to not let our bias and ethnocentrism cloud our analysis. Referring back to Foucault here, it is important to realize that discourse and knowledge is largely shaped by power structures in the society. In Vedic times, for instance, the power structure supposedly resided in favor of Brahmins and the myths and traditions in Hinduism developed through a discourse shaped by the interaction of power structures. The concept of time in Hinduism is circular. Vishnu the preserver while reclining on the eternal waters imagines the world and Brahma emerging from his navel becomes the agent of creation. The world itself is then divided into four

yugs, and by the *kali yug* Shiva once again destroys the entire world and an image of the perfect world resides inside Vishnu while he meditates on the eternal waters. And the cycle keeps on repeating (Zimmer 11-52).

This myth is/was the objective truth for the people who grew up in the society purporting this view and this shaped the world view for them. The conception of *karma* and cycle of rebirth, (both circular in nature as well) follow the initial wheel of rebirth. David M. Knipe talks about how the concept of karma and cycle of rebirth was so crucial in Vedic times that the rituals were shaped around it. For instance, the need to provide the ritual food for the deceased ancestors would be based on some sort of desire to keep them in the heaven and not trapped in a cycle of repeated death (*punarmrtyu*) (Knipe 111-124). Doniger remarks about how the eternal conflict between *moksha* and *dharma* in the *Upanishads* and Vedic worldviews shapes the lives of the people (Doniger 4). This conflict is resolved through the concept of a heaven and *moksha*. The VishnuBhakti movement had a very strong focus on salvation for all, it is important to make the link here about how the future development of myth in the religion is such that in order to resolve the conflict created by the cycle or rebirth, there is a development of concept of *muk'ti*. In this way Vishnu's Vaikunth comes as a concept of resistance against the Vedic system. The hierarchies are destroyed and if the devotee is devoted enough he is relieved from the cycle of rebirth by Vishnu and his devotion earns him the privilege of living an eternal life in the proximity of Vishnu where everything is magnificent and happy. In other words, a political conflict related to development of Bhakti movement and diminishing of social hierarchies is represented in a change in the mythology as well as the depiction of that mythology.

For instance, in *Ramayana*, a whole legend about Shri Ram ascending to the heavens is there. Ram going through the tribulations of life in Ayodhya finally ascends to the skies and presents himself as Vishnu, and Brahma welcomes him into the heavens and the best area in the heavens is given to Vishnu for his Vaikunth and a description of Vishnu being surrounded by gods and goddesses and being venerated by his followers ensues (Ramayana vii. 114-124; Macfie 142-149). This very well illustrates my argument about the development in mythology being reflective of societal conditions. Another example is that of Indra being displaced as explained before.

The second element is that of the division between the heavens and the earth. Hind mythology in a very similar fashion to Mesopotamian mythology separates the realm of the gods and the realm of the people. Similar to the previous example, Vishnu's Vaikunth abolishes that division. The concept of heaven is venerated in such a way that the hierarchy between god and human is there but man comes in close proximity to god. Arguably, this is very well symbolic of the diminishing of social castes. Despite an apparent hierarchy, everyone in Vishnu's Vaikunth is treated equally. There is no concept of a Brahmin receiving more blessing than a *shoodar*. And the fresco that we saw depicts this egalitarianism through the similar depiction of all men in the scene by showing them with same dresses, same riches etc. The fresco almost reminds one of a temple where

people are coming in and receiving blessings from god and celebrating. No hierarchy exists between god and his lovers.

The third element goes along the lines of gender politics. We see practically no female figures, except Lakshmi, in the Vishnu's Vaikunth in the Sheesh Mahal fresco. From a feminist perspective one could speculate a number of reasons for this "symbolic annihilation" of women from the picture. For instance, the secondary importance of women in the largely patriarchal culture of India is one of the reasons women are not deemed worthy of representation. And this view might be validated with an example from the Islamic tradition, where there is no – or little – mention of women in the *Jannah*, except through the concept of *hooris* whose role is reduced to sexual companionship. This is also reflective of the society's general perception regarding prevalent gender norms, where man is considered the standard and 'man' becomes synonymous with 'human'. This is further reinforced by the idea that the supreme god is also male and his consort is given very secondary importance. However, I find this feminist argument rather incomplete. It is true that the mythology and depiction of that mythology represent the dominant culture of the society. A feminist analysis sees a male-centric Vishnu's Vaikunth as a reaffirmation of the patriarchal setup but does not bring into account the role of women in the system. For instance, it is important to note that women's sphere is usually confined to the *zanana* and they are expected to conform to the roles of motherhood and domesticity, which is why women are often not shown in paintings in which the public sphere is represented. The absence of women is accounted for by the role they have in the society. So the previous feminist argument presents a much essentialized analysis of the situation. While the fact remains true that women are under-represented in the public sphere and that is manifested through mythology and art, it is not symbolic annihilation since they are playing their own role to support the larger structure of the society. I believe that this refined analysis is more reflective of the gender relations in the society and how the artist perceives them rather than an essentialized view that sweeps everything under the label of patriarchy that ignores the complicated power dynamics, diversity and patriarchal bargains that women make in their daily lives.

Lastly, I will compare this myth about Vishnu's Vaikunth to myths from other cultures and look for common patterns. In Sumerian culture, there is a similar division between the pantheon of gods and humans. It was believed that gods lived in the eternal gardens and irrigated the lands until the job was handed over to humans and then occurred a division between the realm of gods and the realm of humans and the purpose of human life was to work hard and strive to re-achieve the heavens i.e. the abolishing of division (Kramer). The Sumerian myth was much more complex but many similar elements can be seen, for instance, the concept of association of nation-states with gods is similar in both Hindu and Sumerian traditions. Moreover, image-worship, polytheism and other similar trends in geo-political developments can be observed. A stark difference is the absence of concept of rebirth. A similar case can be made about comparison with Egyptian myth and Greek myth about life after death. A similar pattern in every case includes the elements of luxury, material riches, royalty, and proximity with gods.

Comparing the Hindu myths to the secondary religions like Islam and Christianity, we see stark contrasts in terms of how a monotheistic God becomes more personal and the focus on rituals drops. This is similar to the development of Bhakti movement and in fact the influence of Islamic Sufism on Bhakti movement and later on *Santh* movement can be observed. This is similar to the Christian asceticism in the early years of Christianity. In this context, the concept of heaven is also similar in many aspects like luxury, riches, material benefits and while there are *apsaras* in Hindu myth, Islamic tradition focuses on the 72 virgins. So, the androcentric element is also there. However, a difference is complete abolishment of hierarchies and complex funerary rituals (unlike Egyptian) to achieve *moksha*. Hindu and Muslim traditions in the subcontinent do share certain similar elements.

Summing it up, the point of this comparison is to highlight the common patterns that exist in myths about heaven in many world religions. The differences are very much reflective of the social changes and developments of the people practicing the religion. So, if one is to adopt a functionalist view one can say that the concept of heaven is an essential element in major world religions for people to deal with their fears and uncertainties. This reaffirms what Malinowski says: “Myth creates for humans a 'sacred canopy', 'a shield against terror', which asserts that the universe is humanly meaningful. Myth performs this function and others only as it is society's narrative life/reality”. Myths string together the experiences of people and let them fashion a world-view for themselves through which they make sense of the people and the world around them.

In this paper, I started from an analysis of a fresco in Sheesh Mahal Lahore Fort depicting Vishnu's Vaikunth and I reflected on the various elements that constitute this conception of heaven in Hindu myth and how this conception has been shaped over time and affected by the influence of Vaishnavism. Therefore, I conclude by saying that myths are a crucial part of any culture and a dialectical relationship exists among the myths and their believers which is continuously in a process of flux and shaped by new discourses.

Appendix



Figure 1: Vishnu's Vaikunth in Sheesh Mahal, Lahore Fort



Figure 2: VAIKUNTHA, THE HEAVEN OF VISHNU. Rajasthani school, about 1750. Painting on paper. Lady Rothenstein collection



Figure 3: A Vision of Vishnu (Vaikuntha Darshana), Attributed to Murad and Lupha, between circa 1710 and circa 1715, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper, Brooklyn Museum.

