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PLAGIARIZE AND PROSPER – II

My previous note (<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?260108>) concerning the scandal swirling around Dr. Gopi Chand Narang's award-winning Urdu book on Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Eastern Poetics was based on the three Urdu articles by Imran Shahid Bhinder that appeared in various issues of the journal *Jadeed Adab* (published from Okriftel, Germany, and Delhi, and available on the web at <http://www.jadeedadab.com/>). Since then I have obtained a copy of the special issue of *'Akkas International*, #9 (2009), published from Islamabad (also available on the web: http://www.urdudost.com/library/index_mutafarrigat.php). Besides a fourth, well-documented essay by Bhinder, it includes some other interesting and revealing articles. (Incidentally, the correct name of Bhinder's university is: Birmingham City University.)

In one such article ("The Story of *Jadeed Adab* No. 12"), Haidar Qureshi, the editor of *Jadeed Adab*, reveals how he was forced to exclude from that particular issue material that was critical of Dr. Narang. "The previous four issues (Nos. 8, 9, 10, and 11)," Qureshi writes, "were published by Mustafa Kamal Pasha Sahib of the Educational Publishing House, Delhi.... I liked Pasha Sahib as my publisher. And so I sent him the final files of the 12th issue. It was printed in October 2008. But before it could go to the binders, Dr. Gopi Chand Narang put pressure upon the publisher by threatening legal action. Pasha Sahib, rightly, did not wish to be dragged into any litigation... And so the binding was stopped. Dr. Narang wanted that *Jadeed Adab* should not publish anything against him." And so only a censored version of the 12th issue came out in 2009. (Qureshi informs me that I was in error when I wrote the magazine was no longer published from Delhi. It still is, but under the contract it cannot include any article or letter that is critical of Dr. Narang.) After reproducing the censored letters, Qureshi concludes his essay by appealing to the Government of India to take notice of this act of blackmailing.

Qureshi's article also appeared in the Urdu quarterly *Asbat*, Mumbai, in its issue # 3, Dec. 2008–Feb. 2009. But it went unnoted—like Bhinder's three articles between July 2007 and October 2008—by the academics and authorities at the Aligarh Muslim University and Maulana Azad National Urdu University who conferred honorary degrees on Dr. Narang early this year.

The most interesting thing for me was to discover that, contrary to my earlier belief, Dr. Narang had in fact defended himself in print—in an interview given to Nand Kishore Vikram, the editor and publisher of *Adab-i-'Aliya International* ("Classics International"), a magazine infrequently published from Delhi. The interview appeared in its issue for April–June 2000; the relevant portion is reprinted in the special issue of *'Akkas International*, (p. 109). I immediately posted a translation in the 'Comments' to my first essay; here is a revised version:

Nand Kishore Vikram: People say that those who presented Structural Criticism

(*sakhtiyati tanqid*) in Urdu did so either through translation (*tarjuma*) or by means of adaptation (*akhz*) and summarization (*talkhis*). What do you say about that?

Gopi Chand Narang: When I began my work on “Theory” I was aware—my training is in Structural Linguistics (*sakhtiyati lisaniyat*)—that the fundamental requirement in Philosophy (*falsafa*) was Scientific Objectivity (*sa’insi ma’ruziyat*). I had before me many examples where people started with some talk of Philosophy but very soon began to soar on wings of Imagination, eventually becoming victims of their own silly inventions (*ijad-i-banda*). Many of them toiled to make themselves more prominent than the original texts, while others succumbed to their own writing style and wrote what would be called light entertaining essays (*insha’iya*). [The problem I faced] was that the needed terminology did not exist in Urdu. Secondly, the style of writing of the New Philosophers was so complex, so brimful with meaning, and so dense that it was a major issue for me to transfer it [into Urdu] with scientific accuracy and objectivity. In order to maintain the “Preciseness” and “Rigour”—[both words are in English in the original]—of their texts it was necessary for me to use all available means in my expositions (*afham-o-tafhim*; lit. “comprehension and explanation”), all the while avoiding—as it is required in the discipline of Philosophy—any coloration from my own imagination (*takhyil ki rang-amezi*) as well as any subjective flight of thought of my own (*mauzu’i khayal-bafi*). The first two parts of my book—[entitled “Structuralism” and “Post-Structuralism”]—are of the analytical kind (*tashrihi nau’iyat*). The third part—[entitled “Eastern Poetics”] and the final section [of conclusions] are of a very different nature. In my expositions of the New Philosophers and their ideas and insights I have unhesitatingly used *akhz* (“adaptation”) and *qubul* (“extraction;” lit. “acceptance”). Where it became necessary I also used *talkhