

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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Şafdar ‘Alī

DATE OF BIRTH	1830
PLACE OF BIRTH	Dholpur, Rajasthan
DATE OF DEATH	1899
PLACE OF DEATH	Unknown

BIOGRAPHY

Şafdar ‘Alī was a well-known civil servant, writer, historian and Urdu literary critic, an educationist and Christian reformer of pre-Partition India. He is known as Şafdar of Jabalpur (Jubbulpore), though he was not originally from that town. His letter to an official of the Church Missionary Society in Salisbury reports that his father was a *qāzī* at Dholpur, Rajasthan, but for some reason he resigned and moved to live in Agra (‘From Safdar Ali’, p. 216). The preface of his *Niyāz nāmah* also confirms Dholpur as his ancestral village.

He studied at Agra College for 14 years and became proficient in Arabic, Persian, Hindi and Sanskrit. After completing his studies, he was appointed professor of Persian at the college and also taught philosophy. He dedicated the early years of his career to Eastern languages and Islamic disciplines such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). In 1856, the Ministry of Education appointed him deputy inspector of schools for Western Punjab (present-day Pakistan). He was stationed at Rawalpindi and later in Peshawar, Jhelum and Multan. During his service in Multan, which was known as *madīnat ul-awliyā’* (‘city of saints’), he used to visit shrines there and in Muzaffargarh in search of spiritual peace. In 1860, the education department transferred him to Jabalpur, where for a few years he also served as extra assistant commissioner of the Central Provinces of United India (Justin, ‘Contribution of Christian writers’, pp. 159-60). His stay in Jabalpur led him towards Christianity.

As a Muslim, Şafdar believed in God and the Day of Judgement, but he realised that he never seemed to have peace in his heart. From his early teens he was a seeker, questioning which religion was true and what would happen after death (Harrison Qurban, *Urdu ke Masīhī shua’rā’*, p. 81). In Jabalpur he continued to seek the truth which he had not found in the shrines of Multan and Muzaffargarh. Then, while he was preparing to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, he heard about

Nehemiah Goreh (Neil Kanth Shastri), a Christian convert from a Hindu background. He contacted Goreh and invited him to Jabalpur, where Goreh, although he was not an educated man, was able to persuade him to meditate on the Psalms. Doing this gave Şafdar the spiritual peace he was looking for, and he wrote to his fellow Sufis saying that he had found the true *murshid* ('spiritual guide'; Andrews, *North India*, pp. 72-3, 120-2). C.E. Gardner suggests that this *murshid* was Jesus ('Conversion of Maulvi Safdar Ali', p. 127). Before he met Goreh, Şafdar had already studied Karl Gottlieb Pfander's *Mizān ul-ḥaqq* on the way back to Jabalpur from his home town (together with his fellow student at Agra College, 'Imāduddīn Lāhiz, he had attended the famous debate between Karl Gottlieb Pfander and Raḥmatullāh Kairānavī (*CMR* 24, 188-236 and 253-60) in Agra in April 1854 [*Imāduddīn, Wāqī'āt-i 'Imādiyya*, pp. 12-15]).

In November 1861, he entered a period of concentrated study of the Qur'an, the Bible and 'controversial and polemical treatises' by both Christians and Muslims. As a result, he 'clearly perceived that neither the Koran nor the Hadis was of divine origin, and that Mohammed was not the prophet of God', though he was still not ready to accept Christianity as the only truth ('From Safdar Ali', p. 218). Taking Goreh as his mentor changed his views on Christianity, and his inclination towards the Christian faith was such that his family and friends started calling him *Īsā'ī* (follower of Īsā). In that particular cultural context, this showed the worst degree of hatred (see 'The two converts', p. 48). Although his relatives tried to take his wife away from him, he continued his research with devotion and fasting, so much so that lack of food and sleep affected his health through the last ten years of his life. With the help of Goreh, he studied Christianity for three years, from November 1861 to December 1864, before making a decision to convert (Edwardes, *Memorials*, p. 414).

Şafdar was baptised in Jabalpur on Christmas Day 1864 (Gardner, 'Conversion of Maulvi Safdar Ali', pp. 124-32), when he was in his thirties. His close friend Qāsim 'Alī (Revd Quasim Khan Nehemiah, CMS Amritsar) was baptised together with him and, a few weeks later, his close friend Karīm Bakhsh followed suit. The news of this drew the anger of his family and friends, but even though he had to give up his wife and child ('What our missionaries have done', p. 322), he remained true to his conviction.

