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Author(s): Neshat Quaiser

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Epistemic *Ashrāfiya*-Morality and Urdu Theatre Public Sphere in Nineteenth-Century Bihar: Muslim *Internal*-Decoloniality

--- Neshat Quaiser

Abstract

This essay attempts to provide a Muslim *internal*-decolonial critique of the hegemonic ashrāfiya [i] knowledge-oligarchies. Epistemic ashrāfiya-morality is produced by these oligarchies as a mechanism to colonise the shudra [ii]-dalit [iii]-disenfranchised Muslim mind *internally*. Through the prism of the western-style Urdu theatre in the last quarter of the 19th century in the Indian province of Bihar, this essay examines the epistemic ashrāfiya-morality-based responses to the popularity of the western-style theatre and its 'corrupting influences'; participation of the 'lowly' women and men in theatre that posed a threat to ashrāfiya moral order; a possible subaltern counter-intuitive subjectivity; women as objects of marketised desire and other related issues. Although the essay deals with the colonial period, it has theoretical implications for comprehending the convincing continuity of epistemic ashrāfiya-morality in the postcolonial Indian subcontinent.

Key words: Epistemic Ashrāfiya-Morality, Muslim Internal-Decoloniality, Urdu Theatre, 'corrupting influences'

> *...throw this enemy-of-morality-civility-and-faith woman immediately out of this theatre Company* (Al-Punch, 1891, 7/15).
>
> *Lots of lowly people, very few highborn [in theatre hall]* (Al-Punch, 1898, 14/39).

Introduction

This essay, divided into four sections, draws primarily on Urdu weekly Al-Punch [iv]. Section I outlines the concepts of epistemic ashrāfiya-morality; Muslim *internal*-decoloniality; ashrāf; and ashrāfiya-morality. Section II provides a brief overview of Urdu theatre in the late 19th century Bihar. Section III, with three sub-sections, deals with the questions of popularity; contending moralities; responses to the 'morally corrupting' theatre; subaltern counter-intuitive subjectivity;

'lowly' subalterns in theatre posing a threat to ashrāfiya moral order; maghribyat [v] (Westernism) and ashrāfiya's responses to colonialism; spatial-cultural, urban-suburban and ashrāfiya-subaltern tensions; and the 'lowly'-bāzāri[vi] women as objects of disdain and desire. Section IV, the conclusion, outlines the Urdu theatre public sphere; historicity of the epistemic ashrāfiya-morality; and ashrāfiya's umma[vii]-making endeavours and colonising the mind internally.

Section I: Epistemic Ashrāfiya-Morality and Muslim *Internal*-Decoloniality

Morality denotes a normative framework determining human transactions in different forms in all the fields of social life (for general concepts of morality, see Carson, 1984; Harmen, 1977). However, morality is inscribed in ideologies of caste, class, race, religion, and culture; thereby, we find contending conceptions of morality (for contending moralities in our context see, section III). But when morality is epistemically foregrounded as religious-universal moral prescription, it becomes a 'choreographically occultating' ideology. Thus, epistemic ashrāfiya-morality is that which claims non-ashrāf morality and ethics cannot be authentic. It works from the logic that authentic morality that guides all-encompassing conduct in society derives from superior caste-class, and race/tribe and family lineages, and it alone can produce true knowledge. Epistemic ashrāfiya-morality, therefore, excludes shudra-dalit Muslims from knowledge production. This supremacist moral framework produces relations of domination. Thus, epistemically privileged ashrāfiya-morality was/is presented as an authentic Islamic general moral framework that actually aimed to colonise the non-ashrāf Muslim mind. Epistemic ashrāfiya-morality is produced by the internal hegemonic ashrāfiya knowledge-oligarchies. This calls for decolonising the Muslim mind *internally*.

In the context of colonialism, decolonising refers to deconstructing the social, cultural, and political thoughts and values radiating from the colonial/western/white centres of power (for the concept of decolonisation/decoloniality, see Thiong'o, 1986; Fanon, 2001; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Muslim decoloniality primarily focused on Western colonial technologies of domination to reshape and mould Islam and Muslim societies by privileging the western/'modern'/orientalist constructions of religion and Islam, where secularism, democracy, and modernity emerged as the defining concepts. This engendered different Muslim counter-perspectives. Muslim decolonial thinking, however, as a part of a widely desired counter-strategy, predominantly deployed arguments such as Islam is, by its very nature, modern, democratic and

harbinger of peace, etc.; and that Muslims are *Ummat-e wasaṭ,* meaning that Muslims are just, away from extremism, undogmatic, and 'moderate'. However, concepts such as *Al-zarūrāt tobīh al-mahzūrāt* (necessities permit impermissible things), *iẓṭirārī* (despairing) conditions, and *istishhād* (desired death of a martyr) have also come into play. Muslim decolonial thinking also meant critiquing epistemological and ontological foundations of European Enlightenment, reason, secularism, and modernity, to develop a Muslim/Islamic intellectual counter-strategy (for Muslim decoloniality, see among others Wali Allah, 1995; Al-Attas, 1993; Asad, 1993; Sayyid, 2014).

The overriding theoretical thrust of the grand Muslim decoloniality has been to consider Islam as an internally cohesive and universal religion, in which 'political' compulsions also played a significant role; and to consider Muslims as textually-driven non-hierarchised essentialist category, with the notion of umma as the underlying structuring principle. This may be called the *ashrāfiya oligarchic Muslim decoloniality*, as the *external*-colonial-factors-driven Muslim decoloniality has expediently not paid required critical attention to the following crucial issues from the *internal*-decoloniality perspective: Islamic 'canonical tensions and contradictions'; the manipulative maslaki [viii] -jurisprudential hegemony; caste-race-lineage-class-based theories and practices of discrimination among the Muslims; and the ashrāfiya internal 'epistemic' and corporal violence. A critical examination of these issues alone will be able to unpack the colonising the mind projects of the hegemonic ashrāfiya knowledge-oligarchies within Islamic/Muslim state, society, religion and politics. Therefore, Muslim internal-decoloniality denotes shifting ontologically the focus from *external* to *internal*, within the wider historical and intellectual contexts, without necessarily neglecting the epistemic foundations of external-colonial experiences. Muslim internal-decoloniality assumes greater significance as the continuation of epistemic ashrāfiya-morality has acquired newer implications not only in the Indian sub-continent but also for other Muslim societies as well.