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Neha Raheel

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Dr. Waqar Zaidi

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The Act of 'Writing': Anti-Consumerism in an Industrial Setting

"The people who run our cities don't understand graffiti because they think nothing has the right to exist unless it makes a profit ... [T]he people who truly deface our neighborhoods are the companies that scrawl giant slogans across buildings and buses trying to make us feel inadequate unless we buy their stuff. Any advertisement in public space that gives you no choice whether you see it or not is yours, it belongs to you. It's yours to take, rearrange and reuse."

— Banksy, *Wall and Piece*

The orthodox view of the Industrial Revolution paints a picture that deems industrialization to be a precursor of consumerism i.e. an increase in the supply of goods resulted in the subsequent rise in consumer demand for those commodities.¹ On the flip side of the coin, the unorthodox view claims that consumerism increased due to a consumer revolution which occurred alongside the product and process revolutions.² At the heart of both views, however, lies a presupposition that deems the processes of industrialization and consumerism to be

¹ David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* 2nd edition (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 5.

² Jan De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 71.

inextricably linked. The purpose of this paper, however, is to enter into conversation with both these views by using the case of American hip-hop graffiti. Graffiti problematizes the neat categorization of the two phenomena as it provides an instance where a particular art form, made to be consumed by a mass market, contains the seemingly paradoxical conjunction of industrialization and anti-consumerism. The essay will, therefore, begin by giving a brief history of the origins of American graffiti, it will then delineate how graffiti is linked to industrialization and move on to discuss the way in which graffiti pieces contain a critique of consumerism.

Scholars of graffiti have traced its inception back to the time of Pompeii, claiming that inscribing images and words on walls has been inherent in human nature.³ Over the course of history, however, the motives for producing graffiti have varied immensely. The specificity of American graffiti, however, remains that it allowed individuals to “negotiate and reconstruct their environments” in a manner by which they could carve individual spaces for themselves.⁴ Thus, graffiti, at its inception and during its peak, was a medium of mass communication, a forum to display cultural frustration and articulate individual sentiments.⁵ The origins of American graffiti have been traced back to the birthplace of the hip-hop style – New York City.⁶ During the 1960s, with the ongoing Cold War, the atmosphere in New York was such that the city was in decline, with increasing crime rates, an expanding population, immigration to the suburbs, rising unemployment rates and growing poverty. This created an ambience of disenchantment, apathy and frustration amongst the working middle class which gave birth to the

³ Mount, Harry. "What Can We Learn from Roman Graffiti?" *The Telegraph*. N.p., 1 Oct. 2013. Web. 4 Dec. 2013.

⁴ Esseghaier, Mariam. "Graffiti as Fearful Commodity": Princess Hijab, the Muslim Woman, and Anti-Consumerism." *Rhizomes* 25 (2013), pp. 4.

⁵ Werwath, Timothy. "The Culture and Politics of Graffiti Art." *Art Crimes*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2006. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.

⁶ There was also a simultaneous advent of hip-hop graffiti in Philadelphia and Boston. For further details, refer to: Werwath, Timothy. "The Culture and Politics of Graffiti Art." *Art Crimes*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2006. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.

idea of defining oneself through a new identity – hip-hop; which was expressed musically in rap, physically through break-dancing and artistically through graffiti.⁷

The places where American graffiti found its germinating ground were primarily industrial cities – New York, Philadelphia and Boston. The industrial environment is, however, not merely the space where American graffiti finds its origin but it also provides the fertile soil for the continued survival and growth of graffiti.⁸ It is the industrial city that has played a crucial role in the creation and proliferation of graffiti because firstly, the industrial site provides the space and place for graffiti; secondly the industrial development of the city supplies the necessary tools for graffiti to be produced and thirdly, industrialization can also provide the content and inspiration for the subculture of graffiti.

Initially, graffiti covered the walls of bathroom stalls and possessed overt political content which was, however, removed with the advent of the ‘tag’ in the 1980s as the tag (a writer’s signature) was mostly an index of the writer’s presence and identity.⁹ It was during this era that the subway system of New York City became the “Mecca for writers everywhere.”¹⁰ This complex underground movement, therefore, found its heart in the intricate subway system of New York as writers declared an open season on the metro system and graffiti was done in its purest form on its original surface. Writers used the vast space of a subway train to display their tags to the audience. Gradually, over time; the size, scale and complexity of the work was enhanced and by the mid-1970s writers had begun to paint entire train cars, and even twin cars,

⁷ Werwath, Timothy. "The Culture and Politics of Graffiti Art." *Art Crimes*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2006. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.

⁸ Scheepers, Ilse. "Graffiti and Urban Space." Diss. University of Sydney, 2004. *Graffiti.org*. Web. 4 Dec. 2013.

⁹ The term ‘writers’ refers to graffiti artists. ‘Writing’ was primarily done with spray cans of Rustoleum, Krylon and other industrial aerosols. There are three different types of graffiti work that form the basis of American hip-hop graffiti: tags (writer’s signature); throw-ups (two-color outlined texts) and pieces (multi-color mural masterpieces). For further details, refer to: Snyder, Gregory J. "Getting In." *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York's Urban Underground*. New York: New York UP, 2009, pp. 35, 40, 41.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31.

doing large scale ‘masterpieces.’¹¹ The reason for using the subway system as a canvas is predicated on the fact that the metro system is a heightened site of consumerism, where the whole city becomes a potential audience.¹² In the words of a writer, RAMM:ΣLL:ZΣΣ†, “New York is the biggest melting pot on the planet and we had the baddest gallery known in the world: the transit system, the city’s blood system. We hit the blood system first.”¹³ Thus, the subways, ridden constantly by a wide cross-section of the population, were crystallized as the essential sites for writers to display their art.¹⁴ Furthermore, the subway, by virtue of being a moving space, also provided a way by which writers could transcend parochial limitations and become ‘all city;’ thereby captivating audiences wherever the metro travelled.¹⁵ Therefore, hip-hop graffiti panned across the quintessential industrial transport system - an urban space which became the foundation from where graffiti launched itself in the 1970s.

However, the writers soon faced a city campaign aimed at eradicating graffiti between 1985 and 1989 whereby the Metropolitan Transportation Authority prevented trains showing graffiti from entering into service. This spurred another transition in the graffiti movement as the art form moved from the underground train to outdoor walls across the entire city.¹⁶ It is at this juncture that writers began to use the entirety of the industrial city space as their canvas, painting across walls all over the metropolis, thereby reinforcing the necessity of an industrial environment for the survival of graffiti; as artists, even under grave threat to their work, did not choose to move out of the city into the suburbs. Not only did writers choose to not move out of

¹¹ Castleman, Craig. "A Brief History of Writing." *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1982, pp. 60.

¹² Esseghaier, Mariam. "Graffiti as Fearful Commodity": Princess Hijab, the Muslim Woman, and Anti-Consumerism." *Rhizomes* 25 (2013), pp. 27.

¹³ Mason, Matt. "The Art of War." *The Pirate's Dilemma: How Youth Culture Is Reinventing Capitalism*. New York: Free, 2008, pp. 114.

¹⁴ Bourland, Ian. "Graffiti's Discursive Spaces." *Chicago Art Journal* 17 (2007), pp. 65.

¹⁵ Scheepers, Ilse. "Graffiti and Urban Space." Diss. University of Sydney, 2004. *Graffiti.org*. Web. 4 Dec. 2013.

