

PART II

# A Theory of Commentaries



## Anatomy of the Commentary

### *An Internal View*

*For out of olde felde, as men seyth,  
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,  
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,  
Cometh al this newe science that men lere,*

—CHAUCER, PARLEMENT OF FOULES

On July 17, 1916, a coterie of scholars assembled in the court of the nawwāb of Rampur to witness one of the last rationalist (*ma‘qūlī*) debates in Muslim South Asia. According to the sixteen documents that constitute the archival witness of this event, the two opponents, Barakāt Aḥmad (d. 1347/1928) and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bihārī, had arrived in the city to debate the merits of certain positions taken up by the late Khayrābādī scholar, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Faḍl-i Ḥaqq, in his commentary on the commentary of al-Harawī on al-Taḥṭānī’s *al-Risāla fī t-taṣawwur wa-t-taṣdīq*.<sup>1</sup>

Exactly one week later, a report was published by the editor of Rampur’s widely circulated newspaper, the *Dabdaba-yi Sikandarī*.<sup>2</sup> It reveals that the origins of the Rampur Debate were rooted in the layered world of the commentary that oscillated between the written and the oral. We are informed that al-Bihārī had penned a second-order commentary on a medieval work on logic, devoting considerable space to challenging the commentarial interventions of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrābādī. Parts of the longer commentary al-Bihārī had produced were then discussed by him in person with Mu‘in al-Dīn al-Ajmīrī (d. 1359/1940); subsequently, another shorter and more focused work pertaining to this session was published by al-Bihārī. Al-Ajmīrī conveyed the details of the encounter to his teacher, Barakāt Aḥmad, who was himself a student of al-Khayrābādī. And with Barakāt Aḥmad the written text reverted to the oral medium. This latter moment was the 1916 Rampur Debate, where the battle lines

on issues in logic also demarcated scholarly networks sustained by specific commentarial traditions.

Rampur had long been a city that bore profound loyalties to al-Khayrābādī, and this devotion, punctuated by a history of princely patronage, had seen some continuity with his intellectual heirs. Perhaps the most telling case was that of Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Amīthwī, who is mentioned in the reports as having been present during the debate in the company of the many attending scholars. Al-Amīthwī was not only the teacher of the presiding nawwāb; he was also a student of al-Khayrābādī.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, we are told that the nawwāb’s father’s first cousin, Šāhibzāda Muḥammad ‘Alī Khān Bahādur (Chuttan Šāhib), was the host of Barakāt Aḥmad, whom he had personally invited to Rampur. Like his guest, the prince had also studied under al-Khayrābādī and was troubled by the looming prospects of the publication of al-Bihārī’s longer critical commentary in his master’s city.<sup>4</sup> By any measure, this was unfriendly terrain for al-Bihārī.

But there was more to this story. One report—partial though it is—highlights three significant points.<sup>5</sup> First, al-Bihārī is presented as a younger and lesser-known authority who aimed to enhance his standing in the scholarly community by challenging a canonized authority under particularly insurmountable circumstances. Second, the report emphasizes that the commentarial exercise was a mere excuse to launch the critique. In other words, the commentarial effort involved a carefully deliberated circumscription of the base lemma as the site of living debate. And third, although this commentarial dialectic served individual ambition and scholarly agency at its most recent iteration, it was still fully animated by the past: the report mentions that al-Bihārī’s challenge to the late al-Khayrābādī was also meant to vindicate his own late master, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Lakhnawī, who had objected to the latter scholar’s positions in *his* own commentarial effort. In other words, al-Bihārī was both an instigator and a legatee.

This chapter traces the history of the Rampur Debate in order to offer theories of commentarial practice. The Rampur Debate archive supplies us with a rare glimpse into the internal mechanics and living contexts of commenting, serving as a complement to received and canonized texts. As such, theories of the commentary developed on its basis illuminate the work of the next chapter that relies on the texts of the *Sullam* tradition. This chapter has two parts. In the first, I will explore how the life of the commentary shifted cyclically between the oral and the textual and how the act of commenting—either as hypertext or hypertext—was both an imitative performance of authority and agentive self-actualization. Building on these observations, in the second part I will examine the process of philosophical verification. I will highlight how, in the commentarial context, it was paradoxically innovative precisely by virtue of the constraints of historical texts and partisan legacies.

AN ORALLY INHABITED TEXTUALITY: THE UNITY  
OF COMMENTARIAL VOICES

The commentary was a mode of *agentive* performance in that the commentator both spoke *in* the voice of his predecessors and also spoke *for* them. This feature of the commentary explains various forms of its movement between orality and textuality, the past and the future, and the potential and the actual. Below we will observe that, just as al-Bihārī had reanimated the voice of his deceased teacher, so his own respondents and defenders donned the authorial persona of *their* own teachers. As such, the Rampur Debate was an imitative reenactment of the dialogic space of a previous generation—a commentarial extension of the past. Yet it was also the self-actualization of the past, realized by the authorship of newcomers—a base text (*matn*) in its own right; cyclically, the latter was itself the grist for future exercises.<sup>6</sup> As we will witness below, just as the future commentary performed, rehabilitated, and authored the incomplete past—its hypotext—so the past also preemptively authorized it—its hypertext. As such, the commentarial machine was cyclical, oscillating between two loci: that in which the past was actualized and reenacted and that in which the text remained suspended *in potentia* in relation to its future. The movement was facilitated and sustained by an oral aspect that inhabited the textual space.<sup>7</sup>

