

Please, Could We Have A Proper History Of Urdu Literature?

by *Shamsur Rahman Faruqi*

## **A Modest Plea: Please, Could We Have A Proper History of Urdu Literature?**

**By *Shamsur Rahman Faruqi***

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The redoubtable Ralph Russell wrote us a stern prescription on How Not to Write a History of Urdu Literature. Though composed in the context of three histories of Urdu literature written in English, his strictures could very well apply to very nearly all histories of Urdu literature, including specialized histories of literary movements or genres written in Urdu. In fact, had Ralph Russell turned his gaze to the histories written in Urdu, his displeasure would have been as great, if not greater.

Ralph Russell told us very little about How to Write a History of Urdu Literature. He made just three points in this regard, and unfortunately I have disagreement with all three. He asked that a history of Urdu literature (in English, to be sure, for he was addressing English speakers primarily) should be selective. Now all histories are selective, their size governing their contents. But to make selectivity a prime requirement would seem not only to promote personal biases but also miss the point. For how selective is selective? In his *tazkira Nikat-ush Shu'ara* (circa 1752) Mir gave short shrift to nearly three hundred and fifty years of Urdu poetry in the Deccan (which term included Gujarat too at that time) saying that not one poet arose there who could compose a verse whose two lines had proper connection between them. Another example of "selectivity" could be Sharib Rudaulvi's account of modern Urdu criticism called *Jadid Urdu Tanqid: Usul o Nazariyat* (Lucknow, 1981) which came out in 1968 and has gone through many reprints since. Rudaulvi has very little to say about Muhammad Hasan Askari in this book which spans nearly five hundred pages. Askari gets three pages of prim disapproval, *bas*.

Russell's second point is actually an appendix to his first. He says, "Tell your readers what they need and want to know." Obviously, since no historian can really judge what his reader wants to know, he will fall back upon his own comfortable notions of what the reader "needs", both in terms of the reader's wants, and in terms of the reader's "need to know".

The third point that Ralph Russell commends to the would be historian of Urdu literature is that the historian must describe the social and historical conditions in which the literature was produced. Presumably this is in respect of

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Urdu literature alone, which Russell feels is totally different to English literature and therefore the historian must place it in its proper historical-social context so that it may make sense to the non-Urdu knowing reader. He says that Urdu literature is the product of:

[A] kind of society and of a history of which most of your readers will know very little. So set the literature in its social and historical perspective.

The obvious reply to this somewhat simplistic command is that more, much more than situating a literature in its time and place, one needs to know the poetics, the rules, the conventions, that make the literature meaningful to its users. Many more replies are possible, but my essay is not about answering Russell. In any case, I am in full sympathy with his assessment of the three histories of Urdu literature, which he examines in his essay. I just want to enlarge his scope and say that there hasn't yet been a history of Urdu literature, which does even minimum justice to the literature.

I cannot conclude this section without paying sincere tribute to Ralph Russell for his erudition, forthrightness, and his services to the cause of extending appreciation for Urdu literature in the western world and even in South Asia. His essay about how not to write a history of Urdu literature is just one example of how his teachings and ideas can benefit native Urdu readers and writers.

### 2.

I must say that historians or critics of Urdu literature are not entirely to blame for the pitiful texts that they produced in the name of history. They had two major handicaps. First, there were no models of histories of literature in Persian, Arabic, or Sanskrit, the three literary traditions that gave birth to the Urdu tradition. Second, they had a huge burden of guilt and an all-pervasive sense of inferiority to contend with. Given their inordinate respect for Western (read English) literary, social, industrial and political-administrative culture, they naturally assumed that Urdu literature doesn't need (or deserve) a historian so much as it needs a public censor.

Muhammad Husain Azad's *Ab-e Hayat* (Water of Life, 1880) is generally regarded as the first literary history in Urdu. It was an account of Urdu poetry from about 1700 to mid-nineteenth century. Its subtitle reads:

Biographies of Urdu poets of renown, and an account of the improvements and reforms made in Urdu language from age to age.