¹⁶ Snyder, Gregory J. "Getting In." *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York's Urban Underground*. New York: New York UP, 2009, pp. 148.

the city, they were so deeply embedded in the industrial paradigm that they even used industrial ruins, the aftermath of industrial dereliction, as a site for graffiti production. By virtue of being unpoliced spaces, industrial ruins present a space whereby a host of artistic endeavors can take place as the lines between practices deemed aberrant and acceptable are blurred. Writers, thus, chose to use the disorder of industrial ruins as surfaces for their pieces because these spaces provided easy access and there was little societal sanction against graffiti.¹⁷ A writer, DOER, thus, describes the attraction to such “in-between spaces” by claiming that, “places that were transgressive or... transitive... were of interest [to us] - such as abandoned warehouses.”¹⁸ The extent to which such industrial decay was relevant to graffiti can be understood by the fact that occasionally, the embellishments of extensive pieces were blended with fractured roofs, large puddles and plants to create rich scenes using the industrial ruin, itself, as a tool.¹⁹ Since industrial ruins provided un surveilled urban spaces for graffiti artists to develop their alternative aesthetics and skills, industrialization can, thus, be seen to be intrinsically linked to the development of hip-hop graffiti.

The backdrop of industrialization was also pertinent to the development of graffiti since it furnished the movement with the tools necessary for creating most of the masterpieces. Without the atmosphere of technological development and technical expertise, graffiti artists might not have been able to create pieces the way that they did. For instance, aerosol paint was mastered with great difficulty, requiring dexterity and practice to achieve the necessary technical sophistication to paint smooth and clean lines.²⁰ From 1971-4, writers, in particular Super Kool, began to experiment with aerosol caps from a variety of cleansers which permitted more control

¹⁷ Edensor, Tim. "The Contemporary Uses of Industrial Ruins." *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics, and Materiality*. Oxford: Berg, 2005, pp. 33.

¹⁸ Scheepers, Ilse. "Graffiti and Urban Space." Diss. University of Sydney, 2004. *Graffiti.org*. Web. 4 Dec. 2013.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 34.

over the flow of paint onto the writing surface. As a result, tags morphed from crude felt-marker scrawl to an increasingly systematic variation of the written letters. With industrial development in the chemical industry, thus, the spill-over effect was felt in the graffiti movement as well, and the basic tag was transformed into a stylized tag.²¹ Writers, themselves, also engaged with one of the essential aspects of industrialization – innovation – by developing a host of homemade marking tools called “mops” e.g. shoe polish bottles filled with industrial ink.²² The processes of graffiti production were, therefore, very technical and required a certain learned skill set based on precise coordination, as in “can control,” akin to the technical expertise required by a trained factory worker.

The industrial city also influenced, frustrated and inspired graffiti artists, making the metropolis both their canvas and their irritant. Several writers have, therefore, claimed that graffiti seemed to “fit” the urban landscape.²³ This is because at the time of the inception of the graffiti movement, many of the residents of New York belonged to the poor, working class and were locked into laborious and mundane jobs thereby creating a sense of helplessness as they saw members of the higher strata in society mobilize themselves out of the filth of the city to the pleasant suburbs.²⁴ Furthermore, the disenchantment and frustration with the humdrum of factory life intensified the desire to carve a space for the individual and thus, according to Richard Sennett, “in a city that belong[ed] to no one, people [were] constantly seeking to leave a trace of themselves”²⁵ and carve a space for the expression of a new identity. Lee’s two-car mural titled “Earth is Hell, Heaven is Life” stands testament to the fact that frustration with industrial life

²¹ Bourland, Ian. "Graffiti's Discursive Spaces." *Chicago Art Journal* 17 (2007), pp. 63.

²² Snyder, Gregory J. "Getting In." *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York's Urban Underground*. New York: New York UP, 2009, pp. 41.

²³ Scheepers, Ilse. "Graffiti and Urban Space." Diss. University of Sydney, 2004. *Graffiti.org*. Web. 4 Dec. 2013.

²⁴ Werwath, Timothy. "The Culture and Politics of Graffiti Art." *Art Crimes*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2006. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.

²⁵ Ibid.

provided inspiration for certain pieces.²⁶ Lee describes his own piece by saying, “I told the city how it really looks... I drew factories that were gray and dim with smokestacks. I drew a man hanging a dog, to emphasize cruelty to animals. I drew a dude choking his lady. I drew blood spats... [T]he whole car looked black. If I ever do it again, I’ll do even more.”²⁷ Furthermore, there are also certain forms of graffiti, done at sites of industrial dereliction, which ridicule fellow workers, vilify factory supervisors and comment ironically on the experience of industrial work.²⁸ Feelings of alienation and frustration at work, a product of industrial activity, were channeled through the medium of graffiti and, thus, profuse traces of social interaction and industrial workplace communication haunt most graffiti in industrial ruins.

Lastly, industrialization has also had a latent impact on the content of some graffiti works, in particular tags. Ilse Scheepers claims that writers often leave their mark on various spots to create a living map of the city through their travels, with certain writers having traced a clear route for blocks, ducking doorways, waiting for breaks in traffic and looking for non-grimy surfaces to leave their mark.²⁹ Further, the initial tags, composed of writer nicknames and their street numbers (e.g. Taki 183), are also deeply embedded within the structure of the industrial city. In this case, a part of the writer’s identity is derived from a number that marks his ownership of a part of the urban, industrialized space. Therefore, the graffiti movement remains inextricably linked to industrialization as it is against an industrial, urbanized backdrop that graffiti developed.

²⁶ Refer to Appendix 1 for a picture of Lee’s piece.

²⁷ Castleman, Craig. “A Brief History of Writing.” *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1982, pp. 60-1

²⁸ Edensor, Tim. “The Contemporary Uses of Industrial Ruins.” *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics, and Materiality*. Oxford: Berg, 2005, pp. 157

²⁹ Scheepers, Ilse. “Graffiti and Urban Space.” Diss. University of Sydney, 2004. *Graffiti.org*. Web. 4 Dec. 2013.

Having dealt with the way in which graffiti is rooted in an industrial setting, this paper will now move on to establish how hip-hop graffiti is grounded in an anti-consumerist sentiment, by its very nature, and how a critique of consumerism has seeped into praxis as well. One of the primary ways in which graffiti targets consumerism is by unveiling its invisibility in society and the extent to which it has seeped into culture. Michel de Certeau, in his discussion of “strategies” and “tactics,” focuses on how the industrial city is predicated on a system of structures and how individuals understand themselves in relation to these organizational constructions. According to de Certeau, strategies and tactics operate within a power dynamic whereby strategies comprise of top-down structures which attempt to coerce individuals into certain established patterns, whereas, tactics are the way through which individuals negotiate these spaces differently than intended. What de Certeau demonstrates in this framework is that while strategies are instrumental in the creation of power structures and regulations, the manners in which individuals without power operate within these structures do not always conform to these strategies.³⁰ Using this theoretical framework, graffiti appears to be a tactic within the structural order of the industrial city whereby individuals, who are not in a position of power, attempt to find a method to maneuver within a powerful structure. McAuliffe and Iveson argue that graffiti operates to create spaces for communication and responds to the commodification of the city. Thus, graffiti functions to lay bare structures, such as consumerism, which have become part of the “dominant expectations of [the] visual order.” Ultimately, graffiti that critiques consumer culture is a tactic that is used to underscore the normalization of consumerism in society.³¹ An example of this would be a more contemporary piece (refer to Appendix 2) where the artist is critiquing consumerism by drawing a trajectory of human life which revolves around working,

³⁰ Esseghaier, Mariam. "Graffiti as Fearful Commodity": Princess Hijab, the Muslim Woman, and Anti-Consumerism." *Rhizomes* 25 (2013), pp. 5-6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7.

buying, consuming and dying. By highlighting what the essence of human existence has become, this minimalistic graffiti serves as an example where the artist heavily censures the normalization of consumerism in society.

Embedded within the nature of the graffiti movement is an underlying critique of consumerism because by virtue of being a free, not for profit, enterprise in a world obsessed with profit maximization; graffiti is a consumer product (often made with the explicit purpose of mass communication) which is intrinsically anti-consumerist. Gregory J. Snyder argues that graffiti culture has been “uniquely democratic” considering that “it is free art” because “you don’t need money, or special knowledge, or the right outfit, or a car, or an ID to see it.”³² This is in contradistinction to contemporary art forms, such as photography, which have become so deeply entrenched in the consumer culture that most contemporary photographers take pictures primarily for the purpose of selling them to consumers. Thus, by its very nature, graffiti contains an opposition to consumerism as the philosophical underpinnings of the activity contain a not for profit motto – something which is philosophically untenable in modern day corporations at the heart of which lies a conjunction of consumerism and profit maximization.