The tendency of a student/commentary to fulfill the promise of the teacher/base text and of the latter to call forth to the former is a defining feature of the commentarial genre. Yet this kind of mutual propulsion within the commentarial cycles is obscured from view once the text is straightjacketed into its static form that, with the loss of the contextual, dialogic space, becomes an object of late readership.<sup>8</sup> One report from the Rampur Debate archive explains, for example, that Barakāt Aḥmad had initially insisted that his student, al-Ajmīrī, engage the debate in his stead, stating that it would be all the same whether he or the latter took up the mantle; another report, “A Debate in the Princely State of Rampur” is a ventriloquation by al-Bihārī via his associate, Muḥammad Ṭāhā.<sup>9</sup> Ṭāhā writes,

Mawlānā Barakāt or Chuttan Ṣāhib . . . are requested to give a swift response to this objection and to the objection related to [al-Khayrābādī’s] commentary on the *Mirqāt*. If they do so, this act will be worthy of praise. However, I am certain that they will not be able to offer a response . . . If there is a Khayrābādī who would like to step into the fray, then I invite him to respond according to the respectful etiquette of the great scholars.<sup>10</sup>

A response was indeed published by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Bihārī, a student of Maqbūl Aḥmad, who was himself a student of Barakāt Aḥmad.<sup>11</sup> A rebuttal of this latter work appeared almost immediately in Kolkata and was written by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bihārī’s student, Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad.<sup>12</sup> And in this fashion, the initial encounter at Rampur was fulfilled in the cycle of several written layers. So the story had begun with two pithy reports of the oral Rampur Debate that called

forth to the elaborately written commentarial formats.<sup>13</sup> The subject matter of these works extended well beyond the topics discussed at the court, such that, within six months, detailed defenses of associated issues in al-Khayrābādī's *Kalām-i balāghat nizām* and related critiques of al-Bihārī's *al-Ṣaḥīfa* were also published.<sup>14</sup> These engagements, in turn, led to two additional oral debates between al-Bihārī and two of Barakāt Aḥmad's students, Muḥammad Sharīf and Maqbūl Aḥmad, in Benares and Bankipore, respectively.<sup>15</sup> And in the form of new texts, these latter witnessed a scholarly life similar to the Rampur Debate. In other words, orality quickened and *inhabited* textuality, and the brevity of past oral discourses led to future cross-generational fulfillments in the commentarial space.<sup>16</sup>

It is revealing of commentarial writing that, of the sixteen archival documents, not a single one is attributed to the two original debaters at Rampur. Indeed, their direct arguments quickly disappear from view altogether, even as their voices are assumed by the student/commentator. In speaking for them, the student both spoke for himself and for the positions of scholars two generations removed—that is, the masters of his own master.<sup>17</sup> A kind of living and orally directed textual archaeology lay at the core of the commentarial exercise: the debate was analogous to the base text (*matn*) that spoke through the future commentary, but with a devotion to its own anchored past; the reports, short treatises, and commentaries were all part of a dialectic that textualized the oral and that focused on sets of disputed problemata—the *masā'il*—that were introduced by the *matn*. The latter called out to the future commentary to fulfill it, while also compelling it to return to layers that were subsumed by it. The process continued cyclically, even as the more recent articulations of the cumulative history marched forward in new directions.

Therefore, from the perspective of the commentary as a *readerly* canon, it makes sense that it should appear to be sterile repetition; as a *writerly* medium, however, the commentary was tantamount to a process that sustained cycles of dynamic orality *through* the textual form.<sup>18</sup> The intense bursts of activity propelled by the Rampur Debate allow us to capture commentarial lives eventually—as punctuated disruptions—and within the scope of their cyclical character. Since they are contained both temporally and in terms of their subject matter, they display quite vividly that the textual commentary actualized the oral and that the oral—an invested dialectical site of its own textual past—was a latent germ of the future text.<sup>19</sup>

#### TRADITION AND PARTISANSHIP IN DIALECTICAL VERIFICATION

The commentary tradition oscillated between the oral and the textual, the past and the future, the pithy and the expansive, the potential and the actual, and the master and the student. These dichotomous features of the tradition naturally facilitated certain processes and expectations of philosophical argumentation and

verification. The conduct of the Rampur Debate and episodes in its history can be used to highlight these aspects of the tradition. The *Dabdaba-yi Sikandarī* captures the Rampur Debate in the following fashion.