The book was organized generally in the way most of us thought histories of literature are organized: The narrative had a discernible chronological sequence and the author was very particular about identifying five periods of Urdu poetry. One sub-heading in the list of contents reads, "History of Urdu Verse". Still, in the body of the work, Azad always identifies it as a *tazkira*, not a history. Frances Pritchett has pointed out that the number of pages devoted to each period varies greatly. The early periods have been given lesser number of pages. This might be taken as an indicator of Azad's opinion about the worth and value of each period and such value judgements, explicit or implied, may be construed to have been a result of the author adopting a historian's, rather than a *tazkira* writer's position.

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But Azad's preference in the text itself seems to be for the earlier, eighteenth century, poets, except that he would have much preferred them to have written in the Delhi register of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, Azad is highly anecdotal, and the anecdotes have been narrated with a true raconteur's verve and seem to have been chosen mostly with a view to their dramatic rather than factual content. This would seem to put the work back in the domain of the *tazkira*.

In spite of these ambiguities, *Ab-e Hayat* has almost always been treated by us as a history, even if a flawed or inaccurate one. What exactly a history of Urdu literature should do doesn't still seem to have become clear after the passage of more than a century. Even the anecdotal culture inaugurated by Azad persists to this day. We have histories of Urdu literature whose authors tell us about their acquaintance and encounters with the writers about whom they are writing in their history, or who make personal comments on the events they are narrating.

In his massive *Urdu ki Adabi Tarikhen* (Karachi, 2000), Gian Chand examines scores of histories of Urdu literature, many of them abominably bad. Gian Chand has been even handed in giving praise or blame. But he never considers the point of view, or the literary-critical position, from which the histories have been written. He criticizes individual authors for their errors of fact, and occasionally for their literary opinions, but never stops to suggest, far less examine, any aetiology for their defective or erroneous judgements. He is not at all concerned with the theoretical or ideological underpinnings of the histories that he examines.

To be sure, there have been other substantial histories of Urdu literature after the three, which Ralph Russell castigates. Ali Jawad Zaidi's *A History of Urdu Literature* (New Delhi, 1993) is an example in English and Jamil Jalibi's vast and still unfinished *Tarikh-e Adab-e Urdu* (Volume III, New Delhi, 2007) is an example in Urdu. Zaidi doesn't have much that one could admire, but Jalibi's is a monumental work worthy of respect, especially because he takes care to consult all possible sources in the original and seems to have actually read all the authors that he discusses. Still, he fails to satisfy on many counts, his main fault being his failure to jettison the colonialist-orientalist baggage inherited by him from the nineteenth century modernizers.

### 3.

Given that we haven't yet developed a theoretical model for a history of Urdu literature, my first priority should be to develop one such model. What follows is not a model but a simple list of the most obvious things that a history of Urdu literature should, or should not have. This list of absences and presences reflects my personal experience of reading or consulting a large number of histories of Urdu literature. I will not state the obvious, such as accuracy of dates. I haven't yet found two histories, which give identical dates for the same event, even such a simple event as birth or death. And there are no histories, which have a consistent policy about dates, or a consistent method even about reporting dates of birth and death or the biography and birthplace of an author. No histories that I know give the dates of completion or publication of even important works by the

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most prominent authors. Such defects can be corrected by due diligence, although the last one could have its basis in our ancient view of literary history which sees literature as a continuum and not a series of connected or discrete events.

My main discomfort with our histories flows from the many fictions that our historians have accepted without examination, or have invented with the view of serving some chauvinistic motive. The most pervasive fiction is about the origin of Urdu. Everyone seems quite certain that Urdu was born during, or as a result of Muslim invasions and the reason it came into being was the need of the foreign army-men to interact with the local population for the purpose of obtaining their daily necessities. The name "Urdu" is presented as proof for this theory for it is supposed to mean "army". Historians didn't appreciate the fact that the language-name *Urdu* dates only from the late eighteenth century and so it could have had nothing to do with Muslim armies of invasion or occupation. The only foreign armies present in India at that time were European, not Muslim. Grahame Bailey and Mahmud Sherani inquired into the question why and how the language came to be known as "Urdu" so late in the day. They didn't reach any conclusions, but later scholars didn't even raise the question.