From the inception of the movement, there has been a tension between graffiti and corporations who employ mass advertising. Matt Mason has argued that graffiti is the blowback from centuries of advertising and the privatization of common spaces, which has armed corporations with new branding tools that pervade public urban space. Graffiti artists have thereby claimed that they possess the same rights as corporations to use public space but since corporations have economic and political clout, street advertising and large scale billboards have

³² Snyder, Gregory J. "Getting In." *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York's Urban Underground*. New York: New York UP, 2009, pp. 96.

become acceptable in dominant discourse whereas graffiti remains shunned by society.³³ As a writer, MYME, explains, “words are powerful and they're everywhere. What they [the corporations] are doing, is the same as what we do, only we do it for free.”³⁴ It is this view that inspired the New York graffiti explosion as a “blowback” to corporate attitudes as can be witnessed by the deliberate mimicking of advertising strategies in the first phase of the graffiti movement i.e. tagging. PINK, a writer, explains, “The sheer act of writing our names is based on advertising, logos and the mass media intruding into our everyday lives.”³⁵ For the writers, thus, graffiti acts as a “tactic” by disrupting the lived experiences of mass culture and the passivity of consumption and breaking the hegemonic power that the “structure” of corporations holds over urban space and daily life.

Moreover, the name on the wall dominates, labels and possesses the visual space by virtue of tagging it as owned.³⁶ In this way, writers reclaim public space which has been dictated by corporate advertisements promoting consumption. One of the ways in which modern writers do this is through “cultural jamming” which attempts to sabotage large-scale advertisements with graffiti. This is done by writing over existing corporate advertisements with graffiti that changes the meaning of the advertisement.³⁷ An example of cultural jamming is a graffiti artist’s addition of the word ‘profit’ beneath a Coca-Cola advertisement with the word ‘love’ imprinted on a billboard.³⁸ Reclaiming city streets has become a mission for the writers in retaliation to consumerist advertising and domination of public space. Therefore, such graffiti explicitly

³³ Werwath, Timothy. "The Culture and Politics of Graffiti Art." *Art Crimes*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2006. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.

³⁴ Scheepers, Ilse. "Graffiti and Urban Space." Diss. University of Sydney, 2004. *Graffiti.org*. Web. 4 Dec. 2013.

³⁵ Mason, Matt. "The Art of War." *The Pirate's Dilemma: How Youth Culture Is Reinventing Capitalism*. New York: Free, 2008, pp. 122.

³⁶ Scheepers, Ilse. "Graffiti and Urban Space." Diss. University of Sydney, 2004. *Graffiti.org*. Web. 4 Dec. 2013.

³⁷ Werwath, Timothy. "The Culture and Politics of Graffiti Art." *Art Crimes*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2006. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.

³⁸ Refer to Appendix 3 for a picture of the advertisement.

targets consumerism in society by attempting to leave a mark on public space in a way that removes, re-uses or ridicules the consumerism of corporations.

The extent to which anti-consumerism is deeply rooted within the graffiti movement can also be gleaned through the fact that certain graffiti pieces have been used as symbols of critiques of consumerism. For example, in a nationally televised anti-smoking commercial, as the actor pauses and wheezes emphatically while climbing up a flight of stairs; one of Taki's tags is clearly visible on the wall behind him.³⁹ The use of Taki's tag in a commercial condemning smoking is apt because several writers have targeted consumerism through the example of cigarettes. One such writer, Eskae, claims, "Camel [cigarettes], they're up all over the country and look at the message Camel is sending ... they're just trying to keep the masses paralyzed so they can go about their business with little resistance."⁴⁰ Therefore, graffiti has been compared to punk as an anti-corporate movement; with Mason calling graffiti the "living, aggressive art [that] was a perfect fit with the same antiestablishment attitudes that ruled punk landmarks... If punk was rebel music, this [graffiti] was just as truly rebel art."⁴¹

The purpose of this essay has been to question the foundational link between industrialization and consumerism that lies at the heart of contemporary and orthodox scholarship. The case study of American graffiti provides an apt example whereby both industry and consumption are intertwined, but in a way that is unparalleled in ordinary consumer goods. This essay, therefore, endeavors to open the path for questioning the presumptive association between consumerism and industrialization and problematizing the neat categorization of both processes as working in tandem with each other.

³⁹ Mason, Matt. "The Art of War." *The Pirate's Dilemma: How Youth Culture Is Reinventing Capitalism*. New York: Free, 2008, pp. 107.

⁴⁰ Werwath, Timothy. "The Culture and Politics of Graffiti Art." *Art Crimes*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2006. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 110.

Appendix 1



“Earth is Hell”



“Heaven is Life”

Picture Source: <http://www.leequinones.com/index.php?page=subway>

Appendix 2



“Work, Buy, Consume, Die”

Picture Source: <http://michael-synonymous.tumblr.com/post/15899685751/existential-anti-consumerist-graffiti-is-this>

Appendix 3



An Example of Cultural Jamming – “Coke Advertisement: Love Profit”

Picture Source: <http://caution.wordpress.com/2008/07/31/jamming-the-message/>

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Mian Ahmed Shaheer Afaqi

Essam Fahim

The Islamic Intellectual Tradition

18th May, 2014

Introduction

Weiss explains how the Islamic tradition eventually came to view both the Quran and the Sunnah as having emerged out of the Prophetic experience of ‘Wahy’. Wahy came to be defined as direct contact with the angel Gabriel. Though both the Quran and the Sunnah were repositories of revelation, the Quran was Divine Speech in itself, while the Sunnah was ‘Divine speech mediated through the words and deeds of the Prophet’.¹ Therefore, in this paper, I shall treat the subject of Revelation in terms of both the Quran and the Sunnah.

At one end, theological reflection in Islam continued to engage with the question of God’s revelation of His Attributes and Will in the Quran and Sunnah. At the other end, theology sought to understand the nature of the challenge posed for mankind by the Quran. But the moral impulse of Islam was fundamentally a practical one. In time, the Islamic tradition needed to devise a separate science that would cater to providing specific solutions for the practical domain of life. At the same time, this science required a solid content based foundation upon which to apply its rules and methodology.

In this paper I will make three arguments.

Firstly, I argue that by transferring the basis of the Sunnah from the ‘living tradition’ to the ‘verbal tradition’, Shafi provided the Islamic tradition with a concrete means of understanding the practical spirit of Revelation, thereby laying the foundations for a systematic religious-legal

¹ Weiss 45

framework. Furthermore, his project established the Hadith as an independent discipline that played a part that was complementary to Fiqh.

Secondly, Shafi's traditionalist project of grounding Islamic law in Revelation curbed the emergence of personal and arbitrary reasoning in the domain of Law. Furthermore, acting in combination with political and institutional factors, Shafi's project played a part in the movement that culminated in the elimination of Kalam as an independent discipline.

Thirdly, the resulting picture of the Islamic tradition emerged as one where the discipline of Fiqh gained a concrete textual foundation that operated in conjunction with the property of analogical reasoning. At the same time, it also had some scope for theological discussion.

The Vision of the Piety Minded

The experience of the civil wars had raised crucial questions of a theological nature in Islam. Fazl-ur-Rehman tells us that the first question to be raised in Islam was: Does a Muslim remain Muslim after committing grave sin²? This question was intertwined with another set of inquiry that dealt with the meaning and implications of faith. Was an individual's profession of faith, sufficient to justify his title as a Muslim? Or did it need to include good works (Rahman 86) More importantly, this was not merely a matter of personal faith. An individual's status as 'Muslim' also determined his membership within the community. But to what extent can the community evaluate the faith commitment of the individual? (Afaqi 4)

This question received a variety of responses from within the community. However, eventually, the Mu'tazilites would succeed in providing a sustainable solution to the problem. On the question of the status of a grave sinner, they put forth the doctrine of 'intermediate state'. Instead

² Kharijites- accusation

of calling him an ‘infidel’ or a ‘Muslim’, the Mu’tazila held that he was neither (Rahman 88). The Kharijites had emphasized that ‘faith’ must be expressed in the form that the actions of the believers take. However, this criterion did not provide a suitable method for identifying true adherents of the community. In this connection, the Mu’tazila replaced the notion of ‘faith’ with ‘belief’. In order to be classified as one having ‘belief’, a person simply had to attest to certain religious tenets and propositions (Hodgson 385). The question of the conduct of the believer was simply separated from his profession of belief, in order to provide a convenient method for determining community allegiance.

