

### **Faruqi on Faruqi, May 2013**

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi was born in 1935. He obtained an M.A. in English from the University of Allahabad in 1955, taught English literature at a couple of provincial colleges before joining the Indian Postal Service in 1958. He served in many senior positions in the Indian Post Office and other departments of the Government of India before retiring as Member, Postal Services Board, Government of India, New Delhi. He'd begun writing at a very early age. He wrote in Urdu, his mother tongue. In the late 1940's Indian literate environment was dominated by English, with the local Indian languages—'Vernaculars' in the Colonialist officialese—competing for space in the country, or at least in the regions where they were spoken by the majority. The idea of writing in English didn't occur to Faruqi—English was something that was done by a very small number of the privileged few, and he believed his English wasn't good enough anyway. His father admired the English of Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, and the cold precision of Jinnah's speeches; but his way of encouraging his young and obviously bright son was to berate him for being congenitally incapable of writing with the grace of a Nehru, or the economy of a Gandhi.

So Urdu it was for Faruqi, all the way. And he never regretted it, not even when Urdu's world shrank perceptibly in 1947 right immediately on India's independence, and continued to shrink, and even subjected to revilement for many decades thereafter. During his career as a civil servant Faruqi devoted very nearly all his spare time, and frequent long nights, to writing. He retired in January 1994 and has been a full time writer since then.

Recognition as a writer came late to Faruqi. This was mainly because he was an 'outsider', and one whose ideas were in marked contrast with and often in opposition to the received critical wisdom of the early 1950's. His driving ambition was to write fiction, and poetry. During the years 1949-51, he did manage to get a short novel serialized in a small time magazine and have a few stories published in even smaller time magazines. None of these have survived, either as manuscripts or printed pages. Faruqi says he's infinitely grateful for the loss, for the writing was full of what he then thought was the 'reality of life' and an uncompromising 'moral' view of the world. No poems from that part of his life survive either, and Faruqi is the happier for that

loss, for the poetry was even more unprepossessing than the fiction.

He did write one story, though, in 1951 which was read by one of his teachers at college and who pronounced it to be so mature and so well put together that 'it seemed to have come from the pen of a master story writer.' Faruqi doesn't recall if that story was published in Urdu. In 1953, when he was reading for his M. A. in the University of Allahabad, he translated it into English and was surprised to see it accepted for the official magazine of that University. Faruqi didn't preserve the Urdu original; the English translation might still be found in the 1953-54 issue of the magazine, should someone be intrepid enough to pore over the old files in the musty, if not entirely mouldy archives of that magazine.

Faruqi describes the years 1945-1955 as his days of 'nonage'. He wrote nothing and read almost nothing but English during his two years (1953-55) at the University of Allahabad. It was only in the middle and late 1950's while he taught English literature to young undergraduates that he found what he thought was his true mettle—literary criticism. Aside from having always been an avid reader of English fiction, modern English poetry and criticism since his early youth, he'd also by then read a good bit of modern Urdu literature. He was disappointed to find that with one or two rare exceptions, Urdu literary criticism left him most dissatisfied. He felt that Urdu criticism was more interested in what seemed to him generalizations, or then, in non-literary matters: the 'social value' of a literary work of art, its 'truth to life', its 'realism'. Above all, very nearly every critic seemed to derive his principles from what he thought was the Western (read English) canons of criticism. This criticism seemed entirely incapable of making coherent distinctions, and dealing with the 'Classical', or premodern genres, especially the Ghazal, which was the most popular art form in Urdu literature and which had been mercilessly maligned for lacking in 'qualities' which its makers and theorists had never intended for it to possess.

Faruqi was keen to establish categories, to fashion critical tools which could at least begin to help him (and his readers too, hopefully) understand how one poet or poem was different from another. Above all, he was keen to establish literary, as against non-literary values, to set up basic principles of literary appreciation, principles that relied less on the 'message' and more on the 'mode' of a literary work of art.

If Faruqi the fiction writer had left no trace, Faruqi the critic and poet failed consistently to arrive. The years 1956-66 for him were years of striving, voracious reading, stubbornly believing that he was 'different' and that he was made 'different'. The Progressive Movement in Urdu literature, after two decades of

glory and power (1936-56) was clearly on the decline, but Faruqi didn't see himself posited against the Progressives—though later evaluations always said so—but rather against the Colonialist legacy in Urdu literature with which the Progressives had much in common, a fact little realized at that time, and not fully appreciated even today. Faruqi was in fact the first to point to the similarities, and also the deeper theoretical and political implications of that legacy.

With the moral and monetary support of Jamila, his wife, Faruqi founded *Shabkhoon* ('surprise attack by night'), a fiercely independent, internationalist and something of a highbrow literary monthly. The first issue, dated June, 1966, came out in April and was something of a sensation. One of its main objectives—as the name implied—was to bombard the literary establishment with new writing, unconventional writing, 'new' literary theory and aggressive reviews, especially of the senior writers. Faruqi wrote criticism and reviews and some poetry under his own name, copiously translated fiction, drama and poetry under assumed names, and encouraged debate, dissent and dispute so long as matters didn't become personal.

*Shabkhoon* never looked back, nor did Shamsur Rahman Faruqi. Doubtless, it had its lean years, sometimes it didn't come out regularly every month; the quality of its production declined with the rise in prices, but never the quality of its contents; and it always retained its a hard core of readers and admirers. Very soon it had a plethora of imitators though few could run the course or match its quality and variety of writing, which was generally known as *jadid*, or 'modern', and *Shabkhoon* became the undisputed leader of 'Modernism' in Urdu literature.

*Shabkhoon* soon became a household world in the literary world of Urdu throughout the subcontinent and the name of Shamsur Rahman Faruqi became firmly identified with all the good and bad in Urdu's literary 'Modernism', establishing him as its 'undisputed leader'. The eleven-year-old boy whom his father chided for his inability to write good English became an Urdu poet with a distinctive, unusual voice, and a critic who devised his own prose style, elegant and incisive, closely reasoned and free from the cant, the fudge and the fuzz that was the main characteristic of most Urdu criticism of the day. Faruqi later wrote much in English too and some of his English writings like 'The Expression of the Indian Mind in Urdu Ghazal' (1978); 'Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century' (1999); *Ab-e Hayat: Constructing a Literary History, A Theory of Poetry and a Canon* (2000); 'A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of *Sabk-i Hindi*' (2003) have become seminal in their field.