Şafdar's literary output began with his *Niyāz nāmāh* (1867), an appeal to his family and friends to understand why he had accepted Christianity. In *Ghizā-i rūḥ* (1875), he collected the Urdu poetry of contemporary Christian poets, along with his own. The longest of his own poems,

Faryād-i muntazar, was published in a separate volume dated around 1887. Several other works have not survived. E.M. Wherry wrote sorrowfully in 1905, 'This gifted writer was the victim of one of those sore disappointments and irreparable losses somewhat characteristic of India. The literary labours of eleven of the most mature years of his life were entirely destroyed by white ants' (*Muslim controversy*, p. 95).

Şafdar died on 20 September 1899. News of his death was circulated in Christian periodicals throughout the country with expressions of grief and sorrow. Kedar Nath Mannat, Qāsim 'Alī Shāh and Aḥmad Shāh Shaiq all wrote obituaries and poetic laments (*Nūr Afshān*, 1899, p. 5).

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Waseem Raza

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Niyāz nāmāh

'Humble petition'

DATE 1867

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Urdu

DESCRIPTION

Niyāz nāmāh is the best known and best preserved of Şafdar 'Alī's works. It was written in response to the letters he received from his family and friends who were anxious to know the reasons for his conversion from

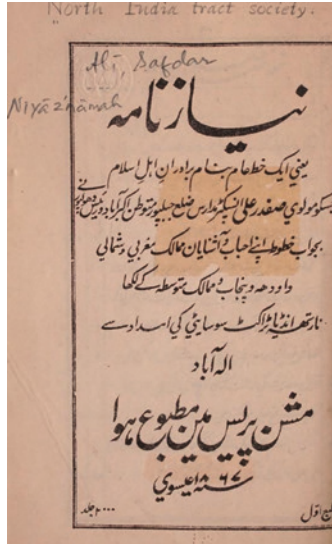


Illustration 22. *Niyāz nāmah*,
title page

Islam to Christianity. The title is an idiomatic way of referring to a letter written with due respect to someone who is superior to the correspondent; it can be roughly translated as ‘humble petition’. The North India Tract Society published *Niyāz* in 1867 at the Allahabad Mission Press in both Roman Urdu and Persian Urdu scripts. The Persian Urdu original runs to 304 pages, followed by four pages of corrections. Some 2,000 copies of the Persian Urdu version were printed, a large quantity at the time.

E.M. Wherry wrote that *Niyāz nāmah* began as a series of letters that were later published together (*Muslim controversy*, p. 95), though Dieter Becht queries this account on the grounds that ‘the book can only be conceived as a whole’ (*The book and the prophet*, p. 361 n. 1; cf. Powell, *Muslims*, p. 289 n. 73). In any case, it may be divided into four related yet distinct main sections. After a brief preface (*dibācha*), the introduction of 71 pages contains an open challenge to Muslim friends and family about the Qur’an and Muslim tradition being contradictory (*barkhilāf*) to the teaching of the Bible (‘Holy Book’). The second main section is an investigation of the allegation (*da’wā*) of *tahrīf* (pp. 78–116 in the original 1867 publication). Şafdar then explains the testimony (*gavāhī*) that the Qur’an and Hadith bear to the Bible (pp. 116–205). The third section contains Şafdar’s proof of the genuineness (*ṣiḥḥat*) and authenticity (*aṣliyyat*) of the Bible (pp. 205–38), and the fourth investigates the claim of abrogation (pp. 239–302),

followed by a two page conclusion (*khātimah*). One subsection that is of particular importance for the history of Christian-Muslim engagement in India is Şafdar's answer to a list of arguments that he calls the current 'bigotries' (*taşşubāt*) and the resistance of Muslim scholars to Christianity (pp. 160-205).

Şafdar's introduction (pp. 6-77) poses a kind of dilemma to Muslim readers. The Qur'an and the Hadith, he writes, attest to the Torah and Gospel as the Word of God. But the Qur'an and Hadith in their own teachings contradict the content of the Torah and Gospel. As examples, he gives the Gospel teaching about the divinity and divine Sonship of Jesus, the teaching that God is one in three persons and the teaching that God in love made a way of salvation for humanity through the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus. The Bible teaches a moral and spiritual law rather than a ritual and external law, and the propagation of the faith is permitted only by peaceful means. In each case, Şafdar argues that the Qur'an and Hadith contradict biblical teachings, listing a number of points at which they contradict the biblical accounts of prophets. These are facts that cannot be avoided. To this point, Şafdar writes, he does not yet wish to say that the Bible is from God but wants simply to demonstrate that, by the flow of their own logic, the Qur'an and Hadith cannot be from God. In an effort to find a way out of this dilemma, he suggests, Muslims have seized on two accusations: that the Bible has been abrogated by the Qur'an, and that Jews and Christians allowed their scriptures to become corrupt or actively falsified them.