In the first iteration, according to the direction of . . . His Highness, Bihārī was designated to be the questioner [*sā' il*] and Barakāt Aḥmad the respondent [*muǰīb*]. The question was, "What is the difference between the expressions 'all' [*tamām*] and 'totality' [*jamī'*]?" The respondent gave a thorough answer. When Bihārī was about to raise an objection against the respected [Khayrābādī], His Highness said that the objections should have been raised if the books written by [Khayrābādī] were present. After this, the next argument—whether propositions are second intentions or not—was under way. Although this debate should have taken place with Mu'īn al-Dīn . . . Bihārī Ṣāhib adamantly refused this, such that, in the end, this debate was also carried out with the [Barakāt] Ṣāhib . . . When, by means of his powerful speech, [he] was able to prove that [propositions] are second intentions . . . Bihārī could say nothing more than that [he] had never heard this from anyone and that this is a new verification [*yeh jadīd taḥqīq hē*]. Upon this [claim,] the gloss of the respected [Khayrābādī], on Ḥamdallāh, wherein this position was proved on the basis of the expressions of the *Ufuq mubīn*, was presented . . . In the third iteration, [Barakāt Aḥmad] . . . was the questioner and [Bihārī] was simply asked for a definition of the continuity of substrates . . . Try as he would . . . Bihārī could not give its definition . . . His Highness declared that, truly, [Bihārī] was not able to offer a definition . . . and on explaining the matter himself, he forced the concession (*ilzām*) on . . . Bihārī.<sup>20</sup>

This quotation is significant in that it lays bare the mechanism underlying the formation of the *matn*, which, in this instance, is the words of Barakāt Aḥmad and al-Bihārī. The context was an oral debate, conducted formally along the lines discussed in the *ādāb al-baḥṡ* literature: the questioner and respondent take turns in these roles as they engage specific problemata; and the event is concluded when the nawwāb forces a concession on al-Bihārī. The iterations of each side are concise and decisive, as they are meant to have an immediately forceful effect on the audience and the arbiter within a limited span of time. And it is these *condensed* oral arguments that became the hypotexts for the written commentarial exercises that followed.

In large numbers and strung together in an organic format, debated problemata of this sort eventually became the written hypotextual handbooks on which commentaries operated; indeed, fertile commentaries—those that beckoned supercommentaries—foreshadowed their future fulfillment in the same manner. The hypotextual lemmata of the handbook were thus tantamount to subdued heteroglossia that the anticipated commentarial hypertexts reified in a loosely unified style. These dialectical sites undergirded the possibility of the philosophical commentary as a genre.<sup>21</sup>

In all this, the case of the Rampur Debate is instructive because it unveils a structure of commentarial practice that is generally obscured by the commentary

on the page. Here it is visible in plain view that the starting point of the written *matn* was an oral debate. As we will observe below, similar traditions of living debates—oral or textual—underlay the production of other hypotexts. And the *matn* that emerged from these debates gestured to its dialectical turgidity in a way that was resolved only in the adoptive voice of the commentator. This was done much in the same way as the positions of the debaters of Rampur were fulfilled in the reports and commentaries of their students.

Furthermore, as we noticed in the case of the first and third problemata mentioned in the quotation above, the oral medium carried determinative weight, although it also betrayed its underlying textual grounds: the debaters were not allowed to appeal to the written text in its absence, although the latter was the source of the dialectic. In this regard, with the third problemata, a proof text was only produced in response to a curious riposte of al-Bihārī—that his opponent was presenting a new verification (*tahqīq*) of the issue at hand. Such a case of verification was problematic. The underlying text was written by the late al-Khayrābādī and it had been argued, in a contracted oral format, by his student and stand-in debater, Barakāt Aḥmad. However, the proof text turned out to be not his master's commentary but a claim in this commentary grounded in the much earlier authorial voice of Mīr Dāmād.

There was, therefore, a certain paradoxical tension within the exercise: Barakāt Aḥmad enjoyed full agency in establishing his positions in the oral defense; it was he whom al-Bihārī aimed to defeat. Yet the victory of Barakāt Aḥmad was poignantly also a historical gain and a vindication of his master, whose written commentary lurked under the surface of this oral moment that would emerge as a new *matn*. Paradoxically again, Barakāt Aḥmad's independent verifications and demonstrations could not be new or unrecognizable. They had to be erected atop al-Khayrābādī's text and, via the latter, they had to be grounded in a still deeper textual foundation. As we will observe in several cases below, it is precisely in this fashion that the dynamic aspects of the most youthful commentaries were also the most profoundly archaic: there were historical commitments buried below the surface of their dense *mutūn* that also brimmed with the urgency of live debates. Thus, the commenting texts—whether critical or constructive—were prompted by their base texts to assume and actualize proximate and distant voices, even as they held fast to their own innovative authorial agency.<sup>22</sup>

In the Rampur Debate, the words spoken with reference to an underlying textual layer crystallized as the *matn* that became the prompt for the ensuing textual deluge of commentaries.<sup>23</sup> It is worth observing, however, that in defending the positions taken up by the Rampur debaters, the ensuing commentaries readily adopted a classical orientation. This mode of scholarly engagement was already apparent even in the aforementioned appeal to Mīr Dāmād's *Ufuq*. In that case, the pithy *matn* of the oral statement had forced a commentarial intervention that authorized the independent verification of the speaker by appeal to a much earlier

source text. This same process is also ubiquitous in the written corpus of the Ram-pur commentaries. As an example, one may cite ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s “Ifāḍa,” which also reveals a number of other important points.

