

## Historical Representation and Religious Intent in Abdul Haleem Sharar's Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat

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### ABSTRACT

This article revisits *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (The History of Judaism), a historical work written in Urdu by Abdul Haleem Sharar in the late 19th century. Sharar uses the history of the Jewish people to reflect on the condition of Indian Muslims during British colonial rule. At that time, Muslims in India were experiencing political decline, social instability, and religious confusion. Sharar selected to write about the history of Jews, as according to him the present condition of Muslim living in sub-continent are going through the same condition the Jews have been going through since long, and there are great lessons for the local Muslim community in the history of Jews. Various scholars have discussed Abdul Haleem Sharar's other books. Barbara Metcalf, Christian Troll, and Francis Robinson have done research on the condition of Muslim thoughts of the subcontinent in the 19th century; however, Sharar's book remains still unstudied. The book focuses on important events in Jewish history, such as the Maccabean revolt, the brief return of independence, and the fall of Jerusalem under Roman rule. Sharar does not present these events only as historical facts, but rather he uses them to show how disunity, moral weakness, and poor leadership can lead to the downfall of a powerful community. Through this indirect method, he encourages Muslims to learn from Jewish history and to improve their condition through unity, being morally strong, and faithful to their religious values. This article discusses the sources he has used, including Islamic, Western, and historical writings, and examines his writing style and purpose. The article also places *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* within the wider intellectual and religious reform movements among Indian Muslims in the 19th century. Sharar's main goal was not to study Judaism in a spiritual sense, but to use it to educate Muslims about their weaknesses and responsibilities<sup>1</sup>In this way, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* works on two levels. It gives readers a clear account of Jewish history and serves as a mirror for Muslims to think about their past and future. Sharar's book is a historical text and a call for reflection and reform. It shows how history can guide a community during times of crisis and change.

**Keywords:** Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*, Urdu literature, Muslim Reformism, Colonial Critique, Jewish History.

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1 Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 33.

## Introduction:

Abdul Haleem Sharar (1860–1926) was an influential figure in Urdu prose, a historian, and intellectual during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period when Indian Muslims were facing major political, religious, and cultural challenges under British colonial rule. The fall of the Mughal Empire, the failure of the 1857 revolt, and the rise of British power in the Indian subcontinent led to a deep sense of loss among Muslims, who were once a ruling class and now found themselves marginalized<sup>1</sup>. In response to this situation, Muslim thinkers, writers, and reformers began to search for ways to guide their community toward revival and resilience, awaken a deeper sense of identity and communal responsibility<sup>2</sup>. Among his many works, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (The History of Judaism) stands out as a unique example of how he used the history of another religious community, the Jews, not just to inform, but to reflect upon the condition of Muslims in India. This book is structured as follow: the course of Jewish history, tracing their development, struggles, and eventual decline, covering their rise, struggles, and fall, but it is written with the clear aim of drawing lessons that would be meaningful to Muslims living under colonial rule<sup>3</sup>. Sharar’s choice to write about the Jews was not coincidental. He saw strong similarities between the Jewish experience in ancient times and the Muslim condition in his era. Both communities had once exercised religious and political authority, faced internal divisions and external threats, and both suffered from periods of moral and spiritual decline. By highlighting events such as the Maccabean revolt<sup>4</sup>. The restoration of Jewish independence and the final collapse under Roman rule, Sharar indirectly comments on the causes of Muslim decline, particularly disunity, weak leadership, and loss of religious values. He doesn’t directly criticize his fellow Muslims; rather, he uses the Jewish story as a mirror, encouraging readers to reflect, compare, and learn. His tone remains respectful and thoughtful, allowing his message to reach a broad audience without confrontation. This article studies how Sharar weaves together history and religious reflection and explores how his work gets fit within the broader current of Muslim reform in 19th-century India. This article argues that Sharar’s work is not simply a history of another religion, but a carefully crafted moral guide meant to uplift and educate a struggling Muslim community during a time of great uncertainty.