The book then moves into investigations (*taḥqīqāt*) of Muslim accusations of scriptural alteration (pp. 78-116) made particularly in *Ijāz-i 'Īsavī* (Agra, 1854-5) by Raḥmatullāh Kairānavī and Muḥammad Wazīr Khān (*CMR* 24, 237-45). Şafdar raises the issue of scribal errors creating differences between biblical manuscripts, then appeals to Muslim familiarity with historical accounts of the various readings or recitations of the Qur'an at the time of the third Caliph 'Uthmān (r. 644-56) and asks whether the variants resulting from differences between qur'anic recitations cause Muslims to regard the Qur'an as unreliable. On a positive note, he describes the ability of the science of textual criticism to determine the original biblical text by comparing many manuscripts, and vouches for the honesty of biblical scholars who openly acknowledge scribal mistakes alongside the corrected text.

The third main section (pp. 116-60) of *Niyāz* advances a large number of quotations from both the Qur'an and the Hadith with the purpose of demonstrating their positive and respectful witness to the Bible. Not

a single verse in the Qur'an containing the words *Tawrāt*, *Zabūr* or *Injil* accuses these pre-Islamic scriptures of being corrupted, notes Şafdar. He also asserts that the Bible that exists in 1867 is the same Bible that existed and was widely known at the time of Muḥammad. At the end of this section, Şafdar answers particular points that Muslim polemicists have made in their attack on the Bible (pp. 160-205). By the references he gives, he was thinking mainly of Kairānavī and his books *Ijāz-i 'Īsavī* and *Izālat al-awhām* (1852-3), but he also mentions *Kitāb-i istīfsār* (1846) by Āli Ḥasan and *Baḥs-i sharī'ah*. The 19 examples cited and answered exemplify the kinds of attacks that Indian Christians had to parry in the middle of the century and also show lively ingenuity in Şafdar's responses. Many of these concern Moses and the Torah, including assertions of differences between the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint and accusations of the complete destruction of the Torah by Nebuchadnezzar.

Accusations against the New Testament include the assertions that the Gospel according to Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, that the 'Roman Emperor Antiochus' (possibly a reference to Antiochus IV Epiphanes [r. 175-64 BCE], the Seleucid ruler of Syria, though he lived in pre-Christian times) destroyed the Christian books, and that the pope imposed the Latin Vulgate. Perhaps most interesting, but somehow also representative, are the accusations that the Bible must be corrupted because many heretics and atheists have found certain Christian teachings repugnant, and because it contradicts the Qur'an and Hadith – the direct opposite of Şafdar's opening challenge in the preface. In his responses, Şafdar repeatedly notes that these Islamic polemical points are moot for Muslims if the Qur'an attests to the Bible as it was in the 7th century. He also draws attention to the frequency with which Muslim polemical points do not actually prove anything related to the accusation of textual corruption. Şafdar supplies such information about history and manuscripts as was available to him, and also appeals to the Muslim reader to consider similar situations with the Qur'an and to apply criteria for judging evenly. He continues this style of presentation in his section on the correctness and authenticity of the Bible (pp. 205-38), where he offers historical information on the development and canonisation of the Bible and statistics about New Testament manuscripts.

In the fourth and final section of the book (pp. 239-302) Şafdar provides an extensive response to the Muslim claim that the Bible is abrogated by the Qur'an because, he writes, this is a widespread charge in India. He explores seven issues, ranging from technical Muslim meanings of *naskh* to the particular Muslim assertion that the Qur'an abrogates the Gospel.

Şafdar writes that, for Muslims, the abrogation of the Bible means a prohibition against reading the Bible or acting according to its teachings – which Muslims choose to declare void. He argues, however, that no such assertion of the abrogation of the Bible can be found in the Qur'an or Hadith. He cites Q 6:156, in which the Qur'an is conceived of as sharing the same content as the Book sent down previously 'on two groups before us'. Rather, Şafdar suggests, when the scholars of Islam discovered that the contents of the Qur'an did not match the teaching of the Bible in certain areas, they invented the doctrine of the abrogation of the Bible, basing it instead on a claim of the unanimous decision of the Muslim community (*ijmā'*).