Allied to the fiction of the military origin of Urdu is the fiction that there was a primal language from which both Urdu and Hindi have descended. Some linguists described this primal language as "Western Hindi". Others called it *Khari Boli* and the name has stuck. No historian of Urdu language or literature found it in himself to make the obvious assertion that *Khari Boli* is actually Urdu (earlier called Hindi, among other things) and modern Hindi is a form of *Khari Boli*, or Urdu. This skewed vision of the origins of the language created numerous distortions in our view of the nature of Urdu. Since Urdu has an abundance of Perso-Arabic vocabulary, and Arabic and Persian were the languages of the educated elite, the view gained currency that Urdu is an urban language, if not the language of the urban elites alone, while "Hindi" was considered to be "rustic" or "rural", or "uncouth". This idea found favour with persons as different as Garcon de Tassy and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who both were lovers and supporters of Urdu. To be sure, Syed Ahmad and de Tassy understood different things from "Hindi", but even Urdu writers were fooled into believing that Urdu was indeed an urban language with no base among the "people", as Progressive writers became fond of saying. How much this kind of assertion soured the already bad relations between Urdu and Hindi speakers is for the historians to inquire into.

The language-ideological dispute which began shortly after 1857 and which continued to hot up over the next century or so and which affected both literature production and literary ideology in Urdu seems not have touched the consciousness of the historian of Urdu literature.

There is a myth widely prevalent among non-Urdu circles that Urdu was the "court language" or the "official language" of the Mughals and of the Muslim princely states, most certainly Avadh, that came into being after the break up of empire. This has again created distortions of perception and given Urdu a bad press. Our historians took no notice of this and while waxing eloquent about the achievements of Osmania University in the 1930's, omitted to report the fact that Urdu became the official language of Hyderabad state only in the 1920's and that

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Urdu was never the official or court language of the Mughals or the rulers of Avadh. In 1835-1837 the British indeed introduced Urdu as the language to be used in law courts in Bengal, North Western Province (now part of the modern Indian State of U.P.) and parts of Central Provinces (most of it now in the modern Indian State of M. P.). This hurt Persian, and the Muslims, and many Hindus as well, but it didn't seem to matter as far as our historians were concerned.

Literary historiography in Urdu has always been oriented toward Delhi, and it generally remains so even today, after Dakani and later Gujri were brought on the map mostly as a result of the efforts of Dakani scholars like Nasiruddin Hashimi and Muhiyuddin Qadiri Zor in the 1920's and 1930's. Maulavi Abdul Haq as General Secretary of Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu and its journal *Urdu* also contributed to this rediscovery. An example of the domination of Delhi in the minds of our historians is the denial of due recognition to writers from outside Delhi and of centres of literary activity other than Delhi, except perhaps Lucknow for a certain period of time. Vali Dakani, or Gujrati (1667-68/1707-1708) whose poetry influenced, and actually kick-started the writing of serious Urdu poetry in Delhi has long been denied his founding role. Unconfirmed and clearly much later-than-the-event stories about Vali's being influenced by a Delhi based Persian poet have been accepted by practically all our historians. Jamil Jalibi has even tried to find for Vali a much later date of death, so that the "continuing influence of Delhi" on his poetry may be proved to the hilt.

It is a common assumption among our historians that wordplay, and particularly punning, are evil things. When they found that Urdu poets in Delhi in the eighteenth century showed a special predilection for all kinds of wordplay, they promptly invented a "movement" of *iham go'i* which raged in Delhi for some time until "reforms" were carried out by some graver spirits and saner minds. They didn't even try to state the reason or motivation for the "movement". When Shah Hatim (1699-1783) compiled his *Divan Zada* (Baby Divan, 1755) and in his short preface made a few remarks about what changes he considered desirable in the language of poetry and what he himself had done in this direction, our historians promptly discovered another "movement": one toward "reform of language" and "purging" or "purifying" it of Sanskritic and Braj Bhasha-based vocabulary and declared Hatim or Mirza Mazhar Jan-e Janan (1699-1781) to have spearheaded this "reform movement" without looking at the poetry itself. They didn't stop to read the poetry, nor did they appreciate that a poet, like all human beings, doesn't necessarily do what he says he does, and that there may have been literary politics underlying Hatim's pronouncements.

Later on, the enthusiastic accounts of our historians of the "movement for reform of language" established the myth that language is a wild or diseased creature in need of disciplining or treatment and it is not the people, but the Ustads who are instruments of change in language and who have the right to fashion, or trim, or improve the language.