## Literature Review:

Abdul Haleem Sharar (1860–1926) is best known for writing historical novels and essays in Urdu that focus on Islamic values and identity. Many writers, like Saleem Akhtar<sup>5</sup> (b. 1930) and Rasheed Ahmad Siddiqui<sup>6</sup> (1894–1977), have discussed his style and his use of history to guide the Muslim community. Most of the work written about Sharar has focused on his writings related to Islamic themes. *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*, which tells the history of the Jewish people, has not received the same level of attention. Very few people have explored how he had used the Jewish history not just for the purpose of information, but to quietly reflect on

1 Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), P: 1–50.

2 Yusuf Ansari, “The Role of Urdu Historiography in the Muslim Renaissance of South Asia,” *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol: 30, Issue: 3 (2015), P: 345–367.

3 Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (Lahore: Al-Aban Book Corner, 2005), P: 3–15.

4 The Maccabean Revolt was a Jewish uprising against Seleucid oppression and enforced Hellenization.

5 Saleem Akhtar (b. 1930) is known for his critical works on Urdu literature and literary theory. One of his notable contributions is *Urdu Adab ki Mukhtasir Tareekh*, which offers insights into literary trends and movements in Urdu literature.

6 Rasheed Ahmad Siddiqui (1894–1977), a celebrated Urdu essayist and satirist, is best known for his witty and reflective prose. His major works include *Ashufta Bayani Meri* and *Ghalib Shanaasi*, through which he contributed significantly to Urdu literary criticism and humor.

the situation of Muslims living under British rule as well.

Writers such as Francis Robinson<sup>1</sup> (b. 1944) and Ayesha Jalal<sup>2</sup> (b. 1956) have demonstrated how Muslim thinkers in 19th-century India turned to history and literature to respond to their loss of political power. They have discussed that how individuals like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) and Shibli Nomani (1857–1914) encouraged Muslims to learn, reflect, and improve themselves. Sharar also belonged to this era but took a different approach. Instead of solely focusing on Islamic figures, he examined the histories of other religious communities as well. In *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*, he told the story of the Jews with care and emotion, not to compare religions, but to illustrate how a strong community can decline due to disunity, poor leadership, and moral weakness. This method of indirect teaching has been analysed by writers like Christian Troll (b. 1937) and Barbara Metcalf (b. 1941), who have written about how some Muslim authors used the stories of other religions to advise their communities without offending.

### **The Background of Sharar and His Times:**

Abdul Haleem Sharar was born in 1860 in Lucknow, a city known for its rich cultural, religious, and literary traditions. His life spanned a time of deep change in the Indian subcontinent, especially for Muslims. British colonial power became firmly established after the fall of the Mughal Empire and the suppression of the 1857 revolt. The Muslim community, which had once played a leading role in political and cultural life, now found itself politically sidelined, economically weakened, and socially divided. Many Muslims were confused about how to respond to the growing influence of British rule, Western education, and new cultural trends. In this uncertain time, many Muslim reformers, such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founders of Nadwatul Ulama, and others, emerged to guide the community. Although not a religious scholar in the traditional sense, Abdul Haleem Sharar became a leading literary voice who used writing as a means of social and moral reform. He believed that the decline of the Muslim world could be reversed through education, reflection on history, and a return to ethical and religious principles<sup>3</sup>.

Sharar was deeply influenced by the intellectual and reformist environment of 19th-century North India. He supported the goals of Nadwatul Ulama, an institution that aimed to preserve Islamic learning while also encouraging Muslims to engage with modern knowledge and the wider world. Unlike some scholars who focused only on Islamic texts, Sharar turned his attention to the histories of other religious communities, including Jews and Christians. His purpose was not to promote interfaith dialogue in the modern sense, nor to produce objective histories for academic study. Instead, he used these religious histories, especially the struggles and failures of other once-powerful communities, as a way to reflect on the Muslim experience. His writing, especially in *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*, reveals his concern with the moral and political decline of Muslims under colonial rule. Rather than criticizing his community

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1 Francis Robinson (b. 1944) is a prominent historian of South Asia and Islam, known for his work *The Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, which explores Muslim religious leadership, reform, and identity under colonial rule.