Interestingly, Şafdar notes that when Karl Gottlieb Pfander referred to this Muslim doctrine of the abrogation of the Bible during the 1854 Agra debate, Kairānavī claimed there was no such doctrine, accusing Pfander of ignorance (pp. 261-6; cf. Powell, *Muslims*, p. 246, and the discussion below). Şafdar, however, comments that Kairānavī's claim contradicts the books dealing with the principles of *fiqh*.

Beyond presenting facts and arguments from the scriptures and from Islamic jurisprudence, much of Şafdar's case on abrogation adopts a style of appealing to the reader's common sense with illustrations and questions. Can God reveal the true path to eternal salvation and then reject it? If the external commandments of the Torah are fulfilled and perfected in the Gospel, would God then return to the external in a third book? Şafdar gives examples related to fornication, divorce and loving one's neighbour. In the Gospel, the neighbour is no longer restricted to fellow Jews, he writes, suggesting that the Qur'an and Hadith slip back from the Gospel's high standard. Is it conceivable that God first revealed the Gospel's perfect and complete commandments, but then repented and abrogated them? Şafdar asks similar questions related to ritual and ceremony, the inner and outer law, physical and spiritual cleansing, the Temple and the Ka'ba, circumcision and animal sacrifice. According to the Gospel, the system of atonement in the Torah is fulfilled in the true sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In contrast, writes Şafdar, Islamic Law again requires animal sacrifice, while the atonement of Jesus is not mentioned at all. Şafdar repeatedly asks the reader to consider whether God, after revealing the Torah and later in line with it also the Gospel, would then abrogate the Gospel and revert back to earlier understandings in the Qur'an.

SIGNIFICANCE

Niyāz nāmāh was the first Indian contextualised writing to make a case for the reliability and authenticity of the Bible in Muslim idiom. Şafdar

brought to the encounter between Muslims and Christians the knowledge gained from a thorough traditional Islamic education, and was able to demonstrate in *Niyāz* how and why Muslim accusations against the Bible remained a central impediment to Christian-Muslim relations in India through the 1860s and beyond. On its publication, *Niyāz* received significant attention from both Christians and Muslims in the subcontinent. It became so popular that, within a few years, it also caught the attention of European readers. Garcin de Tassy wrote of it, 'Cet ouvrage, qui traite de la religion chrétienne et du mahométisme, est considéré comme très-important et destiné à produire beaucoup d'effet chez les musulmans' (*Histoire de la littérature hindouie et hindoustanie*, 1870-1, vol. 3, pp. 19-20). In a letter to Robert Clark in 1875, General Lake of the Church Missionary Society wrote that he had heard a recommendation that *Niyāz*, 'one of the best books' on the 'Muhammadan controversy', should be translated into English so that missionaries in the Ottoman Empire and Africa could also benefit from it (*Conference on Urdu*, p. 8). In 1905, Wherry recommended the book as 'specially suited for a presentation volume to be given to serious-minded Muhammadans' (*Muslim controversy*, p. 97).

Niyāz was published in three Urdu editions, the latest in 1898. Muslims understandably found it controversial. Several Muslim scholars wrote refutations, including Nāşiruddīn Muḥammad Abūlmanşūr Dihlavī in *Raqīmat ul-wadād* (1878), and Muḥammad 'Alī Mūngerī (*CMR* 24, 542-51) in *Ā'īnah-i Islām* and *Paighām-i Muḥammadī* (1884), combined with a response to a work by Ṭhākūr Dās. Muslim responses to *Niyāz* were aggressive and produced a response of correspondingly aggressive works from Indian Christians, even as late as 1947. *Niyāz* itself, however, does not add aggression to controversy. Because of the nature of normal Muslim-Christian disagreement, the book is necessarily apologetic and even polemical in parts, but with respect and politeness. In his writing, Şafdar tends to characterise his responses to Muslim *da'wā* ('allegation') as *tanqīḥ* ('checking' or 're-examination'). Wherry wrote,

The general tone of the book is delightful. It is wanting in the acrid and stinging element of some writings on this subject. The author addressed his dear friends and used the persuasive tone born of love and a strong desire to bring them to a knowledge of the Saviour of men. (*Muslim controversy*, p. 97)