In terms of political and social history, the Shah Hatim myth gave Urdu a bad press and strengthened the ongoing thesis that Urdu was an elitist language and that it looked down upon all localized languages like Awadhi or Braj Bhasha, and of course "Hindi", and in fact was a corruption of the true, pristine "Hindi".

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Another story that our historians have enthusiastically nurtured is that the empire was in a state of decline, if not anarchy and lawlessness throughout the eighteenth century. Delhi particularly experienced almost continuous pillage and rapine through the century. This, according to them, resulted in many things for Urdu literature: Poets left Delhi in large numbers, leaving it in a state of creative barrenness. Also, poets wrote a lot of sad poetry, and poetry of anguish and pain. The poetry of Mir was presented as the ultimate in sadness and downheartedness and a pessimistic view of life. Poets became inclined towards "inwardness" and mystical-sufistic thought. Poets described the pitiful state of affairs in the empire, especially Delhi in numerous *shahr ashob* poems, which were treated as historical evidence of the sorrowful mess that was Delhi's fate at that time. It was also a period of "moral decline" because while nautch girls had never had it so good, all kinds of homoerotic love also became popular all over the place. (Some historians kindly supplied the purdah system as the cause of all this outdoor promiscuity which is also reflected in the Urdu poetry of Delhi, conveniently forgetting that there was no purdah system in ancient Greece or in numerous other cultures which didn't feel uncomfortable with "nautch girls" or homoerotic love.)

All of this is either false, or only half true. But it has been a staple of our literary history texts for scores of years, and much of it can in fact be traced to as far back as *Ab-e Hayat*. However, these stories provided support, even if unconsciously, to the production of more stories. One of the stories was that of the "English peace" in Delhi in the nineteenth century for which Lake's victory over the Marathas in Delhi in 1803 provided a convenient starting point. This "English peace" provided the grounds for yet another fiction: the "Renaissance" when everything, including literature, began to flower and prosper in Delhi.

The conquest of Delhi more or less coincided with the start of publication activities at the College of Fort William in Calcutta. The works of Urdu prose that the British caused to be produced and published from the College were not intended to be works of literature. They were middle level pedagogical material for the Company's British civil servants. Our historians not only insisted on treating them as works of literature but also stated or implied that those works mark the beginning of modern Urdu prose which had so far been artificial, ornate, and not useful in a functional way. Although some later historians cited many works of plain, utilitarian Urdu prose from much before 1800, yet no historian took the trouble to assess the true literary and historical worth of the prose produced at Fort William. All of us continue to give inordinate attention to the College of Fort William as an important landmark in our literary history. In fact, but for the fact that some Fort William-produced Urdu works became course material for High School classes in Bengal around the latter half of the nineteenth century, the productions of Fort William would have remained where they deserve to be: in the margins of the history of Urdu literature.

The colonial-imperial agenda underlying the production of Urdu and "Hindi" works at the College of Fort William has been either ignored or scrutinized but perfunctorily. Indeed, there is no dearth of admirers for the various ideas expressed and steps taken by John Gilchrist in India's linguistic space, particularly the space occupied by Urdu. Similarly, the role of the College in

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setting up modern Hindi as a language separate and distinct from Urdu has remained largely unexplored.

The emergence of Lucknow, and then Calcutta as new centres of Urdu literature helped divert the historian's attention from the southern and eastern centres, especially Hyderabad, Aurangabad, and Vellore in the south and Allahabad, Azimabad and Murshidabad in the east. Mainline historians rarely let their gaze wander beyond Lucknow and Delhi. The result is that these areas are today below the horizon of the average student of Urdu literature. Very few of us know, for example, that Shah Ghulam Yahya Insaf Ilahabadi (d. 1780) wrote delightful comic verse and was perhaps the first Urdu poet to devote himself exclusively to comic poetry.