[Al-Bihārī writes in ‘Munāzara’]<sup>24</sup> that a group of imitators [*muqallidīn*] have written that the simulacrum is distinct [*mubāyin*] from that of which it is a simulacrum and that [a thing] is revealed [as an object of knowledge] only to the extent that there is a self-same unity [between that which reveals and the object that is revealed]. This [position betrays] a neglect of the relationship of imitation [*muḥākāh*] [between a simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum]. For self-same unity is only the most proximate type of specific quality that is suitable for revealing [the knowledge of an object]. A celebrated [scholar] maintains that [such] revealing occurs also in the case of knowledge by means of an aspect [of something] [*al-‘ilm bi-l-wajh*], although an aspect and that of which it is an aspect are different per se [*mutaghāyirāni bi-dh-dhāt*]. The explanation [in the one case] would be the [same as the] explanation [in the other]. Against this [response] is [my criticism] that distinction as a technical term [*al-tabāyun al-iṣṭilāḥī*] is more specific than difference [*taghāyur*]. There is no distinction between an aspect and that of which it is an aspect. Thus the analogy [*qiyās*] has no shared term. However, it is conceded by the eminent ones that there is an accidental unity [*ittiḥād ‘aradī*] between an aspect and that of which it is an aspect. In the case of knowledge by means of the aspect, the revelation [of an object of knowledge] occurs only per accidens. So the revelation occurs only to the extent that there is a unity [between the aspect and that of which it is an aspect]. So reflect on this! For the verification [of this issue] in this manner [*fa-inna t-taḥqīqa ‘alā hādhihi ṭ-ṭarīqa*] is among the things specific to this work.<sup>25</sup>

Let us first outline the argument before turning to its form. The views of three distinct contenders are presented—those of the imitators; those of al-Khayrābādī (the celebrated scholar); and those of al-Bihārī (in the words of Ṭāhā). The imitators first posit the position (1) that a simulacrum in the mind may reveal that of which it is a simulacrum if there is a unity between them. Given this position, and since there is no such unity per se—the two are *mutabāyin bi-dh-dhāt*—the implicit conclusion is that a simulacrum in the mind may not reveal that of which it is a simulacrum. (~1) This conclusion is rejected on the grounds that there is a relationship of imitation between the two and that this type of relationship is sufficient for gaining knowledge of the object. (2 = ~1) al-Khayrābādī supports this argument by pointing out that an *aspect* of a thing proffers knowledge of that thing; it is implied that this is a position accepted by the imitators. Yet there is no unity per se between an aspect and that of which it is an aspect; the two are *mutaghāyir*. Since the relationship between a simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum is of the same sort, one cannot reject the simulacrum as capable of revealing knowledge of a thing, while accepting that an aspect may do so. (3 = ~2) al-Bihārī counters al-Khayrābādī by stating that distinction (*tabāyun*) and difference (*taghāyur*) are technically distinct. Given this, the analogy between a simulacrum and an aspect

is not valid. Furthermore, there is an accidental unity between an aspect and that of which it is an aspect. Presumably, such a unity is lacking in the case of a simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum.

The “Ifāḍa” is effectively a critical commentary on this textual lemma of al-Bihārī, displaying some of the important features of the genre. Its first order of business was to disentangle identities and arguments: the imitators, it explains, are the majority of the Peripatetics (*mashshāʿūn*), who hold the doctrine that a form in the mind is identical to its object with respect to its quiddity (not with respect to its individuation). Given this unity on the level of the quiddity, a thing may be known, with respect to its quiddity, by means of a form that obtains in the mind, but not by means of a simulacrum. The contravening position is specified as that of the Illuminationists (*ishrāqīyyūn*), and it also grants that the mind may know things other than those that obtain in it. However, it denies that there is a unity of any sort between what obtains in the mind—a simulacrum—and that of which it is a simulacrum. The two are distinct from each other both on the level of quiddity and on the level of individuation. Thus insofar as something is known at all, it must be due to a relation of mimesis. “This is an elaboration,” ‘Abd al-‘Azīz writes in closing his first set of thoughts, “of the locus of their disagreement whence the earlier [scholars] sought to prove the doctrines that they held.” In writing a critical assessment of al-Bihārī’s stance, therefore, the author of the “Ifāḍa” had to take up the passing reference to the imitators and expose the necessary fundamentals on which the later arguments were erected. This was a historical unfolding / exposition (*tahrīr*).<sup>26</sup>

It is noteworthy that neither al-Bihārī nor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was directly concerned with the conclusion. Rather, what was of interest was the dialectical play of the argument to which the *matn* and the historical baggage had led. In the case at hand, the argument of the imitators was not suitable because the proof they used in support of their views could be used to the same effect by those they wished to undermine—the aspect was no better as a ground of knowledge than the simulacrum. al-Bihārī’s critique, in turn, pointed out that, in formal terms, to be distinct (what is said of the simulacrum in relation to the referent) is not the same as to be different (what is said of the aspect in relation to that of which it is an aspect); and so the analogy al-Khayrābādī had established was not valid. Furthermore, he claimed that there was an accidental unity between an aspect and that of which it was an aspect; this unity was presumably lacking in the analogue. These twin elements of the proofs, he averred, constituted a mode of verification that was a distinct feature of his work. We will return to this important claim below.