Şafdar set himself to deal with a very difficult subject – the efforts of Muslims to keep the Bible out of Muslim-Christian engagement over the course of more than a millennium (see Powell, *Muslims*, p. 248). *Niyāz* models a way for Christians to make a strong case for the Bible to Muslims without disrespect or confrontation. Şafdar wanted to explain his decision

to become a Christian and to engage Muslims in a healthy discussion in the spirit of 'O friends, dear ones, and respected elders' (p. 302). The style and content of his 77-page preface and introduction therefore become very significant. He appeals to what he understands to be the general Muslim belief that the Torah and Gospel are the word of God. He notes that the Qur'an claims to be a confirmation (*muşaddiq*) of them. He then presents a dilemma to the reader: if the Qur'an differs in its content from these pre-Islamic scriptures rather than confirming their content, how can it then also be called the word of God? Şafdar begins with the fact of differences between the Qur'an and the Bible but poses a fundamentally Muslim question.

Niyāz is actually a continuation of a Christian effort to engage Indian Muslims through written works in discussion and debate that had been initiated by Pfander in 1839. Pfander left India in 1858 and Şafdar was the first to replace him. This raises the interesting question of how a native Indian of Muslim background would compare with a foreign missionary in dealing with the 'controversy' between Islam and the Gospel (Avril Powell does this with 'Imāduddīn Lāhiz in "Pillar of a new faith", pp. 236-44). *Niyāz* does indeed treat a number of themes and points also found in the first section of Pfander's *Mizān ul-ḥaqq* (Calcutta, 1839): the Qur'an's respectful testimony to the Torah and Gospel; the claim that the present Torah and Gospel are the same as those that existed in the 7th century; and the evidence of existing biblical manuscripts and the quotations of the Church Fathers. *Niyāz*, however, greatly expands on Pfander's brief treatment of abrogation (*Mizān*, pp. 18-31).

Pfander understood from his personal encounters in Karabagh and Persia that Muslims regard the Gospel as being abrogated by the Qur'an, and responded to this accusation verbally on 10 April 1854 in Agra ('Movements among Mahommedans', *Church Missionary Intelligencer* 5 [1854] 251-8, p. 255). According to Powell, Kairānavī then charged Pfander with misrepresenting the qur'anic understanding of abrogation in *Mizān* (*Muslims*, pp. 246-8). Some 13 years later, however, Şafdar wrote in *Niyāz* that the accusation that the Qur'an abrogates the Bible is in fact widespread among Muslims in India (p. 239-41), found it to be one of the main ways in which Muslims nullify the Gospel, and made his response to this accusation one of the main sections of his book.

Şafdar knew from his thorough traditional Islamic education that the Qur'an does not claim to abrogate the Torah and Gospel. He also knew that, in the Qur'an, the Arabic root *nasakha* relates to contradictory verses within the Qur'an itself. He states both these points clearly in the

final section of *Niyāz* (pp. 243-5, 249-56). But he also says explicitly that Kairānavī's denial of the Muslim doctrine of the abrogation of the Bible by the Qur'an (pp. 261-6) was false according to Islamic works dealing with the principles of *fiqh* (p. 266). Şafdar did not know Pfander, and at the time of the 1854 Agra debate he was part of the Muslim contingent opposing the missionary. Pfander left India in 1858 and Şafdar's conversion came some six years later, influenced more by the Indian Christian Nehemiah Goreh than by any expatriate. Şafdar would later urge Indian Christians to make the positive affirmation of the Gospel their priority ('Preaching to Muhammadans', pp. 55-6). However, in order to explain his conversion to the Muslims in his family and community who opposed it, he considered it essential to deal first of all with the Muslim accusations that he knew prevented Muslims from hearing these affirmations: that the Bible is corrupt and that it is abrogated by the Qur'an. For this, he returned to the first part of Pfander's *Mizān* ('From Safdar Ali', p. 220) and the verbal case that Pfander and his second, Thomas Valpy French (*CMR* 24, 338-44), made during the 1854 Agra debate, and then considerably strengthened the Christian response to the accusation of the abrogation of the Bible.