The migration of poets from Delhi to Lucknow was useful in another way. While Lucknow did become an important centre of Urdu literature from late eighteenth century, it could be claimed that Lucknow's rise was caused by Delhi which contributed so many brilliant writers to its literary scene. There were some tensions between the two cities, or cultures, and they were not due to literary disparities alone. For example, Insha in his *Darya-e Latafat* (1807) roundly condemned the Lucknow register of Urdu against the register of Delhi because he was implying that since his patron Navab Sa'adat Ali Khan's lineage was from Delhi, the Navab was the true representative of Delhi culture which was by definition superior to the culture of the far flung areas of the old empire. There was, however, no conscious effort on the part of Lucknow poets to differentiate themselves from the literary style and culture of Delhi.

All this changed when Abdus Salam Nadvi wrote his idiosyncratic, disorganized, but suave account of Urdu poetry in of his *She'r-ul Hind*. In volume I (1925) of this work he announced that there are two "schools" of Urdu poetry: Delhi and Lucknow. In a set of reckless generalizations summarizing the essential distinctions of the two "schools", Abdus Salam Nadvi pock marked the face of Lucknow forever. It is not clear if he was extensively read in the poetry of Delhi and Lucknow. His examples were mostly random and limited to a few poets. The poetry of Lucknow, he declared, was marked by *kharijiyat* (externalness) while the poetry of Delhi was marked by *dakhiliyat* (internalness). The former's main characteristics were: an inordinate fondness for wordplay which was mostly tasteless; exaggerated attention to items of female apparel and toiletry; low frequency and low intensity of Persianate phrases; lack of interest in sufistic and mystical themes; lack of interest in boys. All this became *Lakhnaviyat* (Lucknowness) against *Dihlaviyat* (Delhiness).

Although the term "two schools of Urdu poetry" did not gain universal currency, *Lakhnaviyat* and *Dihlaviyat* or *kharijiyat* and *dakhiliyat* as literary categories remain popular as articulate or inarticulate major premises among our historians.

The last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth centuries were the heyday of *khiyal bandi*, a mode somewhat similar to what became known as metaphysical poetry in English. It affected even senior poets like Mushafi (1750-1824) who said that he changed his style in preference to that of his disciple Atash (1777-1847) who wrote in a new mode which was extremely

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delectable. Lucknow's other great poet of the time was Nasikh (1776-1838), another *khiyal band* who commanded unrivalled prestige at that time. In spite of the two poets being almost indistinguishable in general characteristics, the story was spread that while Nasikh was practically a non-poet and chief of the detested *Lakhnaviyat*, Atash was actually a Sufi and an epitome of *Dihlaviyat*. Nasikh's reputation has not recovered to this day. Shah Nasir (1760/61-1838), the main initiator of *khiyal bandi* and Zauq (1788-1854) his great disciple, remain marginalized even though Muhammad Husain Azad seems to have loved Zauq just this side of idolatory.

The nineteenth century modernizers of Urdu literature questioned the worth and usefulness of the main genres of Urdu poetry, especially the ghazal. *Ab-e Hayat* (1880) and Hali's *Muqaddama- She'r o Sha'iri* (Preface to Poems and Poetry, 1893) achieved almost iconic status, especially with the younger writers, over the following three decades. In the 1920's we had two important successors of *Ab-e Hayat*: Hakim Abdul Hayy's *Gul-e Ra'na* (completed 1921, published 1923) and Abdus Salam Nadvi's *She'r-ul Hind* (volume I, 1925, volume II, 1926). *Gul-e Ra'na*'s author in fact echoed and elaborated upon the sub-title of *Ab-e Hayat*. Neither author said anything in defence of the ghazal, or any of the main genres of Urdu poetry. Nadvi, in fact, seemed to share with Hali his low opinion of the ghazal. Ram Babu Saksena, whose *History* (1927) Ralph Russell justly castigates, should be seen in this context. Having an extremely faulty understanding of Western (read English) poetry, and labouring under the twin pressure of colonial values and the retreat in the name of progress forced upon Urdu literature by the modernizers and their imitators, Saksena couldn't have had a worse time and place to start.

Both Azad and Hali believed that the race of old style Urdu poetry and all traditional Urdu literature actually, was run and a new phase in the life of Urdu literature must start, or had in fact started. One consequence of this conviction was that later accounts of Urdu literature tended to regard as unimportant or negligible all traditional-style writing produced during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and after. A whole host of brilliant writers were thus pushed into the background. Today, an average student of Urdu literature knows less about these writers than what he knows about those who came before. The tremendously sumptuous and extremely long prose romance *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* (published by Munshi Naval Kishor of Lucknow in 46 long volumes from 1881 to 1917) which should have been judged as the glory of the prose and imaginative writing in Urdu, and in fact in any language, was pushed far in the background and has remained there.