Ashrāf and Ashrāfiya-Morality

Ashrāf (plural of sharīf – of noble birth) are considered to be those Muslims who claimed to be of foreign origin with highborn lineages such as sayyed (supposed to be descendants of the Prophet), shaikh (supposed to be descendants of Prophet's companions), and mughal and pathan We have learned to take this ashrāf-propelled self-representation for an unquestionable truth[ix]. Such claims remain unsubstantiated in case of most members of these categories in the Indian

subcontinent. However, the early ashrāf - since very long disconnected from their foreign locales of origin - along with the later incorporated members of local origin constituted a hegemonic ashrāfiya-oligarchy. They derived their distinctiveness akin to savarna (high caste Hindus) from their claims to be of noble birth. The only expedient model available to them was the Hindu ascriptive caste hierarchical model, which could enable them to maintain their high social status due to their claims to be of noble birth of foreign origin, which would distinguish them from the shudra-dalit Indian Muslims. Ashrāf's claims of high status as preordained corresponded to the Hindu ideology of ascriptive status for justifying social segregation between savarna and shudra-dalit. Marriages with shudra-dalit Muslim castes are disdained, as it 'polluted' the 'purity'.

Thus, the caste system among Muslims in the Indian subcontinent contains the Hindu caste constitutive features like endogamy, mandatory segregation based on ascriptive occupational affiliation, status hierarchy, and also ritual purity and pollution with varying regional differences, but only in overt expression as these have expediently been equated with Islamic notions of 'pāk' (clean) and 'nāpāk' [unclean] (for caste among the Muslims, see Ansari, 1960; Momin, 1977; Sachar Committee Report, 2006; Ranganath Misra Commission Report, 2007; P. S. Krishnan Report, 2007; Deshpande, 2008; Falahi, 2007). However, some scholars have argued that the caste system among Muslims differs from the Hindu model (Ahmad, 1973; Dumont, 1972). But empirical evidences suggest that the causal relationship between a Muslim's caste location and her/his related social disabilities are in no way different from the Hindu caste practices, which are continually reproduced (Quaiser, 2011, pp. 49-68; Anwar, 2005; Rā'īn, 2013; Trivedi et. al, 2016, pp. 32-36; Lee, 2018, pp. 1-27).

Charles Lindholm (1995, pp. 449-467) has insightfully discussed various approaches on caste among Muslims in India such as structural-functionalist adaptive, normative, essentialist, reflective symbolic, interpretative/ constructionist, comparative, diffusionist, indigenous monistic. The discussion shows a great deal of confusion, chaos, and conflicting oscillation in comprehending caste among Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. These approaches predominantly consider the ashrāf-ajlāf-arzāl divisions in terms of 'adaptive' practices, not in terms of palpable 'caste' divisions among Muslims as concretised in India defying even Islamic textual equality and justice. Ashrāf adopted an adaptive-essentialist strategy and portrayed the adaptive elements from the Hindu caste system as Islamic-essentialist in their exclusionary relations with shudra-dalit Muslims, in which ashrāfiya 'ulama (scholars of Islam) crucially contributed. This lived reality has produced hegemonic casteist ashrāfiya

subjectivity.

Epistemic ashrāfiya-morality, as a mechanism to colonise the mind, emanated from the ashrāf-propelled self-representation and the Hindu caste structures. There were/are four principal constitutive elements of this moral order: firstly, expediently reinterpreted[x] sub-continental maslaki-jurisprudential notions of Islamic moral values [xi] to the advantage of ashrāfiya; secondly, pride in originary Arab, Iranian and Central-Asian lineages and entrenchment in the Hindu caste system that enabled ashrāfiya to assume a superior ascriptive position akin to savarna; thirdly, pride in the sub-continental conquistador lineages; and fourthly, ashrāfiya's collaboration with colonialism and other structures of oppression to safeguard their privileges after the final fall of ashrāfiya political power in 1857. The processes of the formation of this epistemic ashrāfiya-morality had begun with newer dimensions since the second half of the 18[th]century. This propelled them to engage vigorously in umma-making endeavours in the given contexts (see section IV below). Equipped with these mechanisms of colonising the mind, ashrāfiya foregrounded the epistemic morality almost as divine predestination to reproduce conforming shudra-dalit Muslim subjects.

It was against this backdrop that the ashrāfiya's morality-related anxieties and dilemmas in the wake of colonialism produced Urdu akhlāq literature (morality-related literature) in South Asia since the late 19[th]century, which ranged from philosophical debate to issues of everyday life. Akhlāq literature ultimately represented not only ashrāfiya's moral dilemmas but also their quest for a 'modern' Muslim identity in colonial India with a new 'liberal' Islamic identity, which ultimately set the tone for a new akhlāqiyāt (moral code). This ultimately produced a reconciled 'mixture' of expediently ashrāfiya-reinterpreted Islamic moral values and western-colonial moral norms, revealing two-facedness of the epistemic ashrāfiya-morality (for dominant scholarship on Urdu akhlāq and adab literature, see Alam, 2004; Pernau, 2017, pp. 21-42; Metcalf, 1984; Hasan, 2007).

Section II: Urdu Theatre in Bihar: A Brief Overview

This section presents a brief account of Urdu theatre in 19th century Bihar. We find that the theatre that the ashrāfiya opposed for its 'corrupting influences' was simultaneously patronised by them. Thus, ashrāfiya's reconciliation was stronger than the ambiguities.

The introduction of western-style stage theatre in 19th century India emerged not

only as a site to legitimise colonial rule, but also to contest it. However, beyond this binary, the theatre also became a site to contest local caste-class-race-religion-based ideologies of domination, particularly in terms of subalterns' participation. The new theatre had come into existence in Calcutta in 1831, but it began in a big way after 1857. Theatre emerged as a potent site where the colonial rule, western/colonial modernity, existing institutions and moralities, and different responses to these came to be debated that created a theatre public sphere (for theatre in colonial India, see Bhatia, 2008; Singh, 2010).

The history of 'modern' Urdu theatre began with Indar Sabha of Amānat Lakhnavi which was staged in Lucknow in the early 1850s. However, it was after 1857 when professional theatrical companies were established on commercial lines mostly by Pārsīs (Zoroastrians). After the initial success in staging Gujrāti plays, Pārsīs took to commercially most promising Urdu plays, and a new phase of competitive theatre began (for Urdu theatre, see Nāmi, 1962; Rahmāni, 1987; Hansen, 2003, pp. 381-405; Hansen, 2016, pp. 1-30). Professional actors, singers, musicians, playwrights, costume designers, and importantly female actors were introduced. They expanded their activities beyond Bombay and staged Urdu plays in several Indian cities and towns, attaining popularity.