2 Ayesha Jalal (b. 1956), a leading historian of South Asian politics, is best known for *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, where she critically examines Muslim identity, nationalism, and colonial politics in British India.

3 Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), P: 34–40; Francis Robinson, *The Ulama of Firangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), P: 58–62.

directly, Sharar chose to write about the Jews of ancient times. In doing so, he created a narrative that not only informed his readers about the history of another religious group but also invited them to compare themselves with the situation faced by that religious group. The fall of the Jewish state, caused by internal divisions, poor leadership, and moral decay, becomes a quiet warning to Muslims facing similar conditions. This indirect style allowed Sharar to deliver his message with care.<sup>1</sup>

### **Sharar's Representation of Jewish History:**

In *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*, Abdul Haleem Sharar presented a detailed yet selective account of Jewish history, structured to highlight themes of moral strength, political struggle, and eventual decline. The book's structure follows a chronological order, beginning with the early development of the Jewish community, its prophetic tradition, the rise of kingdoms under Saul, David, and Solomon, and the later struggles against foreign powers. However, Sharar places particular importance on the Maccabean revolt, a Jewish resistance movement against Greek (Seleucid) control. He portrays this event not only as a military victory but as a moral and spiritual revival, emphasizing how unity and religious dedication allowed the Jewish people to reclaim their independence and restore their temple. This moment in Jewish history is presented with admiration and symbolic significance. For Sharar, the Maccabean revolt represents the type of active, faith-based leadership that Muslims in India needed—a leadership that could inspire courage, unity, and a return to Islamic principles in the face of foreign domination. After narrating the rise of Jewish independence under the Maccabees, Sharar gradually shifts to the period of decline. He describes in detail the weakening of Jewish society through internal conflicts, the loss of spiritual focus, and the increasing influence of external powers. He discusses the role of foreign-aligned Jewish leaders who compromised their people's interests, contributing to their downfall. The most striking aspect of this decline is Sharar's account of the Roman invasion, which culminated in the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and marked the final collapse of Jewish political autonomy. This event is depicted not just as a historical tragedy, but as the consequence of deep-seated flaws within the Jewish community, especially disunity, betrayal, and abandonment of religious values.

What stands out in Sharar's telling is his tone of moral reflection. He doesn't simply report events; he ponders their causes and implications. He avoids sensationalism and presents Jewish history as a narrative filled with lessons. For instance, he rarely focuses on theological disputes between Jews and Muslims. Instead, his concern lies in highlighting how the Jewish people thrived when united in faith and purpose and how they fell when they lost their moral compass and political coherence. The aim of this method is clear: to lead Muslim readers toward self-awareness, using the past of another community to illuminate their present condition. It's also noteworthy that Sharar's selection of episodes from Jewish history is deliberate and strategic. He gives less attention to periods of Jewish diaspora or theological developments and more to episodes of leadership, resistance, and collapse. By doing so, Sharar shapes the narrative not for historical curiosity, but for moral instruction. His audience is not the academic scholar but the average Urdu-speaking Muslim reader, someone who, in Sharar's view, needs guidance, motivation, and a renewed sense of religious and political identity. Moreover, Sharar's portrayal of Jewish history is not hostile. He doesn't criticize Jews for their beliefs, nor does he engage in religious polemic. Rather, he treats Jewish history

1 Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (Lahore: Al-Aban Book Corner, 2005), P: 10–25; Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), P: 13–16.

with empathy and seriousness. He expresses admiration for their prophets, respect for their early moral vision, and sorrow over their decline. This respectful tone enables Sharar to use Jewish history as a model for both caution and inspiration. It gives his narrative a sense of fairness and balance, even as he uses it to deliver indirect criticism of the Muslim community's present weaknesses.