Faruqi's hopes of writing fiction became a fading dream over the years; he did write a short story under an assumed name: an experimentalist little piece somewhat in the manner of Robbe Grillet. A murder is described from the point of both the murderer and his victim simultaneously. The story ends with the sentence with which it began, suggesting some kind of an impenetrable cycle. He still likes the story, but it was more like a tour de force, with no intent of writing more.

Declining health and the press of other projects in progress made it impossible for *Shabkhoon* to continue with the same élan and rigour which had made it the preeminent Urdu literary monthly throughout the Urdu world. Well before it entered its fortieth year in 2005, Faruqi announced that *Shabkhoon* would cease publication when it became forty years old. And so it did, in spite of protests and requests and entreaties from its readers and offers of help with money or with voluntary assistance to ensure its publication. One reader actually sent the not inconsiderable sum of fifty thousand rupees with a similar amount promised annually to help the magazine go on. Jamila, who had been practically the 'onlie begetter' of the project forty years ago, did not oppose the closure. She had guarded over her husband's health during his heart surgery and subsequent convalescence more jealously than an eagle at her brood and knew that Faruqi needed to slow down as he passed his seventieth birthday.

In fact, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi had become more and more of an institution over the years: writing papers, giving talks at universities and conferences in the subcontinent and abroad. The papers that he wrote were mostly unusual and against the current, but closely reasoned. Many of the demands for papers finally resulted in full-length books, like his *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (OUP, Delhi, 2001). The core of the book became his promised contribution to Sheldon Pollock's massive project, *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions From South Asia* (University of California Press, 2002). Faruqi then translated the book into Urdu. Beginning with its first publication in 1999, it has seen five reprints from various presses in Karachi and Delhi. Its Hindi translation was printed in 2010 and reprinted in 2012 from Delhi. The two Nizam Lectures that he delivered (1997) at the University of Delhi became the nucleus for a multi-volume project on Urdu's immense Oral Romance, *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*. With more than 46000 pages and more than 20 million words, it is perhaps that the world's largest Oral Romance available in printed form. Four volumes of Faruqi's work on it, titled *Sahiri*, *Shahi*, *Sahibqirani* ('Warlockship, Kingship and Lordship of the Auspicious Conjunction') came out respectively in 2000, 2006, 2006 and 2011, totalling up to about 2000 pages. A fifth volume is

under preparation and the whole project may occupy ten or even 12 volumes.

In 1970, Faruqi wrote a provocative essay on the theory of fiction, especially the short story. With the tongue in cheek title *Afsane ki Himayat Men* ('In Support of the Short Story'), the essay asserted that fiction (the novel) was inferior to poetry in the hierarchy of the literary genres, and the short story ranked even lower; it was therefore essential for Urdu fiction writers not to measure themselves solely on the strength of their short stories: the novel was in fact the need of the hour. The controversy and the resentment that the paper provoked can only be imagined by one who is familiar with Urdu's literary milieu where short story writers have been venerated for decades. Five more essays of that title followed, at irregular intervals; their form was as unconventional as their content—ranging from an apparently straightforward short story to a monologue, two dialogues and one semi-dramatic episode.

If *post hoc ergo propter hoc* is what actually happens in life, Faruqi's views on the low hierarchical status of the short story against the novel caused more novels to be written in Urdu over the next nearly four decades than over any other comparable period of time in the past. The controversy over the essays is not quite dead; it has in fact been over the past decade reinforced by the sneers caused by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's own short stories and his big novel published in 2006. In the eyes of many, 'He came to scoff, but remained to pray'.

During the time that Don Quixote-Faruqi was trying to storm the windmill-citadel of Urdu fiction, he developed an active interest in the poetry of Mir Muhammad Taqi Mir (1723-1810), Urdu's greatest but little-studied poet. In spite of his reputation among the academics as a westophile, if not actually a westolator, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi had always been passionately interested in Urdu's premodern literature—'Classical' in Urdu's literary parlance. He certainly brought a quantity of his knowledge of Western literary theory and practice in defence of, or to explain the nature of his Modernism, but he never implied, far less stated—as many of the senior Urdu writers openly did—that Urdu (in fact all 'Asian') literature was clearly inferior to European literature. But there was no tirade or indictment against 'Modernism' or *jadidiyat* (a word favoured but not coined by Faruqi, though he coined many others), that did not begin with the charge of Faruqi's 'Rejection of the Classical Tradition' and 'Total reliance on the Western Literary Practices'. In fact, Faruqi's early essay (1968) on the great Urdu-Persian Sufi poet Syed Khvaja Mir Dard (1722-1785) was admired by Muhammad Hasan Askari (1919-1978), Urdu's greatest literary critic, distinguished short story writer and copious translator from

French and English, though by that time he'd become totally immersed in esoteric Islamic thinkers like Ibn-e Arabi, Al Jili, Ashraf Ali Thanavi, Rene Guenon and Frithjof Schuon.

Faruqi had always been interested in the two greatest names of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Urdu literature: The poets Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797-1869) and Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938). Both have been incessantly read and read about and written about. Still, Faruqi made them the subject of his earliest essays from the late 1950's. Ghalib studies received a universal fillip in the decade 1968-1978 when his death centenary in 1969 became a subject for conferences, monographs and reissues of his works through many countries of the east and west. Ghalib's poetry, admittedly difficult, often obscure and much given to flights of extremely abstract fancy, had attracted commentators even during his lifetime. Faruqi in a way challenged all his illustrious predecessors by selecting some of the more obscure or much explicated verses and demonstrated that nuggets of meaning could still be extracted from them. In some cases, he showed that the received commentaries were plain wrong or inadequate. From 1968, he began to serialize his commentaries in *Shabkhoon*; intermittently, this went on until 1986 when he had a corpus of 138 verses—Ghalib's 'authorized' Collected Works falls pretty short of 2000 verses—which were then published in book form as *Tafhim-e Ghalib* ('Making Ghalib Understood') in 1989. Later, he reissued the book with an additional 12 verses, giving a final total of 150. In his Preface he stated that were he to begin anew, he would easily have chosen another 150.