In Bihar, two Urdu plays – *Sajjād wa Sumbul* and *Shamshād wa Sausan* were written in 1874 (Hasan, 1959, pp. 33-38) by K. R. Bhatt[xii] which were seemingly influenced by some Bangla plays. However, it was in the year 1884 that a theatre company called Imperial Theatrical Troupe staged several plays in Patna which became popular (Abdulwadūd, 1952). Soon after, Bihar Theatrical Troupe was established in Patna (Hasan, 1959, pp. 8-13). In 1891, the arrival of Jubilee Theatrical Company in Patna was reported, but was explicitly unwelcome:

> *In the month of February, this Company came to our city and staged several plays. With God's blessings…now it is planning to move towards west.* (Al-Punch, 1891, 7/15).

In 1892, Damṛī Mukhtār Ka Theatre (Damṛī Mukhtār's Theatre) was founded. This theatre company staged plays in and outside Patna and gained popularity. This was a professional company in which not only male but also female actors worked, and they were paid a proper salary. This company's well-known male and female actors were Mahbūb, Jawāhar, Khurshīd, Nasīr, and Nādir, of which Mahbūb and Jawāhar were very famous. Mahbūb excelled in his zenāna roles, and theatre halls were always full to watch him act (Hasan, 1959, pp. 11-14). Nasīr

too performed zenāna roles, and in the play Zahr-e Ishq[xiii], he played the role of Māhjabīn (Al-Punch, 1892, 8/14)[xiv]. Damṛī Mukhtār Theatre usually staged Urdu plays which were already popular such as Zahr-e Ishq, Indar Sabha, Harish Chandar and Gul Bakauli. In addition to Patna, it staged plays in several other cities and towns, such as Gaya (ibid) and Muzaffarpūr (Hasan, 1959, pp. 11-14) and every year in the famous Sonepūr fair (Hasan, 1959, pp. 8-13). When Damṛī Mukhtār's Theatre became popular and attracted particularly students in large numbers, it was more vigorously opposed. It finally packed up, and its exit was celebrated:

> *Boys have stopped going to theatre, and public have developed hatred…due to lack of patronage from schoolboys, Damṛī Theatre's sources of income have shrunk.* (Al-Punch, 1892, 8/2)

After a gap of about five years, Damṛī Theatre was reorganised in 1898 as Bihar Theatrical Company in Patna City, with a stage in Bānkīpūr[xv] as well. Mahbūb of Damṛī Theatre fame joined this company and became its star actor. The Company's actress Bismillah attracted young people in large numbers. 'Students again came back to theatre and once again, a theatre ripple was created' (Hasan, 1959, pp. 8-13). Opposition to the theatre resumed, but the Company continued to stage plays (Al-Punch, 1899, 15/18). Bihar Theatrical Company staged several popular plays, such as Āshiq-e Jāñbāz, Zahr-e Ishq, Indar Sabha, Katora-Bhar Khūn, Dorangi Dunya, Dhūp Čhāon, Asīr-e Hawas, Khūbsūrat Balā. As a result of its success, several professional and amateur theatre companies were formed in early 20th century that continued for some time (Hasan, 1959, pp. 11-14). Most of these plays were based on traditional masnavi (long narrative poem), dāstān (oral storytelling), qissa (tales), etc., or were an adaptation of English plays. The central themes of these plays mostly related to love stories and heroic deeds. They reinforced mostly the epistemic ashrāfiya moral values.

Section III: Popularity, 'Corrupting Influences', 'Lowly' Women and Men, Spatial-Cultural Tensions, Contending Moralities and Counter-Intuitive Subjectivity

This section, in addition to an introduction, is divided into three subsections: a) Popularity of the theatre and its 'corrupting influences'; b) The Bānkīpūr argument: modernist response, spatial-cultural, urban-suburban and subaltern-ashrāfiya, tensions; and c) 'lowly'-bāzāri women: disdain and marketised desire.

Urdu theatre performances, spectators, stage, actors, theatre companies, ashrāfiya, literate public, 'lowly' women and men, and students, with multiple familiar and unfamiliar issues and questions created an Urdu theatre public sphere[xvi] (see section IV) in which epistemic ashrāfiya-morality and subalterns'[xvii] participation were the key organising principles.

Since the 1870s theatre in Bihar attracted not only the ashrāfiya, emerging educated and professional middle classes, but also the 'lowly' women and men. *Theatre ka tamāsha dekhna* (to watch theatre performance) was emerging as a critical supplementary source to form new identities in the colonial contexts. However, the active participation of the subalterns deeply disturbed the ashrāfiya moral-cultural order. Thus, the expedient ashrāfiya opposition to the popularity of theatre among the masses ('awām-commoners, bāzāri women, shudras, students) was an attempt to pre-empt a possible subaltern ideological challenge.

The participation, responses, and the role of 'awām, shudra Muslims, 'bāzārī' women with regard to theatre were neither 'written' by themselves nor were adequately recorded in the newspapers or elsewhere in their own voice. Evidence of critical subaltern participation is to be extracted even from the disdainful ashrāfiya narratives. Thus, ironically, they registered their presence through antagonistic and disdainful representations in ashrāfiya narratives, thus, the absence was turned into presence, subverting the very logic of that narrative, as is evident from what follows.

However, how would subalterns possibly gain counter-intuitive subjectivity from the plays, which did not at all relate to subalterns' life conditions, and which reinforced ashrāfiya moral values? Most of the plays that the subalterns patronised so eagerly in different ways were based on traditional tales or an adaptation from English plays with highborn as central characters, and which were deeply entrenched in epistemic ashrāfiya moral values. Yes, but the very fact that the subalterns came out of their socially assigned places of exclusion and entered the hitherto exclusive ashrāfiya spaces publicly was of critical importance. While doing so, subalterns defied the charted process of expected subject formation and refused to be constituted expectedly by the ashrāfiya moral authority[xviii]. The active participation of 'lowly' women and men in theatre signified the formation of a counter-intuitive subjectivity, no matter in what embryonic form it may have been. The acts of being spectators and actors formed a critical constitutive element of a new subject formation, as the subalterns were excluded from the domain of knowledge in print. The very fact that the ashrāfiya

launched a tirade against subalterns' participation in theatre provided internal evidence of their critical presence and of a possible counter-intuitive subject formation. This counter-intuitive subject formation was not premeditated, and yet not totally unintended (see concluding remarks in this section). Besides this, theatre, despite having colonial connotations, facilitated subalterns' public visibility in exclusive ashrāfiya social spaces (for how subalterns gained from British presence, see Guru, 2005).