### **Religious Messaging and Purpose:**

While *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* appears, on the surface, to be a historical account of the Jewish people, it becomes clear upon closer examination that Abdul Haleem Sharar's deeper intent lies in delivering a religious and moral message to his fellow Muslims<sup>1</sup>. Sharar does not aim to give an objective or purely academic account of Judaism; instead, he uses the history of the Jews to indirectly reflect on the religious, moral, and political decline of Muslims living under British rule in India<sup>2</sup>. In doing so, Sharar positions himself not merely as a historian but as a reform-minded thinker who seeks to awaken the conscience of his readers through the reflective power of the past<sup>3</sup>. His portrayal of Jewish history serves as a narrative device that carries a larger message of warning, guidance, and hope for a struggling Muslim community. One of the most significant aspects of Sharar's religious messaging is his emphasis on unity as a spiritual duty. Throughout his narrative, Sharar shows that the Jewish people succeeded when they were united under faith-guided leadership and suffered when they became divided<sup>4</sup>. In recounting the Maccabean revolt, for instance, he highlights not only the military and political dimensions of the resistance but also the deep religious motivation that inspired the revolt<sup>5</sup>. The Maccabees, in his telling, were not only national heroes but also defenders of faith and tradition. Sharar uses this event to illustrate the point that when a religious community stands together with moral purpose and sincere belief, it can overcome foreign oppression. Conversely, the Jewish community's later decline, especially under Roman rule, is attributed to internal divisions, competing interests, and spiritual decline<sup>6</sup>. For Sharar, this is not just a lesson in political failure but a moral and religious warning. He subtly suggests that Muslims in India, suffering from similar disunity and spiritual confusion, are on a similar path and must correct their course.

Sharar also emphasizes the importance of morally upright and visionary leadership, a theme that runs consistently throughout *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*. He notes that the Jewish people prospered under the wise leadership of figures like Moses and David, and even under the spiritually driven Maccabees. However, as leadership passed into the hands of self-serving or foreign-aligned rulers, the Jewish people became vulnerable to internal corruption and external domination<sup>7</sup>. This theme clearly resonates with Sharar's view of the Muslim elite in colonial India, many of whom he believed had compromised their values or aligned too closely with British authorities for personal gain<sup>8</sup>. Without naming contemporary figures, Sharar conveys his dissatisfaction with Muslim leadership by showing how weak or misguided leaders can cause lasting damage to the moral and political fabric of a religious community. Another core aspect of Sharar's religious intent is his reliance on the idea of

1 Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*, (Al-Aban Book Corner, Lahore), P: 7.

2 Ibid, P: 9–11.

3 Ibid, P: 15.

4 Ibid, P: 35.

5 Ibid, P: 40–42.

6 Ibid, P: 50.

7 Ibid, P: 53–55.

8 Ibid, P: 56.

divine justice. In his narrative, success is not merely a result of political strategy or military strength; it is shown as a consequence of moral righteousness and divine approval<sup>1</sup>. When the Jewish people adhered to their faith, honoured their prophets, and lived by religious principles, they enjoyed periods of prosperity and independence. When they strayed from these values, ignored their spiritual duties, or allowed worldly desires to overcome their religious obligations, they lost God's favour and fell into disgrace. This theological framework mirrors Islamic beliefs about the rise and fall of nations based on their relationship with God's guidance. Sharar, therefore, weaves into his historical narrative an underlying spiritual worldview in which history is not random but morally ordered<sup>2</sup>. He uses this framework to urge Muslims to reflect on their current state, not just in political or social terms, but in deeply religious terms as well.

Importantly, Sharar delivers these messages with subtlety and care, avoiding direct criticism or confrontation. He does not openly condemn Muslims of his time, nor does he use aggressive rhetoric. Instead, he builds a thoughtful, indirect argument through the example of another community's past. This technique allows his message to resonate more widely, appealing to readers' sense of dignity and introspection rather than provoking defensiveness. His tone remains respectful throughout, and he avoids turning Jewish history into a point of religious polemic<sup>3</sup>. Rather, he uses it as a reflective surface, a mirror through which Muslims can see their situation more clearly. This indirect approach is especially important in the colonial context, where open criticism of Muslim leaders or policies could be controversial or even risky. Sharar's method of using analogy and historical reflection made his moral messages safer and more palatable while still being effective. It is also significant that Sharar avoids engaging in theological debates or attempting to evaluate the truth claims of Judaism from an Islamic point of view. His focus is entirely on the moral and historical dimensions of Jewish experience<sup>4</sup>. This deliberate choice reflects his pedagogical aim: to educate and reform, not to judge. Sharar's use of Jewish history is not meant to expose error or condemn another faith but to reveal the universal patterns of religious rise and decline, especially as they apply to politically weakened communities. In this sense, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* is part of a broader trend within Muslim reformist literature that seeks to recover dignity through self-examination, internal reform, and moral renewal, rather than confrontation with others.