The theoretical underpinning for Faruqi's methodology in his search for meaning in poetry was made clear in one of his early essays on Ghalib (1967): 'The analysis of a poem attempts to examine all the possibilities [of meaning] which may be latent in the words of that poem. Once we recognize that a poem has the power to draw out the farthest meanings, the hidden meanings and the associations that a word may possess, it follows that the most accurate meaning of a poem may be its most subtle meaning. ... This has nothing to do with the question whether the poet actually intended those many meanings, or those remote or subtle meanings. ... Even if we have the poet's own testimony for the meaning of a poem, it cannot be that a meaning cannot exist in the poem because the poet didn't intend it to be there. ... The crux of the matter is that unless the poem's words themselves testify to the non-existence or non-viability of a meaning, we have every right to look for any or all kinds of meaning in a poem.'

Faruqi later applied this same principle in a subtler and more nuanced manner to Mir, much to discomfort of the academic critics who had always believed that much of Mir was trite, if not

just trash, and that his handful best was direct, unsubtle, and full of the primary emotions of sadness and loss. An extremely influential scholar and literary columnist in Karachi sniggered, 'We should at least be grateful to Faruqi for telling us that the verses of Mir that we were brought up to believe were quite inferior weren't inferior after all.'

*Tafhim-e Ghalib* and Faruqi's other essays on Ghalib, followed by a longish, theoretical examination in four essays of the meaning and nature of Ghalib's contribution to the Urdu ghazal, published in 2001 as *Ghalib par Char Tahriren* ('Four Texts on Ghalib') established him as a major player in the field of Ghalib Studies. During the decade 1970-1980 and after, he had also been studying Mir and trying to rediscover the all but lost Urdu poetics of the past—especially from late 17<sup>th</sup> century when Urdu poetry was finally and proudly claimed by Delhi for its very own, in preference to Persian; to understand Mir in the light of what he and his contemporaries thought they were doing when they wrote poetry; to place Mir in the larger context of Indo-Persian poetry—poetry that was much later recognized, even though pejoratively, as *sabk-i hindi* 'The Indian Style'.

As Faruqi continued to read deeper into Mir and his contemporaries, he realized that it was not just their poetics that had been lost: it was the literary culture, highly self-aware, self-confident, vibrant, that had sunk without trace; and the social culture had also been lost, the culture that provided the source and base for the literary culture, its mores of loving and dying, of being a creative human being and also a participant in social and sometimes even political or military transactions. Faruqi realized that it wasn't the so called 'social and political background' to a poet's literary life that held the clues: the clues were in his literary present and past, and not in the din and boom of battle and rise or fall of princelings and potentates, occurrences far too common in the history of India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Faruqi's aims for his work on Mir were modest enough: To select poems which could comfortably take their place in the assembly of the world's great poetry; but the selection should not be what for Faruqi was a 'wishful' selection, that is, to omit poems which the selector wished were not in the Collected Works: the bawdy, the homoerotic, the 'pederastic', the comic, the erotic, the 'vulgar', the abusive; in short, anything which could even remotely suggest that Mir was a man of appetites, a male in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Delhi, a Delhi far more sexually relaxed, far more culturally confident, far more sophisticated, far more intellectually vibrant than it was ever again to be over the next two centuries. Women could flirt, even make love—with other women or men—men could flirt and make love—with boys, other men, or women, and

all the women so loved were not nautch girls or sluts of the street. Women could own property, could manage their own affairs. They were better educated than women anywhere in British India; they could be patrons of the artists and poets and men of learning, the *purdah* system, the bete noir of 'modern' historians, was nothing like the boa constrictor that supposedly kept the women chained in its deadly coils.

It certainly wasn't roses, roses, all the way, but it was a much more balanced society than everyone was led to believe: hedonism rubbed shoulders here with the maximum austerity; a life of sensations went with a life of thoughts with no sense of incongruity. The Mir that Shamsur Rahman Faruqi found in his works was a *formidably* complex character, a Shakespeare-like person, who was capable of giving words to any feeling, any thought, any sensation, any mood, with equal facility and felicity. Mir's much renowned 'simplicity of expression', 'direct appeal to the heart', 'world of sighs and of tears' were found by him to be more mythical than the unicorn and its tears.

While reading deeper and wider in Mir's contemporaries, Faruqi realized more than ever before that there was *an eighteenth century mode of writing poetry*, and all poets of the century wrote in that mode. Certainly, Vali (1667-68? -1707-08) provided the impetus, and Urdu poetry will always be indebted to him. But he became known in Delhi only around 1720, and as Mus'hafi (1750-1824) said, quoting Shah Hatim (1699-1783), each and everyone in Delhi, young or old, prompted adopted Vali's mode. Faruqi also realized that while Mir was a very great poet, perhaps the greatest Urdu poet, some of the many excellences for which he was justly famous were in fact shared by all the poets who wrote in the eighteenth century mode. This was a thrilling, even exhilarating discovery, for Faruqi had always held that there was a manner peculiar to every age, it was like an environment that was everywhere in any poetic space, even if very faintly. This was better perceptible and more potent in the modern age because of the worldwide spread of information.

A case similar to Mir's, Faruqi recalled, was that of Shakespeare, and he felt justly proud to have walked a road that T. S. Eliot had walked before him, for it was Eliot who first pointed out similarities between Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists and showed that many felicities, supposedly exclusively Shakespearean, were in fact to be found in his contemporaries as well.

It would be tedious to give an account of the work that Faruqi did on Mir. Suffice it to say that it took him two years short of twenty-five (1971-1994) to read, think, write and finish the four volumes called *She'r-e Shor Angez* ('Clamour Arousing Poetry'—



a phrase that Mir often used about his poetry, and there's reason to believe that it's been used as a technical term in Indo-Persian poetics since about the sixteenth century). The project covered nearly 3000 pages: each volume had a separate book-length essay on the poetry and poetics of Mir; the original project to create a definitive selection from the ghazals of Mir had long fallen by the wayside. Certainly, the final outcome was still a selection, consisting about 1500 verses, but with elaborate commentarial and technical analysis on each verse, and intertextual citations from mainly Persian and Urdu poets from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup>, with appropriate citations from English and French, discussions on literary theory as appropriate from Arabic, Sanskrit, and of course, English. The four volumes came out, respectively, in 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1994. The set of four was reprinted in 1997, and a revised, corrected and slightly enlarged edition of the four volumes was published, respectively, in October 2006, February 2007, March 2008 and July 2008. A new edition is shortly to come out from Lahore.