Thus, there emerged three sets of contending moralities: firstly, two-faced epistemic ashrāfiya-morality; secondly, subaltern morality, which was constituted by the very act of subalterns' participation in theatre that had a promise for a counter-intuitive subjectivity, even if the contents of the plays were not subaltern-centric. This, in essence, was an act in defiance of the ashrāfiya prescribed moral codes of quiescence, passivity, and submission. The act of viewing theatre was a critical constitutive element for a new subaltern moral imagination, as knowledge in print was not their prerogative; thirdly, colonial moral regime in a sense supported ashrāfiya-morality, yet theatre created an atmosphere for recognisable social visibility of subaltern 'bāzārī' women and 'lowly' men, ironically though.

a) *Popularity of the theatre and 'corrupting influences'*

The popularity of theatre and concerns for its 'corrupting influences' assumed specific ideological connotations. Popularity simultaneously entails inclusionary and exclusionary connotations. In the given context, however, 'popular' tended to emerge as the early *colonial populism* for appealing to the colonised of all categories including ordinary people to legitimise colonial ideological apparatuses. This was different from 'authoritarian populism' where 'the people' are pitted against the elite as Stuart Hall had enunciated in the late 1970s[xix]; but beneath-the-surface-logic common to both is to produce homogeneousness through explicit or implicit pressure. These characteristics were at play in the debate on theatre, under discussion, in different forms. Ashrāfiya's responses were exclusionary as they targeted mainly 'lowly' people for making theatre popular, engendering defiance. Students of ashrāfiya stock were deplored as they not only defied paternal authority, for visiting theatre meant knowing and imbibing new ideas, but also for they would ruin their chances of a bright future in the colonial administration by wasting their time in theatre.

We shall now briefly illustrate ashrāfiya responses to the popularity of theatre and its 'corrupting influence'.

A newspaper in early 1885 reported that a theatre company staged several plays last year and gained immense popularity. It commented:

> *Inhabitants of proper Patna are fully aware of the Imperial Theatrical Troupe…its plays had captivated not only the rich, nobles, different occupational categories, public in general but also the students…last year, the Imperial Theatrical Troupe's plays ruthlessly impacted the education and good conduct of our able and innocent students.* ('Abdulwadūd, 1952; Hasan, 1959, pp. 8-13)

Theatre's popularity had captivated also the educated middle-ashrāfiya professionals such as lawyers that disturbed the high-ashrāfiya. Lamenting the extent of theatre's adverse impact on lawyers and students, a report much later observed:

> *Now listen to the kind of impact theatre had on rich and powerful, lawyers and students. Keeping aside their valuable legal works, and slate and books…they reached the theatre hall as the clock struck seven o'clock (evening)* (Al-Punch, 1892, 8/14).

One Nasserul-zurafaʾ in a letter to the editor sarcastically suggested making use of theatre to tackle cholera epidemic:

> *Theatre is next to college…ask Mahbūb to sing in his characteristic style, and you will see Haiza (cholera) Khan would run away.* (Al-Punch, 1899, 15/33).

The suggestion conveyed the message that theatre is so lethal that even cholera would run away on seeing it. The reference to Haiza 'Khan' has sub-continental Muslim conquistador connotation that even great pathan and mughal warriors would run away in the face of the morally corrupting armoury of theatre. And yet one cannot miss in it the elements of appreciation of theatre.

In the face of upsetting tensions produced by the popularity of the theatre, some ashrāfiya thought of using theatre to reform the *qaum* (community/Muslim community) and society. One Sayyed Mohammad Nawāb Mohammad wrote a play *Jawan-Bakht wa Shamsunnahār* (Mohammad, 1884) for reforming the

qaum, because plays staged by theatre companies were not morally fit for the cultured and educated society. A similar concern was expressed in the face of 'moral degradation' caused by 'lowly' women in the theatre in which the references to *qaum* and 'our Muslim brothers' assumed significant connotations:

> *Jubilee Theatrical Company has publicised itself with magnified honourable claims as sympathiser of the country and qaum, and educator of morality. But these claims are misplaced. It has presented a wanton-eyed woman on the stage. Some people sympathise with this Company, for it is established by...our Muslim brothers. My suggestion is: throw this...woman immediately out of the Company.* (Al-Punch, 1891, 7/15).

Therefore, 'reform' within the *qaum* was essentially an ashrāfiya concern for self-preservation.

Corrupting influence of theatre on students and young was opposed by both 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' ashrāfiya. The traditionalist response was more concerned with the growing erosion of traditional Islamic moral values, expressed in the language of anti-maghribyat. A very prominent ashrāfiya Urdu writer and poet, Maulana Fazl-e Haq Āzād 'Azīmābādī[xx] wrote:

> *If possible, approach the Lieutenant Governor that he should try to remove prostitutes and theatre from India. These are corrupting the morals of people. And also, the influx of European novels in India should be prohibited because in them such materials are that the poetry of Jān Sāheb[xxi] would appear like a dry leaf...* (Al-Punch, 1899, 15/5).

Although Āzād expressed his concerns strongly for the preservation of Islamic values and protecting Indians from the European culture, novels, prostitutes, and the corrupting influences of theatre, he merely appealed to the Governor rather politely. This is for, despite his strong opposition to the theatre, Āzād was very much in favour of Muslims and others acquiring western knowledge and considered British rule as a boon for India. He was perhaps making a distinction between western culture and western scientific inventions and colonial administration.

This concern found expression in different forms, including English education for

Indian girls. In a letter to the editor, one M. M. Sokhtadil wrote:

> *How the girls of respectable people would on a khatolī (a small bedstead) go to school and learn the lesson of a, b, c. This much one can tolerate. But after this, our simpleton girls of Bihar would shake hands with memsahib, which means after completing education they will fight with their husbands for freedom. So, our Bihar is going the London way* (Al-Punch, 1899, 15/10).

Sokhtadil, though hesitant of English education for respectable ashrāfiya girls outside the home, is ready to tolerate 'up to this', revealing a gradual acceptance of English education even for girls. But he expressed a grave concern relating to the control over women's body, sexuality, and expectations for strict adherence to the assigned religious-cultural roles of a wife [xxii]. Coming in contact with memsahib would morally contaminate the girls, as it would encourage them to deviate from the well-defined normative roles of an obedient wife.

Modernist response to the popularity of the theatre and its corrupting influences is discussed in the following subsection, as it is entangled with other emerging complex issues whereby epistemic ashrāfiya-morality was acquiring newer characteristics.

b) The Bānkīpūr argument: modernist response, spatial-cultural, urban-suburban and subaltern-ashrāfiya tensions

Modernist response to the theatre was entangled with more compelling and complex emerging issues. Most ashrāfiya tended to be 'modernist' and were aligned with the colonial power adding new dimensions to epistemic ashrāfiya-morality. Theatre, subalterns' recognisable social visibility, colonial modernity, English education, colonial administration, etc. produced tensions of all kinds within the emerging modernist ashrāfiya. These tensions were reflected through theatre in different forms, such as the tensions between the 'modern' and the old-fashioned residential localities; between the ashrāfiya and subalterns; and between the urban (shahri) and suburban (qasbāti) ashrāfiya. These tensions reflected conflicting economic, social, and political interests of urban and suburban ashrāfiya and the subalterns. The following report reveals the theatre-related tensions, and the reference to *qaum* in it denoted ashrāfiya:

> *When theatre comes to Bānkīpūr, school children come under the*

control of some jinn. We heard it with great sorrow that a student of T. K. Ghosh academy…with some boys of Patna Collegiate has taken contract of theatre, which has saddened us most. Surprisingly, why did our kind and noble Headmaster of Patna Collegiate, Moulvi Amjad Ali Saheb not take corrective measures? If he takes little interest…these boys can be reformed…and qaum would thank him (Al-Punch, 1899, 15/33).

