The self-understanding of new social formations were to some extent influenced by European interaction, both in urban centres and in the qasbahs, as well as in other semi-urban regions, where their base had been built on a long cultural and intellectual tradition. Most of these formations were informed by the idea of the privileged position of Muslims. In an act of self-reflection, of an inward perspective so to speak, these new Muslim communities based their discourses on recent knowledge and experiences, particularly in the wake of the great upheaval of 1857, which had shattered Muslim rule and established firm colonial power, producing a serious crisis. They negotiated the new situation through a variety of forms and institutional patterns, which gradually became important vehicles of communication, be it for traditional Islamic learning and discourse, for treatises, pamphlets, newspapers, novels or even paintings. Their movements varied from “traditionalist” to “modernist”, thereby expanding the semantics of sharif: the notion of noble as part of a (Mughal/Nawwabi) social group was enriched by the idea of noble as a moral quality, thus establishing distinction and distance from Mughal/Nawwabi concepts.1 Appealing to changing ashraf clientele associations (anjumans) and assemblies (of believers) (jama‘a), press and publishing houses in Calcutta, Bombay, Kanpur, Madras, or the famous Naval Kishore Press in Lucknow2 became instrumental in establishing Muslim visibility in the public sphere. Eventually, in the formation of these socially and religiously competing communities, an evolving “middle class” used these media to adapt and adopt the new values, to reshape them and render local, i.e., transform into middle-class values, that which might have been perceived as foreign, and not only

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2 For Naval Kishore Press see Stark: An Empire of Books.
to respond to local educational and social needs, to champion reforms, found schools, and to foster public activity in the Muslim community. The foremost task was to juxtapose these institutions with “civility” in their quest for a new Islamicity, which went public, as it were, at times with Prophet Muhammad as the normative example, being the focal point of Muslim religious discourse. Some of these new identities still dominate Muslim public opinion in South Asia and beyond.

**Incremental Muslim public: The “traditionalist” context**

An early variation of this self-understanding of Muslims was the radical ‘reformist’ position taken by the movement called Ahl-e Hadith, which is said to have found its way to South Asia from Yemen from 1830s onwards, though the term Ahl-e Hadith seems first to have been used in 1864. The movement found some of its activists in the Jihad-movement, most of whom quietened after 1857, while its reformism drew inspiration from Ibn Taymiyya (died 1328), Shah Wali Allah and the Yemenite scholar Muhammad al-Shaukani (1760–1834) in particular, who focused on the study of hadith to reform the judicial and social system. The Arabised Ahl-e Hadith refused to acknowledge any authority of legal schools (madhahib) and also the emerging modernism which had started rallying behind Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1899) (see below). Instead, these hadith-based reformists claimed a purified religious Muhammadan life, the sunna, represented by authentic hadith, and rejected shared religious practices as well as pilgrimages connected to shrine cult and visits to the grave of the Prophet Muhammad which they consider as—heretical—invention (bid‘a). Yet, Sufism remained a form of ethical self-determination. In so doing Ahl-e Hadith showed clear ideological overlapping with Shah Wali Allah and Sayyid Ahmad Isma’il’s iconoclasm, as they claimed to be their real heirs. At the same time *ijtihad* is allowed for members of the educated elite as well, rather than concentrating Islamic agency purely in the hands of ulama. Known as *ghair muqallid* (those who reject, even oppose, *taqlid*, which they consider a deviation from the sunna) these quietists found their

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3 It is very difficult to attach a certain founding date to this movement, because of its having different centres throughout South Asia.