*She'r-e Shor Angez* was turned down by two publishers ('with regret', as they said) because of its vast bulk. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi owes a permanent debt of gratitude to the National Council for the Promotion of Urdu—then The Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu—for accepting the work without stint. (Faruqi was paid at government rates, which were extremely low, and the Council earned a profit of at least ten times more; but that's not a subject that either party likes to bring up. Faruqi hastens to say that the newer rates are much more liberal.)

Unlike *She'r-e Shor Angez*, Faruqi had no difficulty finding a publisher for his multi-volume work on the *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*, the immensely long Urdu Oral Romance that was mentioned earlier. The late Dr. Raj Bahadur Gaur, then Vice-Chairman of the National Council for the Promotion of Urdu wrote Faruqi without even a proposal from him, saying that the Council would be happy to publish his work on the Dastan. This offer has been honoured over the years even when Faruqi had been somewhat tardy in submitting the mss after the first volume. He compensated by submitting volumes two and three together and they came out practically at the same time in 2006. Declining health and other commitments—many undertaken with extreme unwillingness—again slowed the work, and the fourth volume came out five years after the third. Hopefully, the fifth volume will take much less. After that ... who knows? Faruqi will most certainly not live to finish the project. As the great poet Iqbal said:

*As for me, I depart, and others have now taken charge.*

If someone could be found to take charge, it would surely be a 'consummation devoutly to be wished.'

Let's now take a brief look at the 'commitments' during the period 1999-2013 which slowed down Faruqi's work on the Dastan, including the volumes already published. This list doesn't include miscellaneous work like coediting an anthology of nationalistic (or anti-imperialist) poems written in Urdu from about 1857 to the attainment of Independence (2008); editing a text book of Urdu prose for Diploma Level students (2009); coediting an Anthology of Urdu Ghazal after 1947 (2010); translating from Urdu into English four short novels of the thriller writer Ibn-e Safi (2011); putting together in separate volumes, his own literary-critical essays on various subjects collected generally with the view of unity of theme or subject; reissuing his older works with corrections, and things of the sort. The list below is thus a list of substantive work done by Faruqi over the years 1999-2013, not counting numerous requested essays, prefaces, translations of short prose and verse and other things of the sort:

1999-2001 Wrote in English, then translated into Urdu, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History*; first published in Urdu, 1999, in English 2001.

1999-2001 Wrote five stories and published them as *Savar* in Urdu; four long stories were on the Indo-Muslim literary culture of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; the fifth, much shorter, was something like an essay in narratology: What happens with the story once it is completed and published?

2002-2006 Wrote and published in Urdu the massive novel *Ka'i Chand the Sar-e Asman* ('There Were Many Moons Across the Sky').

2003 Published *Lughat-e Rozmarrāh*, a critical dictionary of neologisms and incorrect usages flooding modern Usage.

2004-2007 Actively supervised the preparation of a new edition of Mir's Complete Poetical Works (Urdu) in two volumes.

2009-2010 Reviewed word by word the entire Hindi translation of *Ka'i Chand the Sar-e Asman*, published in 2010.

2011-2012 Translated *Ka'i Chand the Sar-e Asman* into English, under the title: *The Mirror of Beauty*.

2012 Actively supervised preparation of a new and corrected edition of Mir's Complete Poetical Works (Urdu) in two volumes (to be published, July-August 2013).

2012 Wrote and published a novella in Urdu. Wrote a long essay on the modern Urdu poet Miraji (1912-1949) and another long essay on the modern Urdu poet Akhtaruliman (1915-1995).

2013 Wrote a book-length essay on the modern Urdu short story writer Sa'adat Hasan Manto (1912-1955).

The absence of poetry in this list will be instantly noticed. This is because Faruqi wrote very little poetry during this period and published even less. His last collection of poems and verse

translations came out in 1996. Since then, Faruqi's most substantial poetic output has been a set of twelve elegiac ghazals to mourn Jamila's death in 2007. His poetry has some very distinguished admirers, but most in the Urdu world place Faruqi the critic very much above Faruqi the poet, except that many would give high place to his Ruba'i. Lack of public acclaim doesn't worry him at all, for he never aimed for it, and he is satisfied that his manner of poetry is sharply different from the tone and tenor of almost all Urdu poetry of the present. Writing scant poetry has not been his regret: his contribution to the difficult, insistently archaic sounding genre of the Ruba'i has been unique in terms of both range and technical excellence and that seems to him as sufficient for him as a poet.

It has sometimes been said that Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's poetry over the last couple of decades bears traces of the influence of Mir, and his fiction has the Dastan as one of its strongest sources of inspiration. There's a good deal of truth in both the statements, but it must be said that the his fiction owes much to many things, not least to Faruqi's love for and knowledge of the Indo-Muslim culture—knowledge that has been imbibed over many decades through personal observation of family protocols, subtleties and delicacies of conduct worked out over the years almost like the steps of a complicated dance; memories of his childhood dating back to very nearly seventy-five years, and incessant absorption of facts and fiction from books, not excluding books of poetry in Urdu and Persian composed by poets of the past ages many of whose works are all but lost or forgotten now.

Faruqi's work on the *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* owes its genesis to Frances Pritchett, now Professor at Columbia, and Faruqi's longtime collaborator, friend and informal pupil. Her own work on oral qissas and kahanis in Urdu and Hindi the late 1970's led her to the study of the shorter, one-volume version of the *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*. When Faruqi shamefacedly confessed to her that he knew nothing of the *Dastan*, or oral narratology even, she presented to him the first four volumes of the *Tilism-e Hoshruha*, the best known of all the Dastans in the vast cycle. Faruqi read the first one, and gave away his heart lock, stock and barrel to the Dastan nothing daunted by the fact that there were forty-two more, equally fat and weighty where those four came from. He found that extant Urdu works on the Dastan, even when sympathetic, were nearly unanimous in declaring it chaotic, primitive, much inferior to the novel and at best an entertainment of the juvenile sort, falling somewhere between Arthur Conan Doyle and something like *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome* by E. M. Berens (first published 1880, right when the individual volumes of the Dastan were about to start

publication). None of the scholars, even a westophile like Kalimuddin Ahmad seemed to have heard of C. S. Lewis, far less J. R. R. Tolkien.