## Sharar's Sources, Style, and Historical Strategy:

### 1. Purposeful Use of Sources:

Abdul Haleem Sharar's *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* is more than just a list of historical events; it is a carefully written account that takes meaning and strength from well-selected sources. Sharar brings together Islamic traditions, elements of Western historical writing, and some knowledge of Jewish history to build a multi-layered account that remains accessible and relevant to his primary audience, Muslim readers in colonial India<sup>5</sup>. The blending of these different source traditions is neither casual nor secondary; it is central to how Sharar gives weight and resonance to his narrative. His aim is not to produce an academically detached history, but rather a meaningful, instructive account that connects deeply with the moral, spiritual, and political concerns of his community.

1 Ibid, P: 60.

2 Ibid, P: 61–63.

3 Ibid, P: 66.

4 Ibid, P: 68–69.

5 Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (Lahore: Al-Aban Book Corner, n.d.), P: 5–6.

At the core of his narrative is the use of Islamic sources, especially stories and references from the Qur'an and Hadith<sup>1</sup>. Prophets who are revered in both Islamic and Jewish traditions, such as Musa (Moses), Dawood (David), and Sulaiman (Solomon), feature prominently in his account<sup>2</sup>. This shared prophetic tradition allows Sharar to present Jewish history in a way that is immediately familiar and spiritually relevant to Muslim readers. It also enables him to portray the Jewish community not as stranger, but as part of a broader Abrahamic history<sup>3</sup> that Islam inherits and reinterprets. In addition to Islamic sources, Sharar shows an awareness of Western historical literature. While he does not cite European authors in the formal academic fashion, his detailed accounts of the Maccabean revolt, Greek imperialism, and Roman conquest suggest that he had access to translated or adapted versions of Western historical texts<sup>4</sup>. These were likely available in Urdu or English during his time. However, what is notable is how Sharar filters these materials through his worldview. He does not adopt the often secular or Eurocentric tone found in colonial historical writing. Rather than reinforcing colonial narratives of progress or decline, Sharar reshapes the content to support his larger moral and religious themes<sup>5</sup>. He uses Western knowledge to reinforce, not replace, his Islamic framework, showing that a Muslim intellectual could engage with modern sources without surrendering his interpretive independence. When it comes to Jewish sources, Sharar's use is limited, yet his tone remains respectful<sup>6</sup>. This purposeful and balanced use of sources reflects a broader goal in Sharar's writing: to educate his readers not just with facts, but with insight<sup>7</sup>. He believes that history must speak to the soul, not just the intellect. By drawing from Islamic scripture, engaging with modern history, and respecting other religious traditions, Sharar models a form of Muslim scholarship that is open, ethical, and reform minded. He is not content with merely telling stories; he wants those stories to become tools for awakening, encouraging his readers to reflect on their history, their current condition, and their future responsibilities. In this way, Sharar's historical method becomes a form of moral authorship<sup>8</sup>.

## **2. Narrative Style and Literary Choices:**

Sharar does not follow the tone of detached objectivity that defines modern Western historiography. Instead, his prose is deeply influenced by classical Urdu literature and the rhetorical traditions of Islamic moral storytelling. His narrative is filled with pathos, religious symbolism, and an almost sermonic rhythm, reminiscent of the Khilāfat (sermon) tradition common in Muslim devotional culture. This literary elegance allows Sharar to build an emotional connection with his audience, making the text more than a historical account; it becomes a moral experience<sup>9</sup>. His choice of language is deliberate. Sharar uses refined, elevated Urdu that combines poetic flair with intellectual weight. At the same time, his vocabulary remains accessible to a broad readership. His narrative is structured in a way that

1 Ibid, P: 8–10.

2 Ibn Kathir, *Stories of the Prophets*, trans. Rashad Ahmad Azami (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003), P: 137–145.