That being said, the impulse to determine a form of religious conduct that was aligned with the moral message of the Quran had remained strong since the dawn of Islam. The community in general was concerned with this impulse. However, the call was particularly answered by a learned class of men, who were eager to give the community some sort of direction in accordance with the challenge of the Quran. These individuals wanted to respond by formulating a set of rules that were guided by the moral spirit of the Quran. These set of rules or principles had to cater to the individual and communal domains of the believer’s life. The approach that set out to find these principles was guided by a basic assumption of the faith: each individual was directly responsible before God. This meant that the individual could not evade his responsibility before God by the means of any intermediary, etc. As a consequence, at the personal level, religious legislation needed to guide the conduct of the believer in all matters of life, so that he could cater to his direct moral responsibility before God³.

However, the challenge of the Quran also entailed a vision for the social domain. As the experience of the early Civil wars suggests, many Muslims felt that belief in God entailed a

³ Hodgson 318

communal responsibility. However, given direct human accountability before God, this responsibility needed to be shared by all members of the society on an equal basis. Islam did not recognize a hereditary social class structure. Thus, any matter of fulfilling God's will was incumbent upon every individual. However, this could not mean that Islam espoused a 'community' of hermits with no common institutions. Instead, the individual was required to live within a communal framework⁴. A communal framework however, entailed social duties. Hence, the piety minded confronted a situation where they could not remain oblivious to an individual's social duties, but could also not set up a kind of formal organization for enforcing these duties. As a consequence, they looked towards finding a 'pattern' that would allow the individual to exercise his responsibility towards the community in accordance with the Divine Will⁵.

Kalam

But before we proceed to discuss the historical process of finding this pattern, let us take a look at how different schools of theology were engaging with Revelation in their attempt to understand the Creator/created relationship⁶.

Kalam had developed as a system to discuss religious beliefs in the light of reason. It gave birth to different systems of speculative thought. But doctrinal speculation reached its height with the Mu'tazilites. The Mu'tazilites were known for their reliance upon human reason and logical analysis. But their 'rationalism' produced a reaction in the form of extreme textualism. This latter tendency was exhibited by the followers of Imam Hanbal.

⁴ Hodgson 320

⁵ Hodgson 318

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this paper to cover the various avenues of debate pursued by these competing schools of theology. Therefore, I focus on one of these debates, i.e. the Creation of actions, in order to highlight the differences between these schools.

In approaching Revelation, The Mu'tazilites attempted to solve some of the theological difficulties raised during the early history of the community. For instance, they held human beings accountable for their actions before God. In doing so, they were trying to assert the freedom of the human will. They justified this viewpoint by holding that only under such a condition could he be held responsible for his actions- earning rewards for good deeds and punishment for evil ones (Rahman 87). But the Hanbalites insisted that it was God alone who created acts, both good and evil. In this regard, they held that the Mu'tazilites were dishonoring God by ascribing the creation of acts to human beings.

The positions of both these groups were founded upon their understanding of God's characteristics mentioned in the Quran. The Mu'tazilite stand was founded upon their concept of the Justice of God. Building on the idea that God can only promise reward and punishment for human beings if he has granted them free will, the Mu'tazilites stipulated that God cannot be Unjust. This idea translated into the doctrine of 'Promise and Threat'. In view of the Quranic promise, they held that God cannot punish the doer of good deeds. Similarly, in view of the Quranic threat, He cannot forgive the evil-doer. In effect, doing that which is contrary to the above Promise or Threat would violate the principle of Justice of God. Their adversaries on the other hand, sought to uphold the Omnipotence of their Creator. To say that God was powerless to be the author of acts labeled by human beings as evil was to question his Omnipotence.

But while both these groups continued to contest each other, a new movement started when Abu'l Hasan Al Ashari abandoned his Mu'tazilite teacher to find his own intellectual path. In the time that followed, Ashari founded a school of theology that held a primarily traditionalist

outlook, but sought to defend that outlook with the rationalistic tools of the Mu'tazilites⁷. For instance, on the question of the creation of actions, Asharism put forth the doctrine of voluntary acquisition⁸. They held that all actions were directly created by God. However, in some actions there is a 'superadded quality of voluntary acquisition' which makes an individual a voluntary agent, and responsible.

We shall return to our discussion about the fate of these schools in a later section. Before that, we need to look at some of the other developments that were giving shape to the Islamic tradition.

The Earl Attempts at Finding a Pattern

The majority of the community was concerned with aligning its behavior in accordance with the vision of Revelation. Since revelation needed to touch all aspects of the believer's life, there were a number of issues related to faith and practice that needed to be worked on. In this regard, the role of the religious specialists became crucial⁹.

The Living Tradition

By the mid eighth century, certain features had started to characterize the approach taken by these thinkers towards responding to revelation. To begin with, for scholars like Abu Hanifa in Iraq and Anas bin Malik in Medina, the practice and rulings of the early community were to serve as the lens towards understanding the Quran and Sunnah¹⁰. Since the foremost concern was to find a pattern for guiding religious conduct, these individuals looked towards the Sunnah for seeking guidance.

⁷ In the initial period only.

⁸ Hodgson

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¹⁰ Browne 17

The Quran had provided principles that could give shape to one's moral attitude towards life¹¹. However, it did not lay out a precise set of rules that could provide a 'pattern' for governing the individual's life. It does contain certain rules related to religious rituals, taxation, inheritance, marriage, and divorce¹². However, in themselves, these rules could not form a comprehensive system for guiding every detail of life. Under these circumstances, the Ulema looked towards understanding the Quranic Revelation in terms of the context in which it was acted upon during the lifetime of the Prophet pbuh. Such an approach could yield the amount of detail that was crucial towards formulating rules related to religious practice¹³. It is thus no wonder, that the term 'wahy' as coined by later jurists was used to refer to both the Quran and the example of the Prophet.

But in the early period, the Sunnah not only constituted the practice of the Prophet, but also his Companions¹⁴. In the time that followed, the practice of the successive generations of the community itself came to represent the Sunnah. It was assumed that the practice of the early community was passed down to successive generations in an unbroken chain. This idea of the 'living' tradition was best captured in Medina, where Imam Malik insisted that the ways of Medina went back to the Prophet¹⁵. Malik insisted that the living tradition of Medina represented the original tradition of the early community because it stood untainted by the innovations or practices of foreign lands¹⁶. Yet, different provinces continued to identify their local tradition with the Sunnah. Thus, for example, Abu Hanifah and his disciples continued to identify Kufan

¹¹ Rahman 69

¹² Gleave 5

¹³ Rahman 69

¹⁴ Rahman 70

¹⁵ Al Shamsy

¹⁶ Hodgson 321

practice with the Sunnah. Therefore, the early period witnessed the emergence of local living traditions that were constituted as the Sunnah.

There was a sense of communal authenticity that made the connection between law and religion¹⁷. If Sunnah was one of the repositories of Revelation, it was to be seen through the lens of communal practice. The concept of Ijma, i.e. consensus was used to ratify this practice. It was argued that the agreed practice of the community was entitled to represent the legacy of the Prophet¹⁸. Thus, at this point in time, the principle of Ijma determined what the Sunnah of the Prophet was.