Faruqi decided to first study and then work on the Dastan The *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* was clearly a world-class treasury of narrative and certainly the greatest work of Urdu prose. It was sad that both the literary and literate community of Urdu had permitted it to be lost to its sight.

Faruqi found out quickly enough how much lost to sight the Dastan had become barely a few decades after its halcyon days. Individual Dastan volumes were hard to come by: not a single library in India seemed to possess more than a few, if any of the individual volumes. None of the foreign libraries that Faruqi could approach showed better results. It seemed that there wasn't a single individual or library in the world which could boast to possess all the 46—some said 47, some even 52—individual volumes. It was clear that Faruqi must collect and read, collect and read before he could catch up with the *ignis fatuus* called The Pearl of the Ocean of Valour, and the Ruby of the Mine of Intrepidity and Daring, the Moon of the Firmament of Bravery, the Sun of the Sky of the Tearing open of Enemy Lines, the Honourable Amir, Master of Wisdom and Strategy, Capturer of Lands and Taker of Countries, the Pride of the Sultans of the World, the King of Kings and the Sultan of Sultans, the Earthquake of the Lands of the Caucasus, Solomon Secundus, Hamza the Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction of the Times.

Again, it would be tedious to tell the story of the Great Quest, but a day dawned when Shamsur Rahman Faruqi was the only individual in contemporary world to own all the 46 volumes (he'd long since determined the number 46 as definitive). He actually read all the leaves of that multitudinous peepul tree: he even re-read some of the volumes. He'd kept notes all the time, but he found that re-reading was always a different experience than the first reading; so his notes could help, but not replace the re-reading. In 1997, he began writing, publishing first the two Nizam Lectures on the subject, then volume I of the actual Dastan project in the year 2000.

It must be a coincidence that Shamsur Rahman Faruqi recovered the lost barque of his fiction and re-embarked upon his tempest-tossed and lonely voyage of writing fiction—Bakhtin said that the novelist was the loneliest of the writers for he had no audience—almost exactly at the same time when he started writing about the Dastan. Perhaps there was some deeper, mysterious creative urge at work here: his brain was brimming with millions of words and thousands of events clamouring to be reborn in newer

avatars. But Faruqi pragmatically attributes the addition of this major inflow into his little pond of creativity to mere serendipity.

Everybody celebrated Ghalib's 200th birth centenary in 1997 according to their means and ability. It was the convention at *Shabkhoon* not to issue a special number on any occasion, but to devote an appropriate number of pages to a special theme as needed. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi accordingly decided to commission some original writing on Ghalib on this occasion and put them out in an issue to appear sometime in 1997. The harvest gathered after much effort was somewhat disappointing, the best of the lot being a paper in Hindi by Krishna Mohan, a Ph. D. candidate at the University Hindi department. Faruqi had heard him present the paper at a local conference and instantly decided to use it in the *Shabkhoon* along with the papers of Urdu scholars. Krishna Mohan had no Urdu but he had a keen sense of Ghalib from his close reading of translations or transliterations of Ghalib's prose and verse. Also, he'd read much about Ghalib in Hindi and English. He could pronounce the Urdu verses with metrical accuracy and correct intonation.

Unfortunately, Krishna Mohan's paper took very long to translate: Faruqi had rejected the first one as inadequate. Finally, the issue became ready to put together toward the end of 1998. Faruqi wasn't quite happy still: putting a young Hindi critic's paper at the top of the heap in preference to established Urdu scholars could be seen as a tacit admission of Urdu's bankruptcy of ideas on Ghalib. It was best, he decided, to contribute something of his own to right the balance.

He decided to write a story about Ghalib.

Now why he should have thought of writing, of all things, a story, a genre that he hadn't touched in decades? This is a question that others have asked, but it never occurred to Faruqi. Perhaps he was certain somewhere deep in his mind that he was a storyteller still. Perhaps the he was running on dastan power: it was the *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* that now coursed through his blood and altered his self-perception, gave him confidence. He doesn't know. Nor does he care. Later he wrote that the writing of that story gave him the proof, if proof was needed, that the fiction writer in him wasn't dead and was in fact now clamouring to come out.

The story was long enough, but only about half of it was about Ghalib. It was a first person narrative of a Hindu old man, 78 years old in 1918, meditating upon the sunset of his life. An aspiring Hindi poet (as Urdu was then called), he idealizes Ghalib and gives a long account of his meetings with him a few years after the holocaust of 1857. In order to give depth to the story, and to clothe the figure of the narrator with the habiliments of authentic sounding history, Faruqi began the narrative in about 1854, letting

it run its course to about 1860. Everything is narrated as seen and observed by the young boy—the cataclysmic changes occurring on the political field of Hind, the impact of the new order, very nearly crushing the Indian world as it then existed. The loss, the sense of irrecoverability of the past and unrecuperability of the present as it now weighs down upon the old man at the conclusion of the Great War.

This technique, of providing an apparently unnecessary and lengthy background to give distance, depth and body to the characters as well the events that befall them later, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi used with equal, or even more effect in all his later fictions.

He chose the narrator's name by putting small slips of paper containing possible names in a box, shaking it well and asking a niece of Jamila's to make the draw. The name that appeared on the winning slip was Beni Madho Rusva, a Hindu name that sounded sufficiently literate—'Rusva' being the *takhallus*, or pen name—and also archaic. He became the narrator-author of the story, called *Ghalib Afsana* ('Ghalib Story') with a pun on 'Ghalib', which means 'the prevailer, the vanquisher'. Faruqi chose to suppress his name for reasons of literary politics. Anyone acquainted with the literary community in Urdu must also be acquainted with the fact that it consists of three segments: the largest being the quiet, non-polemical majority who read what they like to read and hope to get more of the same. The remaining are divided into two somewhat unequal groups (bands? gangs?) each of which believes that the truth is on its side; one group dislikes, even disdains Shamsur Rahman Faruqi; the other likes him. So Faruqi thought that the readers opposed to him would suffer the usual knee-jerk reaction of denigrating whatever he does or says: a *story* by him would be for them a God sent occasion for derisive or dismissive laughter. The other group was bound to be equally spontaneous in praise. One could say that by using a pretty convincing and remote sounding pseudonym Faruqi was putting to the test his talents as fiction writer.