3 Qur'an 2:136

4 H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History* (London: Newnes, 1920), P: 145–150; likely adapted in Urdu translation.

5 Ibid.; see also Henry Hart Milman, *The History of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853), P: 241–243.

6 Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*, P: 16.

7 Ibid., 24.

8 Ibid., 26.

9 Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (Lucknow: Maktaba 'Nawal Kishore, n.d.), P: 5–8, especially in the introductory chapters where the tone of moral reflection is established and compared to the Islamic *khutbah* tradition.

resembles a parable more than a conventional chronicle: he introduces characters, builds tension through conflict, and draws clear moral outcomes from the resolution of events. The figures he writes about, from Jewish prophets to rebellious leaders to misguided rulers, are given emotional and ethical depth. By giving them voices and motivations, he allows the reader to witness the inner moral dynamics of the historical moment, rather than just observe the facts from a distance<sup>1</sup>.

This storytelling approach also helps Sharar balance two goals: teaching moral lessons and avoiding confrontation. He does not openly criticize Muslims in British India for their weaknesses. Instead, he presents the story of another community, the Jews, who rose through unity and spiritual devotion but declined through internal conflict, loss of faith, and poor leadership. The parallels with the Muslim condition are left unspoken but unmistakable. This indirect method not only reflects Sharar's literary sensitivity but also his political caution. In colonial India, where religious and political commentary could attract suspicion or censorship, this narrative style allowed Sharar to speak boldly without speaking too directly<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, Sharar's tone throughout *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* is not judgmental but contemplative. Even when describing moments of betrayal or collapse, he maintains a tone of sorrow rather than anger. This helps preserve the dignity of the community he writes about, even as he uses their history to convey hard truths. His readers are not meant to feel superior to the Jews or to pity them, but to learn from their experiences. By avoiding mockery or moral superiority, Sharar deepens the emotional sincerity of the text and makes space for honest introspection<sup>3</sup>. This narrative approach also enables Sharar to reach multiple layers of leadership. His writing appeals to the educated Muslim reader familiar with classical texts and reformist ideas, but it also resonates with common Urdu-speaking audiences who might respond more strongly to stories than to abstract arguments. The emotional tone, religious undertones, and accessible language make *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* a work that could circulate in households, classrooms, and religious gatherings alike. It is didactic but never dry, moral but never moralizing.

### 3. Selective and Thematic Historical Method:

Abdul Haleem Sharar's *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* does not aim to offer a complete or academically neutral history of the Jewish people. Instead, his approach is deliberately selective and thematic, guided not by the goal of compiling exhaustive historical details, but by the need to draw out specific moral and religious lessons. Sharar organizes his narrative around key episodes in Jewish history that allow him to highlight certain values, particularly unity, faith, moral leadership, and divine accountability<sup>4</sup>. This method is both pedagogical and strategic: by focusing on morally significant moments rather than on a continuous timeline, Sharar can shape the reader's understanding of history as a purposeful, divinely influenced process<sup>5</sup>. Sharar gives considerable space and emphasis to the Maccabean revolt against Greek rule, portraying it not merely as a political rebellion but as a religious revival<sup>6</sup>. In his telling, the success of the Maccabees was due not only to their courage and leadership but also to their

1 Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (Lucknow: Maktaba 'Nawal Kishore, n.d.), P: 12–13. Sharar's use of elevated yet accessible Urdu is evident in his descriptions of prophets and kings, combining literary beauty with instructional clarity.

2 Ibid., 7. See his depiction of figures like Moses and the Maccabees, where moral failure and heroism are personalized to create emotional resonance.

4 Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (Lucknow: Maktaba 'Nawal Kishore, n.d.), P: 142.

4 Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (Lahore: Al-Aban Book Corner, n.d.), P: 5–6.