We have seen that Mir trashed the Dakanis, denying that they could even compose two mutually connected lines. Writing more than a century and a quarter later, Muhammad Husain Azad quoted a she'r from the Deccan and jeered that if this is poetry, Panjab has produced scores of poets, thus adding the Panjab to the list of the marginalized. However, no historian of Urdu literature paused to take an overview of Urdu literature outside the narrow axis of Delhi-Lucknow. To most of us, the image of Urdu literature is the image of sybaritic assemblies of people of leisure from Delhi or Lucknow. The Delhi orientation is so strong

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among us that when we have to name great poets in an informal way, we say "Ghalib and Mir". Major Dakani poets have still not made it to the canon.

Among others whose picture remains hazy or missing, one could mention the following: Women; Non-Muslim writers; Writers from the artisan or less privileged sections of society.

The term "Women" here includes both writers and their wives and daughters. Biographical details of writers featuring in our histories almost always lack details of the female side of their family. True, there is very little information about most of our writers before the twentieth century. Dates of birth and death even are hard to determine in many cases. Still, the writers themselves occasionally leave information about their family and such information should be taken out from their works and secured in histories. The great Dastan-narrator Muhammad Husain Jah (d. 1891/93) tells us about his daughter and son who died during the time that he spent composing volume III of *Tilism-e Hoshruha* (1888-89). One could however reply that Jah himself couldn't make the pages of most histories.

Most writings and movements which are not strictly "literary" do not generally get to be discussed in histories of literature. But they are important for a comparative young language like Urdu whose lands, moreover, suffered many cultural and political upheavals. Early translations from the Qur'an, religious-polemicist or plain religious writings of the three main parties involved in religious polemics or religious discourse: Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, are mentioned in passing, or not at all, even though they contributed hugely to the development of modern Urdu prose in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps their contribution was more significant than that of the prose produced at Fort William. For the texts of Fort William were read mostly by children outside the College, while the religious texts were directed toward the older and maturer sections of the population.

The writers of the so-called "Aligarh Movement" received extensive treatment, and rightly, but writers not connected with or not produced by the movement were often ignored.

Translation has always been an activity close to the Urdu writer's heart. Translations in Urdu began from the middle of the eighteenth century and became a whole discipline by the first quarter of the nineteenth. The first quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a new wave of translations. Since translations are not discussed separately as a literary activity, the student gets to know about translations only from discussions of individual authors. Except the most prominent, others fall between the cracks. For example, very few of us know that Tota Ram Shayan (d. 1880) of Lucknow made lengthy verse translations from the *Mahabharata* and *Shahnama*, in addition to collaborating with Asghar Ali Khan Nasim (1794-1864) in his verse translation of *Alf Lailah*. Translation became practically a genre in the nineteenth century, writers like Mastar Ram Chandar (1821-1880) and Maulavi Inayatullah (1869-1943) devoting their entire creative energies to translating hard sciences, histories, and novels into Urdu.

A proper descriptive-analytical discourse about the genres of Urdu literature would have gone a long way in dispelling the misunderstandings and

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misgivings of authors like Saksena, or Sadiq, or even Jamil Jalibi who is hostile to wordplay and looks down upon ghazals which do not display what Matthew Arnold called "high seriousness". Similarly, some attention to the numerous centres of Urdu literature, large and small, that began appearing all over the country from the eighteenth century would have resulted in breaching the unnatural privilege that Delhi and Lucknow enjoy to this day. The general rule seems to have been that the farther a place from Lucknow or Delhi, the smaller it should appear through the historian's telescope.