It is important to note that there were a number of reports in circulation that related to the Prophetic precedent at this point in time¹⁹. We noted the presence of the living tradition as constituting the Sunnah. However, given the presence of the living tradition, we still need to note the presence of the verbal tradition. However, the verbal traditions i.e. Hadiths were oriented towards serving the larger purpose of the Sunnah, i.e. a religious norm of practice. As Rehman points out, a rapidly expanding community was more inclined towards transmitting the example of the Prophet in actual practice²⁰. The Sunnah and Hadith are thus coeval traditions. But the climate of the initial period favored the silent medium of transmission, i.e. the Sunnah.

However, as Shamsy points out, even the verbal tradition was localized. Thus, a certain number of hadiths were circulating in different areas. As a consequence, the inhabitants of particular areas would only recognize the Hadith that were known to them²¹. From another perspective, Hadith reports did have chains of transmission. However, the Hadith report could not necessarily

¹⁷ Al Shamsy

¹⁸ Rahman 60

¹⁹ Hodson 326

²⁰ Rahman 65

²¹ Al Shamsy

be traced back to the Prophet himself. In effect, each report was cited on the authority of a prominent figure. However, this figure need not have necessarily been an associate of the Prophet²²

Ray and Hadith

By and large, the community stood in agreement regarding the relevance of the living tradition. The Quranic moral spirit and the example of the Prophet was to be seen through the lens of community practice. However, differences started to emerge with respect to the adoption of a legal approach. In trying to arrive at solutions with regard to issues of faith and practice, the religious specialists took the Scripture as an indispensable source. However, they disagreed about the mode of approaching the Scripture in their effort to derive rules of practical conduct.

Some tended to rely on their personal sense of judgment. The Ahl al Ray or ‘Partisans of legal reasoning’ stressed the relevance of reason in the domain of law and theology.²³ Literally, Ra’y can be translated as ‘personal judgment’ or ‘considered personal opinion’²⁴. As far as the legal realm was concerned, the community had started to encounter situations where the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet did not provide any clear answers. In such situations, scholars like Abu Hanifa relied on their interpretation of these sources to give opinions²⁵. However, this method allowed a considerable degree of liberty to the interpreter. As a method of free thinking, it produced a corpus of legal opinion that was often conflicting. Here it is important to note that many of the Mu’tazilites had entered the Hanafi school of legal thinking. The Mu’tazilites

²² Hodgson 337

²³ Brown 17

²⁴ Rahman 71

²⁵ Browne 17

distrusted the authenticity of the verbal traditions of the Prophet. Hence, their way of approaching the Quran was basically rooted in the use of human reasoning, or aql.

This is not to say that the Ahl-al-ray completely disregarded the traditions of the Prophet. However, the basis of their legal approach was not centered upon the Hadith. As their opponents would point out, the Ahl-al-ray would accept or reject Hadith depending on whether it suited their legal standpoint. Thus, the legal methodology of Ahl-al-Ray was independent up of Hadith at this point in time.

The Ahl al Hadith on the other hand were suspicious of human reasoning in the law. They espoused a transmission based approach which relied upon the ways ascribed to the Prophet in framing their understanding of the Law. This approach was best epitomized in the ideas of Ibn Hanbal, a scholar who broke away from the Ahl-al-ray to a more traditionalist approach. For Hanbal, even an unreliable narration from the Prophet was to be preferred to the use of reason²⁶. The Ahl-al-Hadith understanding of Law was strictly rooted in the assumption of submitting oneself to the ‘uncorrupted ways of the Prophet’²⁷. Hadith and Fiqh were intimately connected. The Ahl-al-Hadith saw their opponents as arrogantly glorifying human reason. In fact, for them, the indulgence of reason led to heretical notions and innovations in religion. It is crucial to note, that during this point in time, there was a wide variety of Hadith reports in circulation that were unauthentic²⁸. But for the Ahl-al-hadith, the simple phrase that ‘the Messenger of God said’ conveyed a great deal of authority²⁹.

²⁶ Browne 17

²⁷ Browne 98

²⁸ Hodgson 328

²⁹ Scholars like Ibn Hanbal were emphatic about authenticating the content of Hadith but the process was in its rudimentary stages.

The debate between these two camps formed the basis of one of the first compelling questions for Islamic legal thinkers. To what extent could they rely upon the use of human reason in deriving legal principles? At one level, the human intellect allowed for a certain intuitive understanding of morality. However, is rational thinking in itself sufficient to allow Muslims to find solutions to the intricate and complex situations of life, in a spirit that was in line with the message of the Quran?³⁰

Shafi's Influence and the development of Hadith Literature

It was under these set of circumstances that Al-Shafi emerged. Shafi'i was once a student of Imam Malik. But in the years that followed, he grew into one of his most formidable critics. Shafi made a number of contributions to the Islamic tradition. But it would be relevant to start our discussion in the context of his views on the living tradition³¹.

Shafi sought to develop a legal approach that was not reliant upon local traditions. In the previous section, we saw that the inhabitants of various areas saw revelation through the lens of local practice. The community assumed that there was an unchanging living tradition that linked it with the tradition of the Prophet. However, Shafi went on to attack this assumption. He argued that the amount of time separating his generation from the Prophet's generation, was reason enough to believe that the tradition had changed. At the same time, he stressed the need to acknowledge that successive generations had continued to add new customs to their inherited tradition, thus altering the received tradition from the Prophet³².

³⁰ Hallaq

³¹ Al Shamsy

³² Al Shamsy

Having criticized the authenticity of the living tradition, Shafi set out to find the means for maintaining an authentic relationship with Revelation. Shafi's solution emphasized breaking away from the living tradition and turning towards explicit reports about the Prophet. For Shafi the Sunnah could only be established by the verbal traditions of the Prophet³³. This had two implications. To begin with, the localized nature of the Hadith was to be transformed into a universal one. However, this was only possible in the presence of an objective measure for validating Hadith. Shafi emphasized the importance of the chain of transmission, or *isnad*. An authentic Hadith needed to have an *isnad* or chain that could be traced back to the Prophet³⁴. As long as a tradition could be traced back to the Prophet, it needed to be accepted regardless of the local tradition³⁵.

Previously, the inhabitants of various areas used Hadith that were embedded in their local tradition. However, Shafi sought to universalize the use of corpus of Hadith. In this regard, he emphasized the importance of the chain of narration. But the chain needed to be traced back to the Prophet himself. The Hadith could not merely be cited on the authority of a prominent figure. All authority was to be vested in the name of the Prophet. Given this understanding, every Hadith that had a sound *isnad*, i.e. a chain needed to be accepted regardless of local tradition³⁶.

To begin with, Shafi's arguments had a profound influence on the Ahl-e-Hadith jurists³⁷. In the previous section, we noted the existence of a verbal tradition alongside the living tradition. However, the arrangement and content of the verbal tradition took a variety of forms. For instance, let us consider the content of one of the first written categories of compilations of the

³³ Al Shamsy

³⁴ In the previous section we noted that prior to Shafi, Hadith were often cited on the authority of prominent figures. They could often not be traced back to the Messenger

³⁵ Al Shamsy

³⁶ Al Shamsy

³⁷ Browne 29

verbal traditions, i.e. Musannafs. The early decades following the Prophet's death witnessed the emergence of scholars such as Hasan al Basri who sought to advise people on issues of faith and practice. This legal discourse was compiled in the form of Musannafs³⁸. Their content would be a mixture of Prophetic reports, records of the practice of the early companions, and the opinions of the scholar himself. However, with Shafi's emphasis upon the sole significance of Prophetic reports, this situation began to change. The change was best reflected in the compilation of Musnads.

The early ninth century witnessed the emergence of Musnad collections. Organized according to the Isnad or chain of transmission, Musnads only contained the verbal traditions of the Prophet. As Johnathan Browne points out, the Musnad movement marks the beginning of Hadith literature proper. It marked a transition from the Sunnah stances of the local schools to an explicit reliance upon the words of the Prophet. At the same time, the opinions of the companions or other prominent figures were now given space only in commentaries³⁹. Meanwhile, this movement also allowed for a greater deal of authenticity than had previously been known. For now, in order for a Hadith to be accepted, the narrator needed to have an isnad that could be traced back to the Prophet. However, as long as the Hadith had a valid isnad, it was included in the Musnad collection without regard for its authenticity or legal/doctrinal implications⁴⁰.