So Beni Madho Rusva burst upon the literary scene with a narrative so compelling and sounding so historically authentic that he became an instant success. No one really thought about the identity of the author. Faruqi's dexterous and sensitive use of archaic language, his feel for atmosphere and history, and his copious use of Ghalib's own words—from his letters and conversations, to draw his portrait of Ghalib—made Beni Madho Rusva almost like an illusionist, or perhaps an authentic, real voice from the past.

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's daughters now pressed him for more stories, and yet more, and Faruqi found himself amenable,

for now he could comfortably see himself as a fiction writer, and could now, more or less unconsciously, envisage himself doing his kind of fiction without having to strain after special effects or conscious plot construction.

One of Faruqi's earliest memories of such kind of fiction was W. M. Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* (1852), or to give its full title: *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq., A Colonel in the Service of Her Majesty, Q. Anne, Written by Himself*. What had fascinated Faruqi most in the novel was its language: it was written in the English of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and though not a historical novel strictly speaking, it has some notable real life characters like the satirist Jonathan Swift making short appearances in it. Faruqi read the novel as a very young man, almost exactly a hundred years after the novel was written, and what thrilled him most was his meeting with genuine 18<sup>th</sup> century characters speaking genuine 18<sup>th</sup> century English.

Nearer home and closer to his theme, Faruqi's model was a fictional essay on Ghalib written by a famous Ghalib scholar Malik Ram (1906-1983) as a first person narrative of the author's meetings with Ghalib. Faruqi read it in the Aligarh Muslim University Magazine in perhaps 1952 when he was seventeen. It was his first encounter with the name Malik Ram. The richness of detail and the author's obvious familiarity with the life and culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century convinced Faruqi that it was a true account and that Malik Ram was really a contemporary of Ghalib's. He was later disabused of the notion and in due course had the honour to become personally and well acquainted with Malik Ram himself. The essay still reads as fresh and convincing as it did sixty years ago.

Much earlier than Malik Ram's essay, Faruqi, like almost any other student of Urdu in those days, read Mirza Farhatullah Beg's (1884-1947) *Dihli ki Akhri Sham* ('Delhi's Last Candle', circa 1934), better known as *Ek Yadgar Musha'ira* ('A Musha'ira to Always Remember', translated into English by Akhter Qamber as *The Last Musha'irah of Delhi*). Again a first person account of the narrator's encounters with Delhi's prominent poets and the Red Fort in mid-nineteenth century, there was no doubt about the fictionality of the account, but the author's knowledge of the subject, and more than his knowledge, his air of knowledgeable, and obvious respect for the culture created an indelible effect on Faruqi's young mind, not as a model to write fiction, but as an authentic document of a lovable culture.

Among the contemporary authors, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi was struck forcibly by Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* for its treatment of a literary life—granted that the life itself had enough drama and tragic interest to make a novel—but Peter Ackroyd made even

smaller characters, literary and non-literary, feel like real contemporaries to Chatterton, and not just paper figures put there to fill in blank spaces. Perhaps even more striking was Ackroyd's ability to place London, the city, at the centre of the emotional life of the novel. Faruqi has loved and hated Delhi in almost equal measure ever since his first visit to that city as a young man. He was appalled by the degradation of the walled city, the absence of any sense among its dwellers that they were a part of history by just being there in that part of the world. The whole of the walled city was declared a slum sometime later, meant not for demolition, thankfully, but for 'improvement'. By that time it no longer felt like a city. Nor does it so feel even now, after years of 'improvement'.

Faruqi later lived in Delhi for extended periods of time in his life and his horror and his fascination and love for the city grew every day. More than any city in the world, not London, not Istanbul, not Beijing made you feel that you had history on or in every inch of the ground underfoot. And the mindless rapine of the commercial newcomers, the craze to destroy and build, destroy and build, build until the millennia old city whose millennia were still in many places visible, disappeared before your eyes. And oh, the lack of love that the people of Delhi had for their city—Faruqi wept in his heart when on each of his visits to Lahore he found alive and palpable the love that the Lahoris have for their city. He didn't find, not ever over several visits, a single piece of polythene, paper, cigarette wrapper or orange or mango peel on the waters of the little artificial stream that runs many miles from the airport to the city.

It wasn't nostalgia; it was a dream for Shamsur Rahman Faruqi to make Delhi come alive in his fiction—not the Delhi of some remote, romantic past where one would be free to let the imagination run without a bridle, but Delhi in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Delhi was then at the peak of its glory, negative and patronizing accounts of modern comprador historians notwithstanding. In fact it was the young colonial modernists, flush with their 'English' learning, who refused to believe what they could actually see in their history and believed instead what they heard from their colonial masters. For it was a Delhi that was still recoverable—through poetry and prose, through letters and memoirs, through visitors' accounts (even English visitors).

From *Chatterton* by Ackroyd to *Possession* by A. S. Byatt, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi found his predecessors in the present: he was enviously surprised by Byatt's command of detail, and of her mastery over the rhythms and patterns of English prose and verse of the mid-nineteenth century. She seemed to be better even than Thackeray at being able to hear the sedate cadences, the imperial



flow of the language of her chosen time. Faruqi knew he couldn't do it for English; but he certainly could do it for Urdu.

The success of 'Ghalib Story' made a man-size hole in the dam that had blocked his creativity in fiction for more than four decades. He then wrote *Savar* ('Rider') a story about Delhi in mid-eighteenth century much more ambitious than 'Ghalib Story'. Around a young, non-historical student at Delhi's Madrasa-e Rahimia, Faruqi wove a number of historical characters—poets, Sufis, physicians, both Hindu and Muslim, and narrated the story of the young man's love for a dancing girl whom he ultimately renounced. Each character was introduced with a purpose, and the purpose was to let Delhi speak for itself. For the story's epigraph, Faruqi chose the following lines of A. E. Housman:

*He would not stay for me, and who can wonder?*

*He would not stay for me to stand and gaze.*

*I shook his hand and tore my heart asunder*

*And went with half my life about my ways.*

There is a Persian verse that had held Shamsur Rahman Faruqi in its thrall for many years. He saw in it a life, a story, a parable, waiting to be unravelled:

*Everlasting Wealth's Rider appeared on the road:*

*None held him by the reins; he went down the road, not to be seen again.*

Now was Faruqi's opportunity: he wrote *Savar* at practically fever pitch and published it—using an assumed name again: Omar Shaikh Mirza. In history, Omar Shaikh Mirza was Babur's father, a distinguished figure by any standard; Faruqi left additional clues for himself in the name: he claims his descent from Omar, 2<sup>nd</sup> Caliph of Islam; his people as a whole are generally called Shaikh (against a Syed, who claims descent from the Prophet through his daughter), and a Mirza in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a gentleman of good breeding and refinement, regardless of his religion.