As a native Christian of Muslim background, Şafdar had his finger on the pulse of Muslim society and was able to diagnose the exact reasons for resistance to Christianity: the Muslim accusations of corruption and abrogation of the Bible. The effectiveness of *Niyāz* is indicated by a series of Muslim refutations stretching over five decades. 'Imāduddīn Lāhiz (*CMR* 24, 506-41), Şafdar's contemporary and similarly an Indian convert from Islam (1866), shared the task of supporting Pfander's legacy and extending it out of deep knowledge of Muslim tradition, especially in his *Hidāyat al-Muslimīn* (1868). Powell writes that Şafdar and 'Imād were able to use 'inside knowledge' of the arguments of Pfander's opponents to 'reformulate' Pfander's writings. She comments that '[t]hese Christian statements made little impact on the rest of the *'ulamā*, who continued to affirm that the *tahrīf* issue was central to their objections to Christianity' ('Muslim-Christian confrontation', p. 89). This is not, however, the same as saying that Şafdar's diagnosis was not correct, or that Pfander's prescription was mistaken.

Niyāz was published in the same year as Kairānavī's *Izhār al-ḥaqq*, but the difference in the reputation and circulation of the two books could hardly be greater. *Niyāz* actually answers many of the claims and accusations contained in *Izhār*, because much of that material came straight from Kairānavī and Muḥammad Wazīr Khān's *Ijāz-i 'Īsavi* (Powell, *Muslims*, pp. 294-5; Becht, *The book and the prophet*, p. 114) – with which Şafdar did

indeed contend (see above). Though Şafdar worked in education for the British administration, the Raj did not, and by policy could not, publish *Niyāz*, which was instead printed at private mission presses. Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire not only invited and encouraged Kairānavī to write and publish the Arabic *Izhār* in Istanbul (1864-8), but in 1880 Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909) also ordered the book to be translated into Turkish (Powell, *Muslims*, p. 295). Despite the recommendation of some missionaries, *Niyāz* was not translated into English and has never been widely known beyond Urdu readers in India.

PUBLICATIONS

Şafdar 'Alī, *Niyāz nāmah*, Allahabad, 1867; 93984255 (digitised version available through the Library of Congress)

STUDIES

Becht, *The book and the prophet* (pp. 166-97 on Şafdar 'Alī, pp. 360-410 summary of *Niyāz*)

Powell, "Pillar of a new faith"

Powell, *Muslims and missionaries*

Powell, 'Muslim-Christian confrontation'

[Syed] Muḥammad 'Alī Mūngerī [Kānpūrī], *Paighām-i Muḥammadī*, [s.l.], 1912

Wherry, *Muslim controversy*, pp. 95-7

[Syed] Muḥammad 'Alī Mūngerī [Kānpūrī], *Ā'īnah-i Islām* (also known as *Takmil ul-adyān*), [s.l.], 1884

Syed Abū ul-Mansūr Dihlavī, *Raqīmat ul-wadād*, Delhi, 1880

Conference on Urdu and Hindi Christian literature, held at Allahabad, 24th and 25th February 1875, Madras, 1875

Şafdar 'Alī, 'Preaching to Muhammadans', pp. 55-8

Rare or lost works of Şafdar 'Alī

DATE 1875-99

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Urdu

DESCRIPTION

Among Şafdar 'Alī's other works, the one that is most in line with *Niyāz* is *Khullat nāmah*, written shortly before his death in 1899. But his most influential work was *Ghizā-i rūḥ*, a collection of poetry published in two

editions in 1875 and 1889; the Urdu text of the 1889 edition was also published in Roman script in 1893. Though this work is increasingly hard to find, the British Library has a copy of the 1875 edition, and copies of the 1889 and 1892 editions are housed in the library of the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad, India. A second work of poetry titled *Faryād-i muntazar* was published in 1928.

Ghizā-i rūḥ ('Nourishment for the soul', from the Arabic *ghidhā'*) is a collection of poems in Urdu by Indian Christian poets, including Şafdar 'Alī himself, and edited by him. The second edition of 1889 runs to 373 pages. In the introductory section Şafdar 'Alī lists the 16 subjects under which the poems are organised (pp. 2-3), the first being 'Praise to God most high'. He then lists the poems alphabetically according to the first letter of the first word of each, giving the name of the poet and the page number (pp. 4-24). This is followed by the *dībācha* (preface, pp. 27-34). The poems themselves occupy the heart of the edition (pp. 1-296, paginated separately), and biographical information about 54 participating poets follows in an alphabetical appendix (pp. 297-339). The 1893 Roman Urdu edition does not contain this appendix but adds a fascinating glossary of poetic key terms from a range of Middle Eastern and South Asian languages (pp. 211-27). *Ghizā* belongs to the genre of *tazkira*, which in Urdu literature is a collection of biographical sketches of poets together with their signature or most famous poems. E.M. Wherry describes its main contents as hymns and sacred songs: 'Many of these songs are from his own pen and are set to the native airs known among Muslims' (*Muslim controversy*, p. 95). In the second edition, Şafdar 'Alī provides an account of his conversion to Christianity on pp. 320-9 (Becht, *The book and the prophet*, p. 167).

