In 1885, Siddiq Hasan was deprived of all his posts and titles by the British, thus forcing him into privacy. For a period of more than one year, he had to retire in his own palace, Nur Mahall, completely isolated from his wife and his supporters. Due to this sudden end of his career, in the Indian nationalist views prevalent since 1918 Siddiq Hasan is described as one of the first heroes of the anti-colonial struggle.

This nationalistic paradigm is overshadowed by another perspective about the historical figure of Siddiq Hasan: several Muslim sources describe him as a puritan and a Wahhabi, closely linked to the reformist movement of Muhammad Abul-Wahhab (d. 1762) in today’s Saudi Arabia. Besides these contrasting views, the sources lack an assessment of the ‘real’ Siddiq Hasan. As a consequence, it is necessary to apply changing research methods in order “to avoid common pitfalls of historiography, like projecting modern nationalistic paradigms back into the past.” Consequently, the social network analysis, originally developed by the Manchester school of anthropologists in the 1950s, seems to be a suitable research method. Taken the premise that every individual (ego) is embedded into a network of personal relationships, it is interesting to observe which parts of his/her ego-network a person activates in order to achieve his/her aims. Hence, it may be interesting to show which personal relations were really in use from a social network perspective and which were not – and which connections became crucial only to the eyes of posterity. The following gives an analysis of Siddiq Hasan’s personal networks, trying to avoid the categorization of ‘Wahhabi’ or ‘nationalist hero’, which have determined the characterization of Siddiq Hasan for more than 100 years.

Born into a Sayyid family, strongly connected to the Taragay Muhammadia reformation movement of Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (d. 1832), Siddiq Hasan made the first steps of his personal career as the secretary of the Prime Minister at the court of the second principality of Bhopal. Since 1818 this Central Indian princely state was ruled by strong female rulers, the Begums. Sikander Begum (r. 1844–1886) followed her mother Qudsia Begum (r. 1818–1837) to the throne (mosad) and secured the succession of her daughter, Shah Jahan Begum (r. 1866–1901). Sikander Begum, on the one hand, needed support from the British to protect Bhopal’s territory from the invasions of the Marathas and Pindaris. On the other hand, she wanted to have her reign legitimated by a group of Islamic scholars. Thus, she invited several ulama of reformist background to Bhopal. Among them was Sayyid Jamal ud-Din Dihlawi (d. 1881) who had been, like Siddiq Hasan, the son of the Taragay Muhammadia.

The ‘Wahhabi’ movement

When young Siddiq Hasan approached Bhopal, Jamal ud-Din took him under his wing. Due to the fact that from now on he lived in financially secure conditions, he could continue his personal studies, which he had to interrupt before. In Bhopal he wrote his legal decrees (fatwas) and his answers (ijazats) to the questions that he had been living in Bhopal for several years, namely the brothers Zain al-Abidin (d. 1890) and Husain b. Muhsin al-Hanfawia (1910). Sikander Begum had met the Yemini family in Hudaia during their pilgrimage to Mecca in 1863. She invited Zain al-Abidin to Bhopal, because she was looking for a new qadi al-qudat (chief judge) for her state.

Although Zain al-Abidin did not know Persian or Urdu, nor did he belong to the Hanafi law school prevailing among the Indian Muslims (he was a Shafi’i), he soon became acquainted with the situation in Bhopal. After a short time, he knew all relevant manuals of Hanafi law in India and wrote his legal decrees (fatwas) according to that school. Later, he invited his younger brother Husain to join him in Bhopal. Husain decided to undertake the journey to Bhopal, where the Begum cereally welcomed him. She employed him as a teacher of the local dar al-hadith (house of the teaching of the prophetic traditions). It was around 1856, that Husain taught Hadith to Siddiq Hasan. This close teacher-pupil relation made a deep impression on Siddiq Hasan and caused a significant change in his intellectual orientation. The reason for this change can be seen in his studies of various famous books by the reputed Yemenite scholar and qadi Muhammad b. ‘Ali ash-Shaikhan (d. 1834), who gained fame for his legal theories of rejecting the tajrid, i.e. the strict adherence to one school of law. Shaikhan insisted on the jihad, i.e. to find the proof (al-qadi) and to defend the legal opinion in the Qur’an and sunna. Shaikhan applied the method of jihad in his own fatawa, columnizing his voluminous Hadith in a similar way as Shaikhan’s works, all of them containing heavy criticism on tajrid, spread all over India starting from the late 1850s. The Yemenite brothers in Bhopal as well as Siddiq Hasan were responsible for this ‘Shaukani boom’. Siddiq Hasan, formerly influenced by the teachings of Shaikhan Barelwi, shifted to the Yemenite tradition of Shaikhan and Husain, and appointed Head of the Bhopal State Archives by Sikander Begum. His career gained further impetus when he married the widowed daughter of the Prime Minister and had to leave Bhopal. Later on, in 1859, he was allowed to return to Bhopal and was appointed Head of the Bhopal State Archives by Sikander Begum. His career reached its climax when the widower ruler Shah Jahan Begum made him her Nawwab-consort in 1877. Siddiq Hasan started extensive propagation of the theories of Shaukani (chief judge) for her state.

In Bhopal, Siddiq Hasan became acquainted with the situation in the Islamic community in Medina. It was mainly the existence on jihad, i.e. all acts that caused conflicts among all Indian Muslim groups of that time, e.g. the Deobandis and the movement of Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi. (d. 1921), who were all strict followers of the Hanafiya.

Siddiq Hasan’s enemies in Bhopal’s as well as in other Muslim circles chose the easy way to get rid of him: they denounced him as a ‘Wahhabi’, which was synonymous with ‘anti-British’, ‘fanatic’ and ‘puritan’. At first, the British did not believe these rumours, mainly because the Begums proved to be loyal supporters of the British in several critical situations. Later, the British began to examine Siddiq Hasan’s books critically and discovered some writings in which the theory of jihad was explained at length. When the British further detected that 17 ‘Wahhabi’ scholars from Najd had come to study in Bhopal, they began to think of an interna-