5 Ibid, P: 7–8.

6 Ibid, P: 42–46.

strong commitment to their faith and their refusal to compromise with foreign religious and cultural influences. This theme of religious loyalty in the face of external dominance strongly echoes Sharar's hopes for Indian Muslims under British rule<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, he focuses on the destruction of the Second Temple under Roman conquest as a symbol of complete communal collapse, which he attributes to internal divisions, moral decline, and abandonment of religious values<sup>2</sup>. By choosing to emphasize these two poles, moments of spiritual strength followed by eventual decline, Sharar constructs a narrative that is not simply informative but instructive.

His method reflects the classical Islamic approach to history, which often views past events not as neutral sequences of causes and effects but as part of a larger moral and divine pattern. In Islamic historical writing, events are understood as signs (Ayat) pointing to the consequences of obedience or disobedience to divine guidance. Sharar draws from this tradition, albeit with a modern sensibility, selecting historical examples that illustrate how a community's fate is shaped not only by political circumstances but also by its spiritual and ethical condition. This approach transforms history into a medium for religious reflection and ethical education. What makes Sharar's method particularly effective is his ability to avoid distracting the reader with excessive detail. He steers clear of less relevant theological controversies, lengthy dynastic records, and debates over doctrinal matters within Judaism. Instead, he streamlines his narrative, providing just enough background to make each episode understandable and meaningful. This keeps the text accessible while maintaining the reader's focus on the larger moral argument. Even the characters and leaders he chooses to mention, prophets, reformers, traitors, and kings, are presented not just for their historical roles but for what they represent: strength or weakness, piety or corruption, unity or division. These figures function as moral archetypes rather than objects of academic study. Furthermore, Sharar's selective method strengthens the allegorical nature of the book. By choosing episodes that mirror the condition of Indian Muslims, he allows his readers to find themselves in the story of another people. The history of the Jews becomes a mirror in which Muslims can see their situation: once strong and principled, now divided and weakened under foreign rule. This reflective method is more than just a narrative technique; it is part of Sharar's broader strategy of reform through moral awakening. He does not argue or preach directly; rather, he constructs a historical landscape in which the reader is encouraged to draw comparisons and arrive at conclusions independently.

#### **4. Analogy and Indirect Critique:**

One of the most effective and subtle tools explored by Abdul Haleem Sharar in *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* is his consistent use of historical analogy. Rather than confronting the failures of his community directly, a strategy that might have provoked resistance or political trouble, Sharar chooses to narrate the history of the Jewish people in a way that gently mirrors the condition of Muslims in 19th-century colonial India. Through this indirect approach, he can offer criticism, reflection, and instruction without offending his audience or drawing unwanted attention from colonial authorities. It is this method of analogy that lends the book both its moral power and its narrative delicacy<sup>3</sup>.

The analogical strategy allows Sharar to present the rise and fall of Jewish political and

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1 Ibid, P: 48–49.

2 Ibid, P: 58–60.

3 Ibid, P: 35.

spiritual life as a parallel to the trajectory of the Muslim ummah. He emphasizes how the Jewish people initially gained strength through religious faith, moral discipline, and communal unity. These values, when maintained, led to periods of divine favour and political independence. However, once the community became fragmented, morally corrupt, and politically self-serving, their decline became inevitable<sup>1</sup>. These episodes are described with an air of sadness and empathy, but their deeper purpose lies in the subtle comparison they invite. Sharar's Muslim readers are not explicitly mentioned in these sections, but the relevance of these narratives to their historical moment is unmistakable. The unspoken message is clear: if Muslims continue along the path of disunity and spiritual neglect, they too will face the fate that befell the Jews<sup>2</sup>. This indirect form of critique reflects Sharar's awareness of his socio-political environment. In the colonial context, direct criticism of Muslim leaders, religious institutions, or British authority could lead to censorship, backlash, or worse. Therefore, analogy becomes not only a literary device but a protective strategy, allowing him to engage with politically sensitive issues without crossing the boundaries of acceptable discourse<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, this method respects the intelligence of the reader. It does not hand over conclusions but invites reflection, comparison, and internal dialogue. The reader is encouraged to think critically, to see patterns, and to take responsibility for interpreting the lessons that history provides. Its analogies are carefully structured to engage the heart as well as the mind. Through his portrayal of Jewish history, Sharar subtly calls upon Muslims to examine their leadership, communal relations, and religious sincerity<sup>4</sup>. He encourages a return to faith not as nostalgia, but as a foundation for future renewal. The fact that he achieves this without confrontation or polemics speaks to the literary maturity and strategic sensitivity of his method<sup>5</sup>.