One Kammo, in a letter, expressed similar concern for *qaum's* welfare with reference to the hostility between modern and traditional localities that theatre had produced, threatening even physical violence:

…you keep unravelling political knots, how would you know the evil doings of theatre. You could not even ask why, leaving the whole of Patna[xxiii], has it come to Bānkīpūr? And why does it choose a place...just opposite Patna College? If you have even an iota of interest in qaum's welfare, you should stop them…They should at least leave Bānkīpūr and perform their jugglery and rope-dancing in Patna and make money. If you cannot do it yourself, order your followers to tear them into pieces. Otherwise, I am ready to take on them (Al-Punch, 1899, 15/18).

The above report and the letter reveal an emerging conflict between the westernising Bānkīpūr and the old medieval Patna City. Bānkīpūr is a neighbourhood and residential area in Patna. Until the early 20th century, Bānkīpūr was the administrative centre of the Patna Division of Bihar, which came under the rule of the British East India Company following the battle of Buxar in 1764. Bānkīpūr, since the 1860s, signified a 'modern' locality inhabited by modern-oriented people. It was in Bānkīpūr where English medium educational institutions, new architecture, modern markets, western dress, Bānkīpūr Club, Bihar Young Men's Institute, Jahangir's Theatre and Cinema Hall, Rammohun Roy Seminary (an English medium High School), Patna Collegiate, etc. existed. These were the markers of modernity. English medium education, colonial power, new job opportunities attracted the traditional urban-suburban high-ashrāfiya and other emerging English educated middle-ashrāfiya and other middle classes.

The argument in Kammo's above-mentioned letter that theatre should leave Bānkīpūr and perform in Patna City signified tensions within the new ashrāfiya,

emanating from two main concerns: firstly, to sustain the hold of epistemic ashrāfiya moral codes over the 'lowly' people by keeping them away from Bānkīpūr. Patna City was predominantly inhabited by subalterns, labouring poor, artisans, shudra-dalit Muslims and Hindus – the non-ashrāf population. The underlying argument was that there was no problem if theatre is performed in the old City as people in that locality were outdated, incapable of upward social mobility, and it was preordained that they were born poor and low in the caste hierarchy. If they come to Bānkīpūr to watch theatre, a culture of subaltern defiance will grow here as well. Secondly, the concern that theatre was distracting their progenies from being studious and competitive, a necessity for acquiring 'respectable' jobs in the colonial administration, which would bring additional enviable social esteem. Thus, Bānkīpūr emerged as a site for new social, educational and economic opportunities from which ashrāfiya alone were to benefit. Ashrāfiya, thus, actively collaborated with the colonial administration in all possible ways. For example, despite their claim to be 'modern', ashrāfiya were critical of the 'corrupting influence' of the theatre for reasons of political expediency as well. It enabled them to emerge as the sole representative of 'Muslim'/Islamic/Indian/Eastern moral values and culture in the eyes of colonial administration. They became the representative of 'community's (all Muslims') interest'. This became evident when ashrāfiya hugely benefitted from the separate electorate (Vohra, 2001, pp. 113-15). In the process, ashrāfiya acquired jobs and positions of power in the colonial administration, educational institutions, and judiciary, and benefitted from the newly emerging political process.

Bānkīpūr and theatre also signified tensions between the urban and suburban ashrāfiya, in which conflicting cultural, economic, and political interests were palpable. After 1857, both the urban (shahri) and suburban (qasbāti) ashrāfiya began to move to Bānkīpūr. But the conflict between the two was expressed through culture, language and literature. City-bred urbane high ashrāfiya of Patna City were high-caste traditional landed, affluent, and pedigreed nobles, having urban-traditional education. The suburban ashrāfiya were high-caste landed gentry of respectable families with suburban-traditional education and constituted the suburban aristocracy. But the Patna City based urbane ashrāfiya considered themselves of high culture and refined manners, and a repository of high linguistic and literary traditions. They considered the suburban ashrāfiya rustic in their manners and substandard in matters of language, accent and literature. Their suburban location of origin rendered them culturally inferior in the eyes of city-bred ashrāfiya. This produced a bitter tiff between the two. They launched a

diatribe against each other to prove their cultural and literary superiority, and theatre did not remain unaffected from this, and for which Al-Punch provided space liberally.

Nonetheless, even such acrimonious argumentativeness contributed significantly to the emergence of a culture of critical public debate enriching comprehension not only of language and literature but also of politics, colonial rule, English education, and other issues. However, suburban ashrāfiya such as Fazl-e Haq Āzād too had been well-informed of theatre and had strongly opposed it, and was considered to be the intellectual resource person behind Al-Punch. The editor and owner of Al-Punch too was a suburban ashrāfiya. They, too, could not resist the temptation of being part of the new centre of culture and economy and began to move to Bānkīpūr, with the view to getting their share in the land of new opportunities. And soon they did make their presence felt in Bānkīpūr in a big way. For example, the Imam family from the suburban Neora became perhaps the most prominent family of Bānkīpūr. Thus, Bānkīpūr emerged as a site for the making of a post-1857 ashrāfiya intellectual ethos.

By the end of the 19th century, ambiguities gave way to reconciliation and ashrāfiya began to accept the 'morally corrupting' theatre expediently. They took to the theatre to seek pleasure, with women emerging as objects of desire, as is evident from the following letter:

> *…brother, tell me, have you ever watched this theatre even in disguise…it is all pleasure and enjoyment…* (Al-Punch, 1899, 15/18).

More forthright appreciation followed:

> *Bihar Theatrical Company staged its play Āshiq-e Jāñbāz very nicely, with spectators in large numbers. Mast Nāz's style of acting…was wonderful…and why not…this role was performed by the old master Mahbūb.* (Al-Punch, 1899, 15/24).