In the next phase of the argument, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz shifts from the *tahrīr* of the positions of the earlier scholars to those of al-Khayrābādī. As before, the defense is only implied in the work of the latter author, so the argument of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz effectively appears to be a continuation and fulfillment of the hints of his predecessor. He writes,

Al-Khayrābādī . . . countered [them] [*nāqīdan*]<sup>27</sup> in that the revelation [of a thing] obtains in the case of knowledge by means of the aspect. However, the aspect and that of which it is an aspect are different per se [*mutaghāyirāni bi-dh-dhāt*]. *The explanation [here] is the [same as the] explanation [there]*. The gist of it is that the proof that you mentioned for [arguing] that the simulacrum does not reveal its referent—namely, that what is distinct [*mubāyin*] does not reveal something else that is distinct [from it]—is applicable, in the exact manner, in the case of knowledge by means of an aspect. The reason is that the aspect is also distinct from that of which it is an aspect. And so the claim [*mudda'ā*]—namely, that no revelation happens [in the first case]—fails . . . If they offer the explanation that . . . although the aspect is distinct and different from that of which it is an aspect, it does have a relation [*'alāqa*] with that of which it is an aspect—that is, [a relation of] accidental unity—well a relation also obtains between a simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum; between them there obtains a relation of imitation. [That there is an accidental unity between the aspect and that of which it is an aspect] is claimed by al-Bihārī in the *Ṣaḥīfa*; and he made the verification [of the issue] in this manner [*at-tahqīq 'alā hādihā t-tariq*] among the special characteristics [*khuṣūṣiyyāt*] of his commentary, deeming the resolution [of his challenge] to be difficult.<sup>28</sup>

There is no need to rehearse all the elements of al-Khayrābādī's critique. What is new in this part of the commentary is the *tahrīr* of his expression, "The explanation [here] is the [same as the] explanation [there]." One learns that this cryptic statement is a response to the *anticipated* counterresponse by the Peripatetics that, although the aspect and that of which it is an aspect are distinct, they nonetheless have some relation to each other. 'Abd al-'Azīz writes,

Al-Khayrābādī imagined that perhaps, at a later point, some supporter of the Peripatetics might try to resist this refutation [*naqd*]. He might present the sterile explanation—as Bihārī has done in his objection—that there is a difference [between the two analogues]. In the one case, there is a pure distinction per se, with no kind of unity. By contrast, in the other case, although there is no unity per se, there certainly does obtain a unity per accidens. And so the 'Allāma [al-Khayrābādī] himself overcame this [potential objection] . . . and he stated that the explanation [in that case] is the explanation [in this case] [*fa-l-'udhr al-'udhr*].<sup>29</sup>

What is this explanation that applied in both cases and that allowed the 'Allāma to overcome the projected critique? Nothing more than the hint—*fa-l-'udhr al-'udhr*—was offered in the text itself, so that the task of 'Abd al-'Azīz came to be, as it were, to divulge a secret that he shared with the author. Furthermore, in so doing, he donned the mask of al-Khayrābādī's persona and directly addressed these critics—the anticipated and historical ones—in *his* living voice:

*You* never posited that the source of revelation and the basis of knowledge was unity simpliciter. Rather, *you* had claimed that the basis of knowledge and the source of revelation was only unity per se. *You* hold that the thing itself should obtain [in the mind] for knowledge and revelation to come about. So how can unity per accidens

help *you* now? And if *you* must now arbitrarily abandon your doctrinal position [*agar yahī tark-i madhhabī sūjhi hai*]<sup>30</sup>—that although there is no unity per se, at least there is *some* relation—then remember that, in addition to being contrary to your doctrinal stance, a relation simpliciter is found also between a simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum. For even *you* do not deny that there is a relation of imitation between a simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum. In this case, if unity per se is dropped [as a condition], then both cases are the same.<sup>30</sup>

Two layers of attack are leveled against the critic. If he holds firm to his standard epistemology, he cannot argue in favor of knowledge by means of an aspect. If, on the other hand, he abandons his underlying doctrinal position, he must concede a conclusion that he wishes to reject. In all this, for the purposes of a theory of the text, it is important to recall that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz is a commentator of a third layer who resolves the textual hints of the commentator of the first layer by inhabiting his persona (“You!” as al-Khayrābādī would have addressed his critic); and he is brought to assume this role in his defense of an oral debate of the second layer. As in the oral debate, so here, too, the development is diachronic and synchronic. The latest author is paradoxically both constrained and free—the historical text predicted, authorized, and compelled his arrival (the central argument, “*fa-l-‘udhr al-‘udhr*,” required articulation) and he, in turn, authored and fulfilled the historical text.<sup>31</sup> Yet this role of the latest author does not emerge as though from a backward gaze of an epigone; the germ of each layer was already sown in each of the cumulative earlier layers; it was posited there deliberately and with the *anticipation* of an unfolding at each moment of recasting. Indeed, even the criticism was projected in a similar fashion: “Observers!” writes ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, “You have now noted that the doubt that al-Bihārī had attributed to himself, and about which he had claimed that it is absolutely unsolvable, is precisely that to which the ‘Allāma had himself hinted [*ishāra*] in his *Kalām-i balāghat nizām*. And he had [hinted at it] along with its response [—*fa-l-‘udhr al-‘udhr*]. So you [the objector] should concede defeat.”<sup>32</sup> The identities of the actors are diluted within the persona of each latest agentive author.