### **5. Sharar in the Context of Muslim Reformist Thought:**

Sharar's historical strategy fits into the broader reformist efforts of Muslim thinkers in 19th-century India. Figures like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan used modern history and education to rebuild Muslim confidence and identity<sup>6</sup>. Nadwat ul Ulama worked to reform religious education through a synthesis of Islamic learning and modern subjects<sup>7</sup>. Sharar, through his literary and historical writing, joined these efforts by using religious history, not of Islam, but of another community, to promote introspection, revival, and a sense of shared moral responsibility.<sup>8</sup> His method demonstrates that the study of other religions was not always about comparison or refutation. It could also be a meaningful tool for internal community reform. Through Jewish history, Sharar helped his Muslim readers explore the universal patterns of religious rise and fall and think more deeply about their responsibilities<sup>9</sup>. His writing aligns with a broader intellectual current among Muslim thinkers who sought to

1 Ibid, P: 36.

2 Ibid, P: 36.

3 Ibid, P: 37.

4 Ibid, P: 39.

5 Ibid, P: 40.

6 Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 167–170.

7 Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilvi and His Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), P: 44–46.

8 Abdul Haleem Sharar, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* (Lucknow: Maktaba' Majlisi, n.d.), P: 5.

9 Ibid, P: 34–51, especially chapters 5–8, where he presents the Maccabean revolt and subsequent decline as moral allegories for Muslim readers.

engage with modernity while preserving religious and ethical foundations<sup>1</sup>.

### **Conclusion:**

Abdul Haleem Sharar's *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* is not simply a history of the Jewish people, but a thoughtful and carefully written reflection on the moral and political challenges faced by Indian Muslims under British rule. By focusing on key episodes in Jewish history, moments of strength through unity and faith, followed by decline due to division and moral failure, Sharar offers more than a historical account; he presents a quiet but serious message to his community. His writing avoids direct criticism, using the example of another religious group to encourage Muslims to reflect on their condition with honesty and concern. Sharar's use of Islamic and Western sources, his respectful tone, and his narrative style all serve a larger goal: to help his readers recognize the dangers of disunity, weak leadership, and loss of religious values. In this way, *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat* becomes a work of moral guidance as much as historical writing. It reminds readers that the lessons of the past are not limited to one community, and that history, when used with care, can guide a struggling society toward self-awareness, reform, and renewal.

### **Recommendations:**

Although this article offers a detailed look at *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*, more work can be done to better understand Sharar's unique approach. One useful direction for future research is to compare this book with his other historical writings, especially those about Islamic or Christian history. This would help show whether he has used the same indirect method of teaching moral lessons in those works or not.

Another area worth exploring is the style and language of the original Urdu text. A closer look at how Sharar wrote, his word choices, tone, and use of emotion, can give deeper insight into how he tried to influence his readers without being harsh or direct. This could also help explain how his message was able to reach a wide audience, from scholars to ordinary readers.

It would also be helpful to place this book in the bigger picture of 19th-century Urdu writing. Was Sharar the only one using other religious histories to guide Muslims? Or was this part of a broader trend among writers and reformers? Comparing his work to others like Shibli Nomani or Sir Syed Ahmad Khan may help answer these questions.

Finally, researchers could try to find out how people at the time responded to *Tārīkh-e Yahūdīyat*. Did Muslim readers understand its hidden message? Did schools or reform groups use it? Looking at old newspapers, magazines, or school records could help us see how widely the book was read and what kind of impact did it have on its audience.

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<sup>1</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge, 2000), P: 88–91.

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