However, 'lowly' men and women were continued to be condemned with casteist disdain and blamed for the popularity of theatre, and 'modern' ashrāfiya had no difficulty in collaborating with the colonial apparatuses. For example, theatre brought 'lowly' people in close physical proximity to high and middle ashrāfiya, which amounted to breaking the boundaries of casteist segregation, despite

seating segregation according to the price of tickets and social status. This produced an alarmist reaction. Thus, a weaver was disdainfully reminded of his ascriptive status:

> *Leaving his loom, he goes to the theatre. For no reason, he will be harmed. If this eagerness to visit the theatre continues, even his loom will be sold out.* (Al-Punch, 1906, 22/46).

The above reminder communicated the casteist social status of a shudra Muslim in the language of patron-client relationship. A stern message was conveyed that stick to your ascribed occupation; do not aspire for any vertical mobility by changing your occupation or by emulating ashrāfiya cultural practices; to watch theatre neglecting loom was not your job. Despite repeated admission that the theatre was patronised even by nobles, ashrāfiya educated people, lawyers and students, yet subalterns were blamed for the popularity of the morally corrupting theatre by lamenting that: 'a lot of lowly people, very few highborn' [in the theatre hall] (Al-Punch, 1898, 14/39).

c) 'Lowly'-'Bāzārī' women: disdain and marketised desire

Gender and sexuality are inscribed in caste-class, religion, ethnicity, and nationality (in relation to theatre, see Bhattacharya, 1998; Hansen, 1999, pp. 127-147; Singh, 2010). Accordingly, a clear division existed between the subaltern and the upper-caste women with regard to theatre under study. Theatre created an atmosphere for women to undertake a journey from home-shanty-kothā (kothā - broadly, a whorehouse) to public stage contesting differently the ashrāfiya notions of women's moral virtues. For 'decent' women, the home was a well-guarded place where they could be kept under control. Their participation in theatre was largely a sign of relative freedom encouraged by ashrāfiya men, who were too eager to be a part of the colonial power structures. Caste-based hierarchised predispositions were clear, as sympathetic concerns were expressed in the case of respectable women. For example, a bit sarcastically but not disdainfully, it was expressed that now even women (here, decent ones) are attracted to the theatre:

> *Fair sex too now… have leanings for theatre*
> *Listening to praises, they are restless with eagerness*
> *Making tinkling sound of anklets, they come* (Al-Punch, 1892, 8/1).

On the other hand, it is evident from the available sources that low-caste women,

branded as 'bāzārī', entered the theatre as performers primarily to earn a livelihood[xxiv]. 'Lowly-bāzārī' theatre women were targeted for causing moral degradation; ashrāfiya believed that they could easily be consumed and owned as objects of desire. In a report, describing the caste-class composition of spectators in a theatre hall, a clear distinction was made between respectable-chaste and 'lowly'-bāzārī women, and it was contemptuously stated that only with bāzārī women one can act lasciviously. One Fakhrul-Zurafa Māel Dharampūrī Darbhangavi wrote:

> *They were respectable, chaste and pious wives and daughters of*
> *Bengali bābūs[xxv]…bāzārī women had not gone there, so there was*
> *no chance for you to act lasciviously* (Al-Punch, 1898, 14/39).

Thus, the subaltern women were portrayed as of lax morals, and ashrāfiya demanded from the Theatre Company to divest them of their means of livelihood. While doing so, upholders of the ashrāfiya-morality two-facedly described the same women lasciviously[xxvi]:

> *It has presented a wanton-eyed, unceremonious woman on the*
> *stage…throw this affliction-without-remedy, enemy-of-morality-*
> *civility-and-faith woman immediately out of this Company* (Al-
> Punch, 1891, 7/15).

In a long poem, on the decline of Damṛī Theatre after its star actress Jawāhar eloped with Bādshāh Nawāb, bodily beauty of the actress and sorrow of the spectators are expressed, significantly, with a blend of 'morality' and lascivious desire:

> *If old men get to see such a complete body, their old age will be*
> *taken care of,*
> *And the condition of young men is worse than the old men, Ah*
> *Theatre!*
> *When you could not satisfy your innate desire, you got the idea*
> *And you subdued schoolboys, Ah Theatre![xxvii]*

In yet another report, representing casteist segregation, it was lamented that no seating plans were made to segregate bāzārī women from the respectable members of the audience:

> *No separate seating plan was made for bāzārī women. Generally,*
> *they sat next to any person as per their desire.* (Al-Punch, 1899,
> 15/24).

The violence of representation of the subaltern women was brazening. And yet the disdainful lamentation that 'they sat next to any person as per their desire' signified self-respect that the 'lowly' women were gaining – even if it was at a nascent stage.

A report blamed 'common people' for the growing number of women performers in theatre, as they increasingly desired to see women in close proximity:

> *In the eyes of common people, women's appearance on stage as*
> *actors is certainly considered praiseworthy, and for that very*
> *reason they rush in hordes. But the gentry consider it vulgar and*
> *do not look at such theatre with respect.* (Al-Punch, 1891, 7/15)

Participation in theatre was gradually transforming subaltern women into objects of marketised desire. Marketisation generally denotes the privatisation of public services within the welfare state (Kumlin, 2007). Marketisation, however, herein denotes a capitalist marketisation of social relations, which produces petrification of true meanings of immanent human qualities. It commodifies, for example, women as objects of desire to be bought at a *price* effected by the market. Market manufactures commodified desire and presents it as innate to one's being (for desire as an object, see Quaiser, 2018, pp. 22-38).

Within the sphere of theatre, ashrāfiya casteist disdain and transformation of women into objects of desire to be consumed and owned went together. Thus, by the end of the 19th century, the expediently reluctant ashrāfiya were attracted to female theatre performers to seek lascivious pleasure from the object-desired – the easily accessible immoral women. A reporter L. H. Hamsar Bhāgalpuri wrote:

> *Why did you go to Calcutta? It is because the Harmistone Circus'*
> *fearless, lustful…ladies' riding intoxicated horses…This generated*
> *lustful desire in spectators and clapping with great dejection. Pārsi*
> *Elphinstone Theatre's taut bodied girls' and fairy-like boys' dance*
> *with expressive action and gesture on stage, and on every step*
> *trampling upon the hearts of out-of-control spectators under the*
> *feet of coquetry. Such alluring and confounding plays were in*

Calcutta that you would forego thousands of conferences for each expression of those women...[xxviii]

The power of masculine ashrāfiya social location to acquire the object-desired was displayed quite brazenly in a letter to the editor, indicating a greater possibility of gaining easy access to and even 'run away' with the 'women of lax morals'. It was lamentingly asserted:

Alas, I was not there, otherwise, right from the stage, clutching in my lap, I would have run away with at least one (of the actresses)[xxix]

Marketisation with the underlying logic of the ownership of the desired object led to the competitiveness among ashrāfiya. Jawāhar of Damṛī Mukhtār's Theatre was very beautiful, and many big wigs competed to possess her, but ultimately Bādshāh Nawāb was successful. In a poem, this event was commented upon, lamentingly and longingly for the body of the object-desired:

I am faint-hearted; with grief I am dispirited - Ah! Jawāhar
With you went away the splendour of stage - Ah! Jawāhar
What to say, what was that swelled-up breasts - that was stairway of beauty
It was here that the travellers of intimacy boarded the train - Ah! Jawāhar
Movement of lips was stimulant for eagerness – speech was magic
In your sight was hidden Africa's magician - Ah! Jawāhar
Tell me, who sold you at Guzri[xxx] *- O golden bird*[xxxi]

With the progress of time, almost all theatre companies preferred to have women actors. For a fruitful survival of theatre, it must be economically viable, and for that to happen, female actors were much needed.