In addition to uncovering the unusual framework of the commentarial texts, the evidence presented above intimates that the pulse of the debate was still beating in each of its oral or written transmigrations. As mentioned above, the relevant parts of the commentary of al-Khayrābādī on the base of al-Harawī’s commentary had textualized a disagreement with ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Lakhnawī; this confrontation, itself a fulfillment of earlier developments, was reignited, rehearsed, and reformed by their respective students in the oral debate of Rampur; this moment then led to another set of textualizations of the oral in the form of reports; and these, in turn, led to commentaries, such as those of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. In each case, the earlier text looked forward, as a prompt, to the next layer and called out to be realized by it. The master’s voice—oral or textual—reverberated through the future student, the speaker/writer of his commentary. It is in this sense that

the commentator never quite read the base text of his master as an ordinary recipient but spoke/wrote that very text as the master himself. Hence, in each case, he occupied a liminal space—that of the student and the master—in relation to the historical past and the projected future.

The vibrancy of the commentarial cycles was also sustained by the thrust and parry hidden under the contracted form of each layer, a point that is made explicit by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: “The ‘Allāma . . . has already contravened [*naqḍ*] their aforementioned proof by means of the rules of dialectics [*uṣūl-i munāzara*].”<sup>33</sup> These rules of dialectics were also at play in the oral debate at Rampur, where the nawwāb assumed the role of the arbiter (*hākīm*), appointed the questioner (*sā’il*) and respondent (*muǰīb*) in each cycle, and eventually forced the concession (*ilzām*) on one side. In the “Ifāḍa,” ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, as al-Khayrābādī, became the *nāqīḍ*, wrestling with several of the cumulative layers before and after the Rampur Debate; and he similarly forced his opponent to succumb (*ifhām*).<sup>34</sup> And so this form of play continued in future commentaries.

These texts were thus motive objects—*substitutes* for the strategically reticent master—that guided future *writing*. In compressing historical voices and in appropriating them as their own, they deliberately prompted future debate. In this manner, each latest incarnation of the textual organism thrived to the extent that it succeeded in regenerating itself through a voice both of its own and of another. When this process of writing ceased, the text became sterile. It was thus the paradox of the genre that textual repetition—so maligned by past scholarship as a symptom of scholarly decline—was in fact at the root of intellectual development and innovation.

Various elements of the “Ifāḍa” bring this cumulative dialogic tradition into sharp relief; and its arguments also uncover an important aspect of the meaning of verification (*taḥqīq*). For example, in turning to refute the aforementioned criticism that distinction in the technical sense (*al-tabāyun al-iṣṭilāḥī*) is more specific than difference (*taghāyur*), such that the analogy between a simulacrum and an aspect fails, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz writes:

Observers! Bihārī believes that the distinction that exists between the simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum is a distinction in the technical sense of the term. And then he presents it as more specific than the essential difference that [exists] between an aspect and that of which it is an aspect. It is not clear to me what he intends by the technical sense of distinction; nor do [I understand] why he declares this distinction to be more specific than essential difference . . . The real story is that, since even in the most basic books of the rationalist disciplines the expression “distinction” is used in relation to a simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum and [the expression] “difference” [is used] in relation to an aspect and that of which it is an aspect . . . well, his error may be attributed entirely to these expressions. It is these surface utterances that are the source of his objection . . . and it is on their basis that he presented his doubt against the ‘Allāma—namely, that the analogy between

[the two aforementioned pairs] fails . . . Well, what if this word “distinction,” which is the source of the error and of the objection, were to be dropped and, in its place, [the expression] “difference” were to be posited? . . . Now the problem is: how can *I* make simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum “different” in the same way as an aspect and that of which it is an aspect? For it is indeed very easy for me to present the statements of many great scholars as my proof texts [*sanad*]. Yet perhaps Bihārī has not heard them, especially [the statements] of the eminent Khayrābādī scholars. For as far as he is concerned, they are his opponents. However, perhaps ‘Allāma Dawānī is not a Khayrābādī? If his statement is presented as a proof text and he conveys that the simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum are different [*mutaghāyir*], then perhaps it would be suitable [for the opponent] to concede [*taslīm*].<sup>35</sup>

Earlier, we witnessed al-Bihārī presenting his critique of al-Khayrābādī as an independent verification of the issue, declaring his doubt to be unresolvable. In that case, we observed ‘Abd al-‘Azīz pointing out that the doubt had already been anticipated and that al-Khayrābādī had supplied a response in the expression *fa-l-‘udhr al-‘udhr*. The cryptic expression called to the future commentator to take up the challenge against the future critic. Thus, al-Bihārī’s verification was not independent in the strictest sense, as it unfolded a challenge already foretold by his opponent. The challenge was subsumed in the transmitted text.

