Despite the humble beginnings of Anglicisation under the watch of the East India Company, by the early 20th century, English schools and colleges had grown in number and begun to produce the first generations of elite and capitalist-class Muslims primarily educated in the European mould. In the midst of this transition, Anglicisation had received a boost from the Uprising of 1857, which provided the final pretext for government by the Crown to supplant Company rule in 1858. Continuity in educational policy since the 1830s hints at how little else to do with colonial policy actually changed with the onset of ‘direct rule’. In the pattern of government, the Crown maintained ‘subsidiary alliances’ with more than 500 ‘Princely States’ first negotiated by the Company, and continued to depend on South Asians in the lower ranks of all branches of state. The Codification process also continued to inform the state, together with Anglicisation shaping many of the governing institutions of ‘British Raj’ (1858–1947).

Another example of the continuity inherent in the governing institutions of the Company and the Raj, is the many censuses conducted, beginning in the late East India Company period with works like William Adam’s previously considered ‘Reports’ in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, but vastly expanded by the 1860s. While the nature of religious communities was moulded in various ways by Codification and Anglicisation, the induction of censuses emphasising religious community to aid in allocating quotas for government jobs, political representation and so on, encouraged the elite and capitalist classes educated in the former to ask and answer which demographic slot they fit in the latter. The result, according to Bernard Cohn and others who follow his lead, was a process of cultural ‘objectification’, such that by the 20th century:

…the whole Western educated class of Indians…have objectified their culture. They in some sense have made it into a 'thing'; they can stand back and look at themselves, their ideas, their symbols and culture and see it as an entity. What had previously been embedded in a whole matrix of custom, ritual, religious symbol, a textually transmitted tradition, has
now become something different. What had been unconscious now to some extent becomes conscious. Aspects of the tradition can be selected, polished and reformulated for conscious ends.¹

Cohn restricts the predominance of Objectification to the ‘Western educated class of Indians’ because it is through a ‘Western’ lens that culture is objectified, the influence of the colonial discourse not able or intended to penetrate much further. Although such theses afford colonial subjects much agency in sculpting their own ‘Modernity’, the idea that the ‘whole Western educated class of Indians’ can be said to have ‘objectified their culture’ does not sit well with some. In fact, as early as the 1960s, before such theoretical perspectives became standard fare in the historiography of South Asia, Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), a major ‘Islamic Modernist’ of the post-colonial period, commented that to ‘many observers, the history of Islam in modern times is essentially the history of…a semi-inert mass receiving the destructive blows or the formative influences from the West’.²

The case can certainly be made that advocates of Objectification qualify as just such ‘observers’ of ‘tradition’ in general, particularly when it is acknowledged that Rahman’s ‘insider’ critique has its echoes in the works of academic ‘outsiders’ who write the intellectual history of Muslims. Francis Robinson, for one, concurs with Rahman in asserting that so far as Muslim scholars are concerned, ‘whether traditionalist [e.g. Deobandis] or modernist [i.e. “Western educated”], it must be granted that they ‘understood the world within an Islamic frame’.³ Rahman and Robinson agree that apart from European thought and institutions, the ‘Traditionalist’ movements identified in this book as permutations of a ‘new’ Sober Path were ‘directly bequeathed’ to the ‘Western’ educated Muslims of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁴ This contributes, in Rahman’s thought and Robinson’s words, to a progressive shift from ‘other-worldly religion to this worldly religion’, accounting for much of the communitarian social activism advocated by ‘Traditionalists’

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