But Shafi's proposal was not accepted without some resistance. In response, the schools in Medina and Kufa upheld their reliance upon Ijma for deciding the Sunnah. Most of Shafi's opponents, which included the Hanafis and Mu'tazilites, as well as Malikis argued that since the

³⁸ Browne 25

³⁹ Browne 29

⁴⁰ Browne 30

Hadith are primarily transmitted by individuals, they cannot provide us with certain knowledge about the ways of the Prophet⁴¹. However, as Hodgson points out, for the pious Muslim, the idea of deriving religious message solely from the authority of the Prophet was too hard to resist⁴². Gradually, the Ijma of the local schools began to give way to the acceptance of the emergent corpus of Hadith. Nevertheless, Ijma itself continued to play a role in the process of choosing the Hadith that were to represent the Sunnah. However, by the end of the 9th century the corpus of Hadith that were chosen to represent the Sunnah had been firmly established. As Rehman points out, ‘Once Hadith had been established by Ijma, it ousted Ijma by its very logic’⁴³

Self evidently, Shafi’s project had a transformative effect upon the approach of the Ahl-al-Ray. With the primary scope of authority shifting towards the Hadith, the domain of personal judgment or individual reasoning would automatically grow smaller. But Hadith reports could not be expected to cover all kinds of possible circumstances. Neither could they produce the law in themselves. To develop a workable legal discipline, Shafi emphasized the use of the principle of Qiyas. Qiyas or analogical reasoning is a process whereby, the reason or Illa from a known case is transferred to another unknown case⁴⁴. For instance, God has forbidden wine because of its intoxicating effect. Thus, all objects that are intoxicating are therefore prohibited.

Shafi could not entirely eliminate the use of personal judgment as espoused by the Ahl-al-Ray. In fact, that might not have been useful. However, he sought to limit the arbitrary character of its application. As Maqdisi points out, analogical reasoning needed to function within the domains of the rules set by the Quran and Sunnah (as established by the Hadith). As Rehman holds,

⁴¹ Rahman 62

⁴² Hodgson

⁴³ Rahman 77

⁴⁴ Gleave 7

Moreover, the logic of the Hadith phenomenon demanded that all legal issues be discussed with reference to the authority of the Prophet. Consequently, the process of independent thinking or personal judgment was bound to be very limited. Furthermore, Shafi set out to lay out methodological laws that would govern the application of this process. At the same time, if analogical reasoning acted as a limiting influence upon the Ahl-al-Ray, it sought to expand the textual domains of the Ahl-al-Hadith.

Meanwhile, in the subsequent decades, Hadith compilation and criticism started to develop into a sophisticated discipline. Greater attempts were made with regard to the authenticity of the hadiths with the emergence of Sunan and Sahih collections. Compiled for legal references, a sunan was topically organized, focusing on Prophetic reports with full isnads. Most of these Ahl-al-hadith jurists focused on including only those hadiths that had strong isnads. Two of Ibn-Hanbal's students, Al Bukhari and Al-Muslim compiled collections that only included Hadith reports, and met what they held to be the strongest criteria for authenticity. Their works were the first products of the Sahih movement.

Hadith compilation went hand in hand with isnad criticism. Though there was a certain peripheral tendency towards evaluating the the content of the Hadith, the atmosphere required that Hadith criticism solely deals with the chain of transmission. However, once the rationalist threat of the Mu'tazilites faded, content criticism also began to emerge as a separate field⁴⁵.

Hadith collection which had started as a means of providing raw material for legal decisions (for the Ahl-al-Hadith) had developed into a separate discipline with its own specialists (in terms of compilation and criticism). Due to Shafi's contribution, Hadith served a role that was now relevant to legal specialists of all schools. However, it needs to noted, that apart from serving the

⁴⁵ Browne 100

purposes of fiqh, Hadith content had started to become important in matters of doctrine, in its own right.

At the start of our discussion we noted how the Quran and the Sunnah represented the two repositories of Revelation. However, in raising the platform of Hadith to represent the Sunnah, Shafi succeeded in providing a defined means of viewing Revelation. The Prophet's Hadith reflected his conduct and manner of life. In turn, these aspects reflected the moral message of the Quran. Finally, the moral message signaled God's expectations for his community.

The Foundations of Usul-al-Fiqh

W.B Hallaq has argued that the image of Al-Shafi'i as the founder of Usul-al-Fiqh was a later creation. Hallaq's claim is open to debate. However, as Al-Shamsy has pointed out, with Al-Shafi we begin to see a movement towards a hermeneutical legal approach- an approach that involved the interpretation of texts as the basis of law. We have already seen Shafi's contribution towards the development of a science of Hadith. But Shafi was perhaps one of the first exponents to voice the idea that the entire foundation of fiqh should be derived from Revelation⁴⁶. In the Kitab ul Umm Shafi attempted to show that it was possible to derive the entire law from the Quran and Sunnah.⁴⁷

The term Fiqh, which is commonly translated as 'understanding' refers to the process of determining religious conduct, its sources, and the resulting 'statutes'. It therefore aims to translate the message and content of revelation into legal norms⁴⁸. We shall explore the implications and issues associated with the concept of fiqh in a subsequent section. Broadly

⁴⁶ Vishanoff 1

⁴⁷ Hodgson 327

⁴⁸ Reinhart 1

speaking, Usul-al-Fiqh sought to deal with three issues of law: the reliability of source texts, the methodology for interpreting these texts, and the rules for deciding as to who is entitled to interpret these texts. We shall deal with the issues related to the systematization of fiqh in a later section.

Here, it is important to make a point about our narrative. In consequence of Shafi's influence the discipline of fiqh started to take a systematic form. Based on four 'roots', the Quran, Hadith, Ijma and Qiyas, Muslim jurisprudence had now begun to develop as a sophisticated science, striving to provide guidance to the community in a systematic fashion. If the Hadith were a definite means of viewing Revelation, Fiqh and Usul-al-Fiqh as introduced by Shafi attempted to systematize the content of the Revelation in an effort to provide a practical religious outline for the community.

The Fate of Kalam

The years that witnessed the triumph of Hadith, and the development of Fiqh, had detrimental consequences for Kalam. To begin with, as a textualist project, Shafi's endeavor of deriving the entirety of fiqh from the Quran and Sunnah had negative consequences for the rationalist spirit of the Mu'tazilites. As George Maqdisi argues, Shafi's project was to act as an antidote to the science of Kalam. Self evidently, a traditionalist approach to the revealed sources was going to darken the prospects of a rational approach⁴⁹. Secondly, lasting about fifteen years the Great Inquisition (Mihna) had a severely damaging impact for Mu'tazilite scholars. Instituted by the

⁴⁹ I understand 'traditionalism' and 'rationalism' as ideal types in this context

Caliph Al-Mamun in 833, it targeted scholars who refused to recognize the Created nature of the Quran (a Hanbali doctrine). Thirdly, this time period also witnessed the development of Waqfs, i.e. Masjid colleges. Supported by Hanbali jurists, these colleges were built by charitable trusts to support the study of law. Mu'tazilism which was attacked by Shafi on the intellectual front, was also being marginalized on the political and institutional spectrum. Traditionalism in general and Hanbalism in particular had emerged triumphant⁵⁰.

But as George Maqdisi has convincingly argued, in the years following Al-Shafi, the science of Kalam managed to make inroads into the discipline of Usul-al-Fiqh. Shafi's approach to Usul-al-Fiqh was mainly concerned with positive law and theory. However, some of the later works of Usul-al-Fiqh contained theological and philosophical themes. Mu'tazilite kalam was certainly present in these works. However, here it is also crucial to note the direction taken by Al-Ashari's movement. In a previous section, we noted that Al-Ashari set out to defend the traditionalist Hanbali stance with the tools of rationalism. However, around the tenth century, this movement began to take a rationalist turn where it started to abandon the predominantly traditionalist stance of its founder. More importantly, while the Mu'tazilites had infiltrated the Hanafi school of law, Asharism went on to enter the Shafi school. Having made these inroads, it played a dominant part in bringing a rationalist outlook to the discipline of Usul-al-fiqh- a discipline that had originally emerged as a primarily traditionalist project⁵¹.