In the passage above, a similar development is noticeable: the ground for al-Bihārī’s verification is a commonplace expression found in a number of books of the rationalist disciplines. Thus, a case of independent verification is generated by accepting, in the first instance, certain transmitted claims about distinction and difference. Now, this would not be an unusual manner of proceeding, as independent proofs may certainly be erected on an established consensus. Yet the matter here requires further consideration. In his response, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz does not trouble himself with undoing the textually based starting point of his opponent by offering an independent counterproof. On the contrary, he cites proof texts in order to show that the grounds are faulty. Indeed, one should bear in mind that these citations do not offer arguments for the validity of the rebuttal; they are simply claims made by past authorities. And perhaps what is most striking is the expectation that the proof texts would not be accepted by al-Bihārī if they issued from an opposing faction. Put differently, the independent verification (*taḥqīq*) of al-Bihārī, like the defense against it, is fully grounded in transmitted texts (*naqlī*) that require factionalist considerations. This is a representative case of the paradoxical imitation (*taqlīd*) of one’s masters within the ambit of an exercise in verification (*taḥqīq*). As we will see in the next chapter, commentarial networks facilitated this mode of scholarship.

Next, in order to press his point further, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, in the ensuing passages, offers other proof texts (*sanad*), making sure, in each case, that they were not produced by scholars who belonged to the opposing camp. Thus, he quotes Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Ḍashtakī and ultimately, al-Bihārī’s own teacher al-Lakhnawī, using the

following words: “Who knows? Perhaps even great scholars like [al-Dawānī and al-Dashtakī] made a mistake. Yet what would you say if al-Bihārī’s own teacher confirms this position of ours? . . . Perhaps then he would concede . . . and the analogy [that he declared sterile] would be productive.”<sup>36</sup> Following this, a number of quotations are offered.

Let us return to the proof text from al-Dawānī that was extracted from his first gloss on al-Qūshjī’s commentary on Ṭūsī’s *Tajrīd*. (As in other proof texts, so here the aim is to collapse distinction and difference into one notion.)

His statement that this [thing] that subsists in the mind, which is expressed as a psychological state [*kayfiyya nafsāniyya*—if it were different [*mughāyir*] from that which is known, as the apparent sense of his discourse indicates—well, this [reduces] exactly to the doctrine of the simulacrum and the image.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, Dawānī recognizes no category that separates what is in the mind and what is known other than that of difference (*taghāyur*). ‘Abd al-‘Azīz now points out that, despite his intense opposition to al-Dawānī regarding precisely the same issue, in his gloss, al-Dashtakī did not take recourse to the claim that distinction and difference are two notions. Given this historical fact, al-Bihārī’s verification fails. He writes,

Observe [Dawānī’s] contemporary, Ṣadr-i Shīrāzī, who, despite his intense opposition and rebuttal of this statement . . . in his new gloss . . . he did not deploy [this distinction]. Otherwise, the easy response would have been that the simulacrum and that of which it is a simulacrum are distinct, but not different . . . In other words, this objection on the part of Ṣadr would have been onerous to the discourse of ‘Allāma Dawānī . . . For here as well it is the same story of distinction and difference . . . Alas, this idea that befell Bihārī could not have befallen the contemporary Ṣadr. For in his view, essential distinction and difference are one and the same thing.<sup>38</sup>

The dispute was thus already part of a set of earlier texts that were familiar to Indian scholars. Had the criticism of al-Bihārī been valid, so the argument goes, some version of it would have occurred at the suitable locus in the earlier tradition. Since there is no such proof text (*sanad*), the verification of the latter author, which must build on an established foundation of the transmitted textual base, cannot lift off the ground. Thus, we again have ambivalence in the notion of *tahqīq*.

Next, in turning to the proof text of al-Bihārī’s teacher, the author of the “Ifāḍa” exposes an interesting logic behind his choice of the Dawānī-Dashtakī commentarial cycles on the *Tajrīd*. He writes,

Mawlānā al-Lakhnawī . . . writes the following in his *Miṣbāḥ* . . . “We say regarding his statement that this thing that subsists in the mind is different [*mughāyir*] from that which is known that it does *not* reduce to the doctrine of the simulacrum and the image, as Dawānī falsely imagined. For the simulacrum and the image are different [*mughāyir*] from that which is known with respect to their quiddities.”<sup>39</sup>

The *Miṣbāḥ* was a gloss by al-Lakhnawī on Ghulām Yaḥyā's *Liwā' al-hudā*. This latter work was itself a gloss on al-Harawī's commentary on al-Taḥṭānī's *Risāla fī t-taṣawwur wa-t-taṣdīq*. In other words, the proximate proof text was a commentary of one order lower than that of al-Bihārī and al-Khayrābādī on the same genealogical text. And this commentary, in turn, had taken up the task of engaging the same quotation from the Dawānī-Dashtakī commentarial cycles as 'Abd al-'Azīz had invoked as his proof text (*sanad*) against al-Bihārī. Here, then, we have a typical moment that illustrates the syncretic disciplinarity—the *Tajrīd* was not a text on logic—and the synchrony of the commentarial tradition: a commentary of a lower order impacts those of an earlier one even as its commentarial task focuses on earlier commentaries on a text of a different discipline. It is within the logic of such textual constraints that the process of verification was valid.

'Abd al-'Azīz's chronologically proximate proof text both betrays his misunderstanding of its substance and further confirms the idea of the commentary as the fulfillment of textual potentialities. In his work, al-Lakhnawī is arguing against al-Dawānī that the claim of difference between the mental object and the object of knowledge does not necessarily reduce to an adoption of the doctrine of the simulacrum and the image. For in the latter case, the difference between them and the object of knowledge is with respect to quiddity. In other words, the latter difference has a further restriction, making it more specific than the former. This interpretive step appears to be precisely what led al-Bihārī to posit that essential distinction (*tabāyun dhātī*) is something other than difference (*taḡhāyur*) and that, given this, the analogy that al-Khayrābādī had set up—one that is sharply reminiscent of al-Dawānī—had failed. The failure of this analogy was of course only implicit in the statement of al-Lakhnawī; it was articulated in its fullest form by his student, al-Bihārī. Yet here again, this rehearsal and actualization of the hints in the textual base is precisely what is referred to as *taḥqīq*. Given that these texts were widely available, the author surely did not imagine that he would escape charges of intellectual theft in his claims of verification. No such accusations were leveled against him; rather, verification appears to be the author's ability to draw out and actualize the textual base *in potentia*. By the same token, the verification efforts were considered to be futile by his opponent precisely because, as the latter claimed, his textual acumen and range were limited.

## CONCLUSIONS

Let me highlight the salient features of the foregoing analysis. The story of the Rampur Debate begins with the ambition of a rising scholar, 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bihārī, to cultivate his stature. In this effort, he had raised objections against the commentary of a major figure of the previous generation, using his own

commentary on a much earlier text as the locus of the exercise. The targeted scholar, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrābādī, was a scholarly rival of al-Bihārī’s teacher, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Lakhnawī. Thus, from the offset, the personal agency of the author was inexorably implicated in factionalist scholarship, with two layers of commentarial space serving as the medium of dispute.

After some iterations—oral and written—the issue was presented in a live session in the deeply partisan court of the nawwāb of Rampur. This oral debate was held between al-Bihārī and Barakāt Aḥmad, who was a student of the commentarial target. Following the debate, a written corpus was produced at a quick pace, excavating its dialectical commentarial roots. It indicates that, in any moment of commentarial *writing*, the most recent author circumscribed the lemma of the hypotext—the *matn* or the *sharḥ*—for his own professional and scholarly ends. As such, each new author retained his agency in relation to the past. This agency was liminal in that, on the one hand, it was authorized and compelled to be effected by the authority and sanction of the dialectical space of the hypotext and in that, on the other hand, it called to its own future hypertext to fulfill it. In other words, this agency did not militate against the past or the future—it subsumed the former as the germ of its actuality, and it prompted the latter to speak for it. The cumulative past was thus fulfilled in each iteration.

This notion of fulfilling the promise of the past author, by dint of his authority, is a central theoretical claim of this book. Whether the hypotext is the oral debate or the commentary or the handbook, the actualization of the incrementally billowing lemmatic space was the defining feature of the commentarial tradition. The hypotext in each instance was both a hypertext in relation to its base and a call to its own future actualization. It is in this fashion that the notions of authority and authorship were invested in each agent commentator. The commentary, then, is most suitably regarded as a *writerly* process motivated by the hypotext *in potentia*. Such a hypotext was tantamount to the *living* master, the guide who issued gestures and prompts to the student, the hypertext, in order to lead him to the past dialogic space and to sustain its voices by means of his own agency. It is in this manner that each scholar in this dialectical space was both a master and a student.

The agency of any author within this system of writerly culture was therefore complete in both temporal directions: he both actualized the past and prompted his own actualization in his future hypertextual incarnation. As an object of readership, the commentary was merely exegetical deadweight. And this is precisely where the paradox of dynamism resided. As we saw above, within the ambit of the commentarial tradition, independent verification (*taḥqīq*) was also grounded in past textual authority and, although its exercise legitimized claims to innovation, it too appears to have been the creative actualization of past potentialities. It is in this manner, then, that the voice of each recent authorial agent was both his

own and the tradition's; and it is for these reasons that the relation among such texts was not properly intertextual, for neither was the author dead nor was there a clear-cut circumscription of textual domains—or one of influence—there being neither parricide nor filicide. The genre of commentary was unified in the implicit and explicit dialectic that recognized the dual gesturing and actualizing agency of each historically cumulative authorial voice.<sup>40</sup>