In 1887, Şafdar 'Alī wrote that compiling the second edition of *Ghizā* had been a lengthy and time-consuming task ('A suggestion to increase the publication and subscription of *Nūr Afshān*', *Nūr Afshān* 15 [1887] 4-5) and he was particularly exhausted by having to keep on writing to request introductions from some poets. At this point, he had been trying to add to the first edition for more than ten years, an effort that finally bore fruit in the publication of the second edition in 1889. However, the work remained little-known until 1982, when A. Harrison Qurban found a copy, mostly eaten by worms (*Urdu ke Masiḥī shu'arā'*, pp. 78-82) – as Wherry says, the tragic fate of many of Şafdar 'Alī's writings.

The collection is devoted to poems composed in praise of Jesus, God and moral values. The language is idiomatic, and Urdu literary devices are employed throughout. In some places, biblical names have been modified

in line with the metre, for example *Pilatus* (Pilate) to *Pelat* and *Patras* (Peter) to *Patar*. The poets included seem filled with passion to preach the good news and love of Christ to their fellow Indians.

Study of *Ghizā-i rūḥ* shows how Christian poets made use of key religious terms to communicate their message. Since most of them were new converts from Islam to Christianity, they expressed important Christological concepts in typically Muslim ways, with sensitivity towards Muslim perceptions. For example, in his *Christmas ghazal* Şafdar 'Alī refers to Christ as *shāh-i shahīdan* ('king of the martyrs'), though when it comes to the divine sonship of Jesus, he understands that *Ibn Ullāh* ('Son of Allāh') might be too provocative for his audience, so he crafts compounds from non-Arabic words such as *pisar-i Īzād* ('son of God') and *ibn-i Parwardigār* ('son of the Sustainer'). Such expressions were actually novel to Urdu poetry and make a contribution towards the Urdu linguistic corpus. Another good example occurs in the preface of *Ghizā-i rūḥ*, where Şafdar 'Alī translates the idea of Jesus being mediator as *Shāfi' ul-maznubīn* ('intercessor for sinners', p. 17), and another is the translation of Christmas as *Milād-i muqaddas* ('Holy Christmas') rather than *barādīn* ('Christmas holiday', pp. 4-5). Muslim poets who referred to Jesus in their poetry did not use such terms: in his signature *ghazal*, 'Ibn-i Maryam hua kare koi, Mere dukh ki dawa kare koi' ('If only someone became the son of Mary, and could cure the pain of my sorrow'), Ghālib used the qur'anic title 'son of Mary'.

Khullat nāmah is a prose work of 160 pages which Şafdar 'Alī completed in 1899, the year of his death. The title means 'a treatise of friendship' from the Arabic *khulla*. The book was published by the Indian Christian Press in Allahabad with a print run of 3,000. From his retirement home of Bhandara (Maharashtra), Şafdar 'Alī composed the text in three parts – each individually paginated – between February and May 1898, then added a conclusion in June 1899 (part 3, pp. 89-96).

The first part of *Khullat* (29 pp.) is an exhortation to loyal and peaceful behaviour among Hindus, Christians and Muslims in India; the second part (32 pp.) is titled 'The evils and treatment of an angry nature and bad temper'; and the third and longest part (96 pp.) is an attempt to uphold the thesis that 'Religious freedom is obligatory for everyone'. This part includes a subsection on 'Religious freedom for Christians' (pp. 7-25). After living in north India as a Christian from Muslim background for more than 30 years, Şafdar 'Alī here makes a case for Muslim toleration of converts to Christianity on behalf of those who might follow his own action.

The third part also includes prayers for peaceful coexistence that churches can use in daily morning and evening worship (pp. 25-7), Şafdar

'Alī's own prayers expressed in poetry (pp. 60-4), and an explanation of 'missionary work' and evangelism (pp. 68-78). He quotes liberally from the Qur'an, Hadith, Gospel accounts and other parts of the New Testament. The earnest tone of his appeal is typified in a series of heartfelt questions (*dilsoz savālāt*, pp. 54-60).