*Savar* was even more successful than 'Ghalib Story'. In *Savar*, through Mirza Mazhar Jan-e Janan, a prominent Sufi, aesthete and Persian-Urdu poet, Budh Singh Qalandar, a young Hindu-Sikh Nanak Panthi aristocratic poet (both were true characters from history), the young scholarly narrator and a charismatic dancing girl, Faruqi was able to pull together what was seen by the readers as the essence of Delhi. Speculations about the real author were made freely, but the majority opinion began to veer towards Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, or Naiyer Masud, one of the greatest modern Urdu short story writers who is also a major Urdu Persian scholar. Some even said that Faruqi was trying to attract attention to him, as though he still needed it, by acting coy and mysterious about his authorship of the stories.

All speculations were more or less set at rest with the publication of an even longer tale, *In Suhbaton men Akhir* ('In These Transactions, Ultimately'. It was about Mir Taqi Mir's love of his life, but began in far away Armenia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and brought together a good bit of Delhi's literary cultural history, social history and even some political history. Narrated in the third person, the story brought together aspects of Delhi's Urdu and Persian poetry of mid-1760's; Delhi's cultural life as lived by its elites; the protocols and mores of romantic love; and finally, how that society saw its poets and artists. There was much of Mir in it, but much more besides. The colouration imparted to the narrative through so much history, Persian and Urdu poetry, and the life of Mir, was sufficient pointer to the real author. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi never admitted authorship, but sometimes answered literary and historical questions about it.

*In Suhbaton men Akhir* was the first story in which the erotic appeared, and somewhat explicitly, though painted through extremely metaphoric, Persianised language. Syed Muhammad Ashraf, a prominent but younger fiction writer wrote out of pique, with maybe some hidden delight, that parts of the story read like 'a blue film in Persian'. Yet on the whole, *In Suhbaton men Akhir* presented a somewhat tragic view of life, a view not necessarily present with any strength in the poetry of Mir. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi has always maintained that Mir is too great a poet for one description, any description, to suffice for him. Mir, in any case, is not the only arresting figure in the story; there are two women, both mistresses of their own fate; neither can stop herself from loving, but both bring death and desolation upon those whom they love. Hence the title of the story, taken from a verse by Mir:

*In these transactions, ultimately, lives are lost:*

*Love is never exhausted, and Beauty never relents.*

Faruqi's last story in the series was *Aftab-e Zamin* ('The Sun that Rises Upon the Earth'). It was mainly about Mus'hafi (1750-1824), an Urdu and Persian poet who had long been regarded as an important poet, but at best a poverty stricken second-rater whose life or poetry didn't have much to commend itself to the 'modern' mind—'modern' here meaning the mind of the colonial modernist, a species of people who have dominated Urdu literature one way or another for more than a century and a half now. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi also began as a colonial modernist, but having had little formal education in Urdu or Persian, he soon learned to question and then repudiate colonial modernism as false, shallow and useless for a tradition based literary culture like that of Urdu.

But Faruqi was, in this story, concerned with not only putting Mus'hafi the prolific, highly creative poet in the correct

perspective, but also to realize him as a colourful, forceful literary and social character, who was in many ways typical of the fin de siècle scene in the Urdu literature and social culture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The story was also a sort of experiment in the art of the narrative with many narrators and one narrative voice mingling with another. With his attention to detail and his obvious mastery of minor historical facts, Faruqi was able to make his Mus'hafi so convincing that most readers believed his spoof of citing the memoirs of one the main characters as a source and inquired where those memoirs could be found.

As would be clear from the chronology of Faruqi's literary activities, he kind of morphed into a novelist just when he finished his five stories; he didn't see it then, but he can now see the effect of the imagination's seamlessness, some thing like a rich vein struck quite by accident in improbable granite, and the vein strengthening itself rather than weakening as it went deeper into the heart of the stories. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi had demonstrated to the world that he could write fiction, fiction as distinctive and aesthetically incisive as his poetry, a fiction as compelling and organically structured as was his criticism in its own way. But he had no conscious thought then of becoming a novelist. He was sixty-six now, an age when most people prefer to retire and look back at their past with regret or pleasure. Yet the stories were resonant not only in his readers' minds, but also in his own psyche: he'd done some thing which he had previously thought as almost never being capable of execution by his pen. So what if the second origin of his fiction writing was serendipitous? So what if ages ago he'd stopped regarding himself as a serious maker of fictions? The readers of his fictions believed in him; he himself was now persuaded that he had another, meaningful, role left to play: He wrote his stories; he must now fulfill his destiny and write his novel.

So that's how it was; to be slightly facetious at Faruqi's expense (he always enjoys a joke, even against himself), he wrote the novel because he wrote the stories and he wrote the stories because he needed to write the novel. His family constantly suggested newer themes for fictions to him; they, and his friends too, asked for a novel—Lord help us! It seemed everybody had already determined that Faruqi should, must, and can write a novel.

One of the subjects proposed was the life and loves of Navab Mirza Khan Dagh (1831-1905), Urdu's last great premodern poet. Dagh was in some ways like Mus'hafi, prolific, but with a reputation for triteness and frivolity—his ghazals were sung almost exclusively by the nautch girls, (one could almost hear the snort as the learned critic pronounced judgement on him);

worse still, said another with a grimace of disgust, Dagh was brought up in the effete, effeminate, hedonistic environment of the (Red) Fort, so what else could one expect from him? And his mother? She was a fallen woman, or a woman of loose morals, why, she was practically a harlot, perhaps a scheming harlot at that. She ensnared men and then had them die on her hands, somehow. Navab Mirza Khan Dagh was her illegitimate son with Navab Shamsuddin Ahmad Khan, who already had many wives. He was ultimately hung by the English for the evil deed of having the Navab Resident Bahadur murdered.