In sum, Kalam had faded away as an independent discipline by the early eleventh century. However, its themes and methodological tools had made inroads into Usul-al-Fiqh⁵².

The Systematization of the Fiqh Tradition

⁵⁰ Maqdisi, 1984

⁵¹ Maqdisi, 1984

⁵² Maqdisi, 1984

Textualism, Analogy and Reason

A textualist approach can be defined as one where the formulation of the law is grounded in a closed canon of foundational texts. The law cannot exist independently of these texts. That the fiqh tradition came to espouse that God had revealed His Will in the Scripture (and with that in the Sunnah of his messenger) is only self-evident, given Shafi's influence. However, the early debates in the fiqh tradition showed that the line between textual and extra-textual was difficult to draw. We saw in a previous section that Shafi managed to minimize the possibility of free and arbitrary opinion, by emphasizing the process of analogical reasoning. However, some Sunni jurists continued to regard a textualist approach as totally incompatible with the use of analogical reasoning in the formulation of the law. Others argued that the revealed sources in themselves were insufficient for covering the variety of possibilities, making analogical reasoning a necessity⁵³.

But the textualist bent of the fiqh tradition had grown strong enough to bring the analogists on the defensive. The analogists had to emphasize that they were merely using analogy to 'extrapolate' the law from the text⁵⁴. Thus, they stressed that they merely relied on revealed causes, i.e. causes that had already been discovered from the cases within the Quran and Sunnah. Having extracted the revealed cause, they applied it to cases that were not explicitly covered in the foundational texts. However, the debate between these two groups continued to center on the issue of how these causes themselves were to be discovered and interpreted⁵⁵.

At the same time, it should be noted that the various schools of law continued to find space for different forms of reasoning within the textualist framework. Robert Gleave has argued that the

⁵³ Weiss 67

⁵⁴ Weiss 67

⁵⁵ Weiss

texts of Usul-al-Fiqh do not normally deal with the theme of an underlying philosophy of law that would guide the fiqh process. However, it is possible to see the employment of different philosophical categories in the manner in which these cases were handled. Let us consider the case of the purity of tanned dog skin. It was reported that the Prophet had forbidden the eating of dog meat. In this connection, all parts of impure animals were considered impure. Building on these considerations, and the impurity ascribed to a dog during its lifetime, the Shafi's held that dogs fall in the category of animals that are essentially impure- i.e. impure under all circumstances. Thus, even tanned dog skin was impure. On the contrary, the Hanafis contended that since tanning prevents a hide from transmitting animal impurity, it makes an animal's skin pure for ritual activity. Furthermore, they held that dogs are not essentially impure, but rather only accidentally so. This is because their impurity only comes from their linkage with an impure object such as carrion. Thus, the Hanafis employed the essence/accident principle to argue that a dog's sin becomes pure once it is tanned⁵⁶.

It is important to make two points about this example. Firstly, textualism is self-evident, since both parties deal with the issue, within the framework of the Prophetic report. However, the Shafis appear to strictly adhere to the commandment in the report. The Hanafis on the other hand, go on to reason about the commandment and arrive at a different solution. God's Will may very well have been revealed in the Sunnah of the Prophet. However, it was still possible to understand it in different ways.

Intentionalism and Ambiguity

⁵⁶ Gleave 448

In formulating the science of fiqh, the legal theorists also came to emphasize the discoverability of authorial intent. By and large, Muslim jurists agreed that the Divine intent behind the words of the Quran could be known. Central to this assumption was Shafi's conception of language. In effect, it was the particular form of language that Revelation took, that allowed the possibility of understanding the message of the Scripture. Shafi emphasized that one of the purposes of Revelation is to express the intention of the speaker⁵⁷. To this end, he stressed that understanding the grammar and other associated techniques of Mudari Arabic was crucial to deciphering the meaning of the Quran. This did not mean that the Divine intent was always discovered in fact by the jurist. However, in essence, it was always discoverable⁵⁸.

However, at another level, Shafi emphasized that the language of revelation was often ambiguous. Thus, portions from the revealed text may appear to be in contradiction with each other. As a result, it was up to the Jurist to analyze these portions in order to fit them into a coherent whole. Eventually, the fiqh tradition came to hold that the text of the revelation contains an element of ambiguity that makes it possible to adapt it to a particular set of legal rules. However, at the same time, the legal rules can be taken as the literal meaning of the revelation text. In effect, it was this paradigm that came to define classical Muslim legal theory⁵⁹.

On the surface, the aspects of intentionalism and ambiguity may seem to contradict each other. However, in combination, they contributed to the practical success of the fiqh tradition. Intentionalism justified the jurist's position of seeking the law in the text. God did indeed speak to his people through the text. However, He spoke in different ways- hence the apparent ambiguity. As a consequence, the jurist's responsibility was to seek to understand the intent of

⁵⁷Al Shamsy

⁵⁸Weiss 65

⁵⁹Vishanoff5

God as conveyed within the apparent ambiguity of Revelation, for the benefit of the common folk. Due to assumption of authorial intent, the jurist's opinion was able to command strong authority. At the same time, the ambiguity of the text, allowed him a degree of flexibility in applying his methodology⁶⁰

In this light, it may appear that the legal jurists commanded a significant degree of power in deciding what constituted 'Islamic Law'. However, the dynamics of legal theory placed constraints on plain innovation in law. To begin with, innovation was prevented by the requirement for 'consensus'. In addition, the training of the interpreter was structured in a way, such that his scope of understanding and interpreting the text was 'standardized' according to the body of legal knowledge in existence. In turn, the Islamic legal method mainly functioned as a means of 'justifying' the inherited body of legal knowledge. Broadly speaking, despite interpretive powers, it did not serve as a medium of 'creating' laws⁶¹.

Theological Reflection

It is only intuitive that the fiqh tradition was primarily concerned with providing practical religious guidance in the light of revelation to the common folk. However, discussion about the theological assumptions behind a legal and ethical framework had begun with the dawn of the Islamic intellectual tradition. With the inroads made by kalam into fiqh, these discussions would continue to shape the assumptions of legal theory.

⁶⁰ Vishanoff 4

⁶¹ Vishanoff 8

One issue that continued to receive the attention of legal theory dealt with the ‘ontological status’ of moral qualities. The primary question in this regard dealt with the moral assessment of actions: Do actions become right/wrong because God has declared them to be so, or is it because they have certain ‘external, objective qualities’ that make them right/wrong. From the Shiites to the Mu’tazilites to the Asharites, different schools adopted different responses to the question. In turn, their positions reflected their longstanding assumptions⁶².

On another front, Muslim thinkers sought various ways of explaining the relationship between knowledge and action. One theory held that due to their innate quality of aql, human beings are endowed with the capacity to ‘undertake a trust from God’. They are therefore capable of not only being obligated to God, but also capable of responding to these moral challenges in an effective manner. This theory therefore stressed the competence of human beings to respond to the covenant with God, by discharging their moral obligations. The other theory held that morality basically emerges through the act of Revelation. It is the revelation of the Quran that creates the obligation to act upon moral knowledge⁶³.

Conclusion

By the eleventh century, the Islamic intellectual world comprised of a triumphant fiqh tradition, an independent hadith tradition that served a complementary role to Fiqh, and a Kalam tradition that had almost faded away as an independent discipline.

Primarily textual and traditionalist in outlook, the fiqh tradition had embraced a system of analogical reasoning (with some hesitation) to provide solutions to the extensive array of questions encountered by it. Meanwhile, Kalam had succeeded in bringing some scope for

⁶² Gleave 455

⁶³ Reinhart

theological discussion within the fiqh tradition. Hadith on the other hand continued to provide the primary raw material for the process of fiqh. But at the same time it had evolved as a separate discipline with its own doctrinal value.

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