At the beginning of the 20th century, both *Khullat nāmah* and *Ghizā-i rūḥ* were readily available at the Religious Book and Tract Society depots in Lahore and Allahabad (Wherry, *Muslim controversy*, p. 95), though *Khullat nāmah* has since become very difficult to find. The library of the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad, India, preserves a precious copy.

Faryād-i muntaẓar ('Cry of the anticipator') is a 14-page poem written by Şafdar 'Alī to express the feeling of a devotee of Jesus who cannot wait for the second advent of his Lord. Pinki Justin, a Pakistani historian of Christianity in India, dates it to around 1887 ('Contribution of Christian writers', pp. 158-68). It is composed in the typical antique language of Urdu poetry in 19th-century India. Some expressions are not found in modern Urdu dictionaries, and in some places the grammar seems outdated, so that a modern reader might not enjoy it as much as its original audience. It is full of beautiful poetic expressions and well-employed literary devices. Every stanza is closely connected to the next and there is a clear continuity and progression of thought. It shows Şafdar 'Alī's devotion to Jesus Christ and how eager he felt to meet his master at His second coming.

Copies of *Faryād-i muntaẓar* are now very hard to find but, during her doctoral research, Pinki Justin found a copy in a private library in Lahore, which was printed by F.M. Najam ud-Dīn Akhtar in Lahore in 1927. Another notification, in *Qamūs ul-kutub Urdu* (Karachi, 1961, p. 1085; this should not be confused with *Qamūs ul-kitāb*, an Urdu translation of a Bible dictionary), cites a publication of the book by Gilani Press, Lahore, in 1928.

SIGNIFICANCE

Wherry suggested in 1905 that *Ghizā-i rūḥ* was Şafdar 'Alī's 'best known [work] in the churches' (*Muslim controversy*, p. 95). It was the first *tazkira* (see above) of Christian poets in Urdu, and became an inspiration for two others, D.A. Harrison's *Urdu ke Masīḥī shu'arā'* and Griffin Jones Sharar's *Masīḥī mashāḥir*. Further, Şafdar 'Alī's fellow convert Imāmuddīn praised the first edition and was stimulated to attempt a similar work ('Report of Mr. Imam-ud-din, Catechist at Batala', *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, new series 3 [1878] 495-6, p. 495).

Without *Ghizā-i rūḥ*, many Christian poets would now be unknown, but through this book they remain alive. Şafdar 'Alī's poetic works and

leadership in gathering and publishing the poetry of others opened a window onto a significant phenomenon in north India in the second half of the 19th century. A substantial number of well-educated and culturally rich Muslims converted to Christianity and continued to enjoy the beauties of their native culture, injecting their new faith into cherished forms. In his 1893 *Khatt-i Shakāgo*, 'Imāduddīn was able to name and describe 117 prominent Muslim converts to Christianity that he knew (*Mohammedan converts to Christianity in India*, trans. H.M. Clark, London, 1910, pp. 6-16). Urdu poetry was an appropriate way to encourage fellowship and identity among the new believers.

Even so, at the end of the 19th century Şafdar 'Alī felt compelled to make a friendly, heartfelt, and earnest plea to Muslims for toleration of converts to Christianity in his *Khullat nāmāh*.

PUBLICATIONS

Şafdar 'Alī, *Ghizā-i rūḥ*, Lucknow, 1875 (British Library shelfmark VT854)

Şafdar 'Alī, *Ghizā-i rūḥ*, Allahabad, 1889 (Henry Martyn Institute library call number 245 ALI; a greatly expanded second edition))

Şafdar 'Alī, *Ghizā-i rūḥ* (Urdu in Roman script), Allahabad, 1892 (Henry Martin Institute library call number 245 ALI)

Şafdar 'Alī, *Khullat nāmāh*, Allahabad, 1899 (Henry Martin Institute library call number 269.2 SAF1)

Şafdar 'Alī, *Faryād-i muntaẓar*, Lahore, 1928

STUDIES

Becht, *The book and the prophet*

Justin, 'Contribution of Christian writers'

Harrison Qurban, *Urdu ke Masīḥī shu'arā'*

Wherry, *Muslim controversy*

Şafdar 'Alī, 'Native Christians and Christmas holiday', *Nūr Afshān* 19/11 (March 1891) 4-5

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