Then there were disabilities and prejudices created by literary geography. Insha was not alone in pouring scorn over Murshidabad: Delhi and Lucknow both seemed to believe that the noticeability of a place east of "our" city was a function of its distance from "our" city. While the "East" was, by common consent, ill bred and inelegant, the Deccan had nothing to do really with Urdu: the language of the Deccan was Dakani, not Urdu. Maulavi Syed Ahmad's (1846-1918) *Farhang-e Asifiya* (circa 1901 to 1908), the first substantial Urdu-Urdu dictionary compiled by an Indian, doesn't enter Dakani words. Some words of common North Indian speech are entered by him but are described as "rustic". Many of these very words are entered in the *Nurul Lughat* (1924-1934) of the Lucknow scholar Nurul Hasan Nayyar (1865-1936) without any such classification. Many of the words of the eastern register entered by Nurul Hasan Nayyar were in their turn declared "rustic" and "non-Urdu" by Asar Laknavi (1885-1967) in his *Farhang-e Asar* (1951).

By a curious coincidence, all-important writers on the origin and development of Urdu language and its implications for Urdu literature came from the Panjab, or from Western U.P. They were thus unfamiliar with the registers of Urdu prevalent in regions east of Lucknow. They thus missed many important features of the language of Delhi which fell into disuse over time but which are current in the eastern regions even today. For example, Fazl-e Ali Fazli's prose work *Karbal Katha* (circa 1732) contains many linguistic elements which the scholars have identified as peculiar to Dakani. Since Fazli never went to the Deccan, scholars have wondered where he could have picked so much Dakani. Had they been familiar with the eastern registers of Urdu, they would have seen that most of Fazli's "Dakanisms" are still current in the east. So Fazli picked up his so-called Dakani vocabulary right at his doorstep in Delhi. The same is the case with an earlier and much greater writer, Jafar Zataali (1659? -1713) who, incidentally, also wrote the first Urdu prose in the north.

This insight about commonalities between the Urdu of Delhi and of the east puts a different complexion on the relativities of growth and change between Delhi, Lucknow, the east, and the Deccan. Had our historians appreciated this, their approach to the different registers of Urdu and the literature produced in them would have been different.

Journal and newspapers, especially journals, are important to the history of Urdu because they facilitated Urdu literary culture's transition from orality to print and made the Urdu reader feel comfortable with, or at least less suspicious of the reality of Westernization and change. Even the *Tahzib-ul Akhlaq* (edited by Syed Ahmad Khan from 1870 to 1876, first series, and 1879 to 1881, second series),

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though not overtly literary, helped shape Urdu's new culture because Syed Ahmad Khan wrote essays on modern topics but also never missed out on any opportunity to run down or pour scorn on Urdu literature, especially Urdu poetry as *inutile* and retrograde. While specialized accounts do exist, the average student generally remains unaware of the role played by journals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in shaping literary opinion, widening the perspective of both Urdu readers and writers, and tilting Urdu away from premodern assumptions about the nature of literature. Also, it is a moot point whether the short story could have been established so quickly as a proper genre in Urdu without the support it enjoyed from influential Urdu journals in early twentieth century like *Zamana* of Kanpur, edited by Daya Narain Nigam and *Adib* (1910-1913) edited successively by Naubat Rai Nazar, Pyare Lal Shakir Merathi, and Hasir Azimabadi from Allahabad. The first forty years of *Zamana* (1903-1943) remain seminal.

Hasrat Mohani's (1875-1951) *Urdu-e Mu'alla* (first series, 1903-1913) helped save and preserve works of numerous premodern poets whose value is being increasingly recognized now. Hasrat's essays in *Urdu-e Mu'alla* helped provide some modern perspectives on Urdu poetry especially because Hasrat was a B.A. from Aligarh and also a disciple of the noted "Delhi-style" Ustad Amirullah Taslim (1819-1911) and was therefore seen as using authoritative classical as well as modern inputs in framing his judgements and opinions. Shaikh Abdul Qadir's (1872-1950) *Makhzan* (first series, 1901-1911) played an important role in promoting new writers and poets, including Iqbal, the popularity of whose early poetry owes much to *Makhzan* and Shaikh Abdul Qadir.

#### 4.

It's true that there can be no history of literature, or maybe history of anything, that is fully satisfactory. But given the fact that there is at present no history of Urdu literature of medium length, or any length, that takes cognizance of all or most of the issues raised here, I think I would be justified in praying that someone with more time and more competence than mine sit down and write just my kind of history of Urdu literature.

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