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi admired Dagh for his versatility and technical mastery as a poet. Though not profound, his poetry was exemplary for its technical excellence. In one of his papers and in many lectures, Faruqi described Dagh as a poets' poet, that is, a poet from whom all other poets could learn something. His favourite poet to recommend to young aspiring poets for study as model is Dagh. He also had an extramarital love life (as many people did in those days) and he even wrote a long poem about it.

Yet, for all his colourfulness and his early eventful life, Dagh seemed to Faruqi as too thin an individual to fill a whole novel; there wasn't much gravitas there, no complexity, and most important, nothing that left you wondering, questioning. There was nothing that made you stop and try to understand what life meant for those people. What was the meaning of being alive at that time, a time when life seemed cheap but also full of thrills and possibilities of both instant disaster and elevation to high success? Did they see that they were living in a time of decline, or crisis, or a mere transition to some small change, such that came and went in India all the time while India remained essentially unaffected? What was the meaning of life in the eyes of those who were born to the reality of an age of change, when Delhi was no longer the centre of the world? What made that culture so vibrant still? How was it that Ghalib, in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century could still believe that Delhi was the soul, and the world its body? He'd seen Calcutta, and still he could say:

*I asked, So tell me now, What is Delhi?*

*He said, Delhi is the soul, and the world its body.*

Dagh's upbringing, his temperament, his immense talent, and a big chunk of luck made his a success story after many pits and troughs. But he was the last of his race, there wasn't another to come like him. What made him Dagh was a cultural profundity that went back to past centuries, past times, when the codes for the lives of poets and lovers, adventurers and traitors were developed. The life of Dagh was a cultural terminus, nothing came after him. Faruqi needed to show the land of Hind in early nineteenth century

when Delhi's present still held some possibility that it wouldn't die and become an unreachable past.

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi wanted to do for the first half of the nineteenth century what he did for the first half of the eighteenth in *Rider* and in *Ultimately, in These Transactions*. Navab Mirza Khan Dagh, for all his qualities, didn't possess the depth and the multiplicity of dimensions to show the life that Faruqi was aiming to portray in the round.

But his subject was right there, a remarkable life that had waited for more than a century to be noticed and recovered. ('Recovered' was the operative word here, as always; for not only were those people dead, their lives were also dead, their times existed in the footnotes of learned books as dead times, times whose life-force had been sucked off or bled away, leaving nothing but a shrivelled withe, barkless and sapless, unfit as even kindling.) As the Urdu poet Atash (1777-1847) said prophetically in the early 1800's:

*Don't ask me about what I am and what befell me:  
I am the odd piece of dry wood in a wilderness,  
Which the caravan set fire to, and went on its way.*

That subject was Wazir Khanam, Dagh's mother, the girl who left home to elope with an Englishman at the age of fourteen or fifteen, determined to make her own life. She was born in around 1811, a child of loving and reasonably prosperous parents. So why did she go away, and what befell her then? The story of her life, Faruqi could see, was more knotted and more full of twists and turns than a novel. Fiercely independent, supremely, almost superhumanly beautiful, she once declared to her oldest sister: 'I will first taste the man who wants me. I will let him stay if I like him, if not, I'll show him the door.'

Wazir Khanam's loves and her vicissitudes; the characters of her lovers; the personalities of other men in or around her life; the women who sustained her or sought to destroy her; the mystery and the controversy around her life and character, which still persist—There was everything here for Shamsur Rahman Faruqi to recover and recreate to give his reader an almost physical experience of what Wazir and others at that time felt and did and how they fared as human beings. Too complex to be called just victims, too deep to probe and discover the source of their life's water, too colourful and vibrant to be seen as mere actors—those people were of their age; they were not paper cuts or clippings from newspapers or travellers' accounts of the past.

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi decided to accept the challenge that those times and those people had thrown before him. Was that which what was lost valuable enough to be rediscovered, mined

like living fossils from veins of history that had dried up ages ago? Only his novel could you that (or maybe tell him too).

Faruqi was convinced that the past that he wanted his reader to revisit with him was valuable. *For the past is always valuable*. Even the past that Indians were taught to abhor, to be ashamed of. For the past is the future's mother.

Does one detect a hint of nostalgia here? A desire to paint the dark of Delhi's evening as the rosy hue of dawn? Faruqi says No. Time travel is not his purpose: his purpose is to tell you that you had a past, and you need to revisit it in your mind and reconnect with it.

So how was all this made to happen? Or how did Faruqi, in the words of one questioner, 'take real life characters and turn them into fictions?'

It's true that all the chief characters, and many of the less central ones in the novel, are real, historical characters and the events that they took part in, or which happened to them, did happen more or less in the same way as described in the novel. But what Shamsur Rahman Faruqi actually did with the history was *to imagine history as fiction*. Presenting history as fiction wasn't enough, in his eyes; he must imagine every incident, every detail, as a story in its own right.

Some time ago a friend submitted two reasonably well-written stories to Faruqi. He criticized them for having what he said was 'too much world' in a small space, making the stories sound improbable and lose their effect. The author assured Faruqi that one of the stories was a true account of what actually happened in a family whom she knew well. The other story too, she assured him, was based mainly on 'things that really happened.'

'What really happened is a series of actual events,' Faruqi replied, 'what is true is not necessarily a story. All truths are to be remade, as stories. Otherwise they are just events, no different from what is reported in the newspapers, on the radio, or shown on the television, or written in history books as the 'truth' about this, or that event of the past.'

When his friend protested that Faruqi was devaluing history, or truth, Faruqi advised her to keep fiction and truth sharply separated. 'Truth,' he said, 'must be allowed to evolve and develop by letting it pass and churn into the writer's imagination.'

'So that's what you did with your cartload of historical-cultural knowledge?' She retorted, not a little piqued.

'Yes,' said he. 'There were two cartloads, actually. One full of books and the other full of the world. I locked them up in two

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi on Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

separate cells, but with peepholes so that I could peep in for inspiration when I needed it.'

She laughed; because she thought he was a wise man or a wise-ass, Faruqi couldn't determine.

Allahabad, May 7, 2013.

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