As is evident, a new subaltern subjectivity was in the making through the very act of subalterns' participation in theatre as spectators and performers that constituted an act in defiance of colonising the mind project through epistemic ashrāfiya-morality. The act of viewing [xxxii] assumed critical importance, as knowledge in print was the preserve of ashrāfiya and other literate castes. Subalterns did not have a neatly worked out schema for class struggle when they

actively participated in theatre; instead, it was an expression of impulsive, dormant, undeclared desire to say no to the undesirable state of existence marked by apparent silence, quiescence, servitude, meekness, passivity, submission to the ashrāfiya-morality as preordained. The desire to say no finds expression in many undeclared transferences (Quaiser, 2019a, pp. 98-99). In the process, they learned mechanisms to act outside the given boundaries of epistemic ashrāfiya-morality. 'Lowly bāzārī' women, shudra Muslims and other labouring poor were driven by their existence in everyday life and its counter-intuitive comprehension; they learned imaginative manoeuvrings convivially.

Subaltern participation in theatre, however, was contradiction-ridden as well; for if theatre facilitated subalterns' social visibility with emancipatory promise, the logic of colonialism at the same time was to subjugate them, and in times to come they would oppose the colonial power.

Section IV: **Conclusion: Urdu theatre public sphere, historicity of the epistemic ashrāfiya-morality, umma and colonising the mind** *internally*

Urdu theatre in Bihar in the period of our study created an Urdu theatre public sphere. It became a critical source for comprehending not only the changing ashrāfiya moral, cultural and social landscapes but also of the making of a cultural history of subalterns. Thus, new discourses on gender, sexuality and ashrāfiya-morality; ashrāfiya perception of 'corrupting influences' of theatre; theatre enabling shudra Muslims and 'lowly women' to contest epistemic ashrāfiya-morality amounting to decolonise internally through their participation in theatre; a challenge to the 'Muslim'/ashrāfiya/'Islamic' cultural identity and concerns to reform and preserve it; ashrāfiya collaboration with the colonial rule; colonial authority, English education, modernity, western moral values; and ashrāfiya and lowly castes' responses to these issues constituted an Urdu theatre public sphere in Bihar. Within this sphere, unfamiliar issues, ideas, institutions, and a new language effected a new outlook, and the tensions that these produced engendered a sense of amazement, despair, lamentation, and attraction. Familiarity with the unfamiliar produced different routes for the ashrāfiya and subalterns. The ashrāfiya took the route of recognition of and negotiation with the colonial rule and continued with their epistemic morality. For subalterns, their convivial participation in theatre, questioned the ashrāfiya moral order, amounting to decolonise the mind internally.

The processes of colonising the mind through epistemic ashrāfiya-morality that

began with newer dimensions since the second half of the 18th century assumes critical significance. Assertion, contestation, recognition, negotiation, placation, and acceptance were the key ashrāfiya responses at different stages. The defining event of 1857 radically altered the social life of all segments of ashrāfiya, who portrayed the event as a big blow to mashriqyat[xxxiii] and further ascendancy of maghribyat, causing   attrition   of   distinct   'Muslim'   identity. However, mashriqyat has been a euphemism for ashrāfiya-morality and political power. Compelled against this turn of history, ashrāfiya began the construction of a sub-continental Muslim umma. Umma ideally denotes a united community of Muslims bound to Islam, independent of national boundaries. However, territorial conditions, local ashrāfiya's interests, and 'restorational politics' (Quaiser, 2011, pp. 49-68) ultimately shaped the conception of an umma. It meant, how to ultimately restore the lost 'Muslim'/Islamic (read ashrāfiya) political power, but since such a possibility did not even remotely exist, the only option left was to recover and sustain whatever could be recovered and sustained. This post-1857 concern and its postcolonial implications are best captured when much after 1947, Imārat-e Shari'a Bihar and Orissa, a prominent ashrāfiya institution established in 1921, introducing its raison d'être argued:

> *After the revolution of 1857 and the downfall of Mughal Empire in India, the 'ulama of the day…were compelled to find out a suitable platform for the Muslims in India through which their social, cultural, religious lives and activities could be managed, controlled and guided in the light of Shari'at laws…in non-Islamic countries. An organisation based on Shari'at laws under one Ameer (Chief of the faithful) is essentially required to educate, inspire and guide the Muslim ummah to enable them to lead a collective life under Islamic order.* (Quaiser, 2019b, p. 173)

In Iāmrat's conception of the umma, Islamic identity and loss of Muslim political power assumes critical significance. Certain other factors, such as the activities of Shuddhi Sangathan of Arya Samaj[xxxiv] and the rise of Hindutva forces in the pre-and-post-colonial period also supplemented the umma-making efforts. Thus, the notion of umma became a powerful tool to colonise the shudra-dalit Muslim mind. In this conception of umma, the ashrāfiya-perpetuated caste-based vertical division among the Muslims was strategically never even mentioned. It is obvious that the need to expediently construct a Muslim umma was/is for the preservation of ashrāfiya politico-religious oligarchic hegemony.

Notes:

i Of ashrāf (of noble birth). Ashrāfiya herein denotes a hegemonic-highborn-casteist-racist-knowledge-oligarchy. See the discussion in this section.

ii Shudra is the lowest-ranked category in the Hindu caste system, under the subordination of Hindu upper castes. They are producer peasants, artisans and labourers, engaged in necessary material production and reproduction. Shudra castes constitute the majority of the Muslim population in the Indian subcontinent, retaining their ascriptive caste social status. Caste affiliations constitute their primary identity and are accordingly disdained by ashrāfiya.

iii Dalit means trampled upon, oppressed. The term Dalit was first used by Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) for the untouchable lowest castes in the Hindu caste system. Muslims too have their share of converted dalits.

iv Urdu weekly *Al-Punch* was started in 1885 from Patna, the capital city of the north-eastern Indian province of Bihar. The weekly was read even outside Bihar. Al-Punch widely covered Urdu theatre activities in Bihar in the period of our study. Al-Punch covered national, provincial, local, suburban and international social, political, administrative, and cultural events and news. It supported the British Raj, as various post-1857 ashrāfiya run Urdu newspapers did. Although, it was critical of the government's various policies and practices with wit, satire, and humour but in a rather friendly manner. Al-Punch represented the post-1857 emerging ashrāfiya intellectual ethos in Bihar. This essay is part of the author's ongoing work on Al-Punch.

v Maghribyat - Westernism: Western normative structure, moral values and philosophy of life and society, which in the given context included also colonial state's economic, political, and cultural machinations.

vi Bāzārī (woman) herein means a woman portrayed as of lax moral, easily accessible for sexual gratification due to her low caste location.

vii Umma ideally denotes an integrated brotherhood of Muslims bound by tenets of Islam, devoid of caste-class-race hierarchies and independent of national boundaries. See section IV below for discussion (for a general concept of umma see: Shafi, 1997, & Esposito, 2004).

viii The term mazhab denotes a school of Islamic jurisprudence. The term maslak in the Indian subcontinent refers to multiple denominations within a particular mazhab, with conflicting interpretations of the Quran, hadīs, and Sunna. They are in antagonistic relations with each other as they also significantly represent 'non-faith caste-race-class interests.

ix Scholars studying ashrāf and their place in South Asian history (such as Margrit Pernau, 2013 & 2016) too have taken this ashrāf propelled representation as gospel. These categorisations are highly misleading, and they are only descriptive (which is also inadequate), which cannot be employed as an analytical category for comprehending ashrāf as a 'caste' social category. This is crucial, as this originary theory has laid the ashrāfiya epistemic foundation on which sub-continental hegemonic casteist ashrāfiya subjectivity is constituted, which reproduces casteist hegemony to keep reproducing conforming non-ashrāf subjects. Most scholars studying ashrāf and their defining role in the 'making of South Asian Muslim society and politics' do not question the ashrāfiya epistemic foundations, and in doing so they endorse ashrāfiya hegemonic social locations. They can be called 'docile' authors as drawing on Foucault's schematisation of 'the author' Wael Hallaq has explained (Hallaq, 2018, pp. 134-5).

x Role of Islamic 'canonical tensions and contradictions' in expedient reinterpretations is a matter of another debate.

xi In Islam, akhlāq (morality/ethics) and *ādāb* (good manners) are traditionally rooted in Qur'an, sunnah, and hadīs. However, akhlāq has also been philosophically interpreted by Islamic scholars since the 9th century A.D. (See Fakhri, 1991; Hourani, 1985)

xii It has forcefully been claimed that the real author was Moulvi Hasan Ali. (see Hasan, 1959, *Eshara,* pp. 33-38; 31-36 and Hasan, 1962, pp. 5-8)

xiii Based on classical Urdu Masnavi (long narrative poem) Zahr-e-Ishq (1862) by Mirza Shauq Lakhnavi.

xiv For males representing females on stage, see Hansen, 1998, pp. 2291-2300.

xv Bānkīpūr (or Bānkīpore or Bānkī Bazaar; also known as Bāqīpūr) is a neighbourhood residential area four kilometres west from the medieval Patna City or 'Azīmābād, which came under the East India Company in 1764. Since the late 19th century, it signified a 'modern' locality.

xvi Habermas identified a public sphere in 18th century Europe where public issues were debated and the government's activities were criticised by the 'public'- the bourgeoisie (Habermas, 1989, pp. 13 and 27). However, increasingly public sphere became tatus-quoist to legitimise the capitalist state and society (Thompson and Held, 1982, pp. 4-5; see also Calhoun, 1992). In the case of India, 'as the historical context of public spheres in colonies was different from that of the western bourgeois society, the nature of public sphere also differed. In India, public spheres existed much before the 18th century representing ideologically conflicting critical and conformist orientations outside the state. In India, it was concerned not only with the state and the political but also, with other indigenous structures of domination', see Quaiser, 2012, p. 122. See also: Joshi, 2001, pp. 23-58.

xvii Gramsci employed the term subaltern for those who are excluded from political representation, thus hegemonically denied having their voice (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 52-55). Moving away from Subaltern Studies Group's understanding (Ludden, 2003) or any mechanical class perspective, the subaltern is employed herein not strictly through and against the coloniser and colonized; instead to include also the non-colonial local caste-class forces of domination and forms of knowledge: the disenfranchised people of low castes; or at times even youth and student who felt suffocated under parental authority.

xviii For subject formation and subjectivity, see Althusser, 1971, p. 123; Quaiser, 2019b, p. 180.

xix For popular, populism and authoritarian populism, see Hall, 1980, pp. 157-185; Hall 1981. For Frankfurt School's views, see Jay, 1973.

xx Fazl-e Haq Āzād (1854-1942) was a landed ashrāfiya of Sayyed caste from the village Shāho Bigha in the Jahānābād district, Bihar, but later he settled in Bankipur in the 1880s.

xxi Jān Sāheb (1817-1896) is known for his Urdu poetry that detailed women's sexual desires and activities.

xxii These concerns were articulated more forcefully by various prominent ashrāfiya scholars.

xxiii Patna here refers to medieval Patna City.

xxiv Samik Bandyopadhyay has noted in a general sense that, 'For the actresses, several of them single mothers or with dependents, the options were more constricted, and acting remained the only means of living' (see Bandyopadhyay, 1994, pp. 65-66).

xxv Respectable educated men – plural of bābū.

xxvi For ashrāfiya lascivious description, see endnotes xxvii, xxviii xxix & xxxi.

xxvii Al-Punch, 1892, 8/4: Passim

xxviii Al-Punch, 1900, 16/24

xxix Al-Punch, 1899, 15/18

xxx Guzri – a residential and market locality in Patna City, where Badshah Nawab resided.

xxxi Al-Punch, 1892, 8/45

xxxii Augusto Boal (2008) has underscored the possibility that the spectators could modify the representation according to their contextual experiences.

xxxiii Mashriqyat - Easternism: Eastern normative structure and philosophy of life, which in the given context meant Islamic, 'Muslim'/ashrāfiya-morality, Indo-Islamic, composite culture, indicating conflicting ideological predilections.

xxxiv Arya Samāj was formed in 1875 for the revival of Vedic values and practices. It gained notoriety for its shuddhī activities for conversion to Hinduism creating communal tensions.

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Neshat Quaiser is an Associate Researcher (Politics and Society) at Centre de Sciences Humaines (CSH), New Delhi.
Email id: neshatquaiser@yahoo.com