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Building a new 'Paradise': Anjumans and Urdu Literary Culture in Late Nineteenth Century India

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ABSTRACT:

After the Great Revolt of 1857 and the destruction of Delhi, Lahore emerged as a center for an Urdu cosmopolitan print and literary culture in north India by the 1880s with the publication and circulation of many reformist texts that influenced Muslim identity well into the twentieth century. These early developments centered around the growth of the Anjumane Punjab as a reform and literary organization that drew from the early nineteenth century Delhi Urdu milieu in order to promote literary and educational systems to reflect a new colonial cultural world. Led by the Orientalist scholar and educator G.W. Leitner, the Urdu poet Muhammad Hussain Azad became the intellectual basis of the organization, heading efforts to create Lahore as a new 'Paradise' to further promote an Urdu literary culture and participating in associated debates about social and cultural reform. The Anjumane Punjab also helped to foster the growth of later Anjumans in the region that were vital to twentieth century Muslim nationalist movements. This paper will analyze Azad, Leitner, and their efforts in Lahore, arguing that these developments stimulated the articulation of new forms of Muslim identity in India.