The second half of the nineteenth century saw European expansion on a hitherto unknown scale. The major factors behind the speed at which Western Europe took the lead were superior weapons, better communications, sophisticated transport systems and improved health care. Great Britain, the Netherlands and France occupied substantial territories on other continents. With the industrialization of the European heartlands, national economies grew rapidly.

The colonization of the world and large-scale globalization happened simultaneously. Across the colonies, Western schooling and dress became standard as the print media, telegraph, trains and steamships transported the latest news across the empires and created a public sphere in which everybody participated. Christian missionaries took advantage of the new communication structures to spread their faith as aggressively as they could, for they considered their work an essential part of the European *mission civilisatrice*.

Across the Asian world, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs answered with reform through religion, depicting their traditions as ‘corrupt’ and urging the return to the ‘pure faith.’ In combination with educational reform, religion served as a channel of upward mobility and as the basis for a new self-respect. In his *Age of Entanglement*, Kris Manjapra sketches out the effects of colonization on the Hindu population. Focusing on the Bengali national resistance that came to a head around 1900, he describes how protest against the aggressive suppression of local markets in favour of British exports took shape. Before the young generation started to throw bombs at British administrators, Bengali intellectuals had already founded universities, propagated reform of the Hindu tradition, formulated claims of political independence and occupied high positions in

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the British colonial administration. The entanglement with empire reveals moments of both adaptation and resistance.

After the Great Uprising of 1857, India’s Muslims began to reform their traditions and, as I explain later, Aligarh became the country’s first Western-style Muslim university, followed by the Punjab University in Lahore. At the same time, the Punjab-based reform movements of Deobandis, Barelwis, Ahl-i-Hadis and Nadwa, albeit in very different directions, were competing with one another to set up new religious schools and to restructure Islamic theology and the curriculum of the religious scholarly class (ulema).5

In a regional context, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, a descendant of the Muslim landowning gentry and independent religious scholar in rural Qadian in the Punjab, put himself forward as the Mujaddid (reformer) of the age. He proposed to defend Islam from the infamous attacks of Christian missionaries and, to that end, he founded his own mission organization, the Sadr Anjuman. Around 1900, his followers began to preach in places as far flung as Kenya, Afghanistan and the Fiji Islands. However, apart from a dream in which he saw himself ‘standing on a pulpit in London and giving a sermon, while white birds flew into his hands,’6 actual proselytizing in Europe seems not to have been on his agenda.7

Bearing in mind the British ‘determination to civilize,’ Mirza Ghulam Ahmad decided to examine what options the modern age offered. His answer was a Muslim mission organization modelled on the British mission in India and a Muslim theology that appropriated some of Christianity’s most basic truths. Around 1900, this was a ‘modern’ answer, one that reconnected with the tradition yet responded to the contemporary situation. Nonetheless, as I pointed out in the Introduction, although the word was on everybody’s lips, modernity eluded any single definition. Rather, it served as the perfect blank screen on which to project visions from all parts of the world. ‘An essential part of being modern,’ Bayly observes, ‘is thinking that you are modern.’8 This then was the global context in which Ahmad’s followers established centres in Europe with a view to sharing their approaches to modernity and challenging Western ideas of their religion that the accounts of Christian missionaries had discredited.

7 He rather thought that, ‘instead of these missionaries, writings of an excellent and high standard should be sent to these countries.’ Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Izala Auham*, (Qadian, 1891), 773. With thanks to Nasir Ahmad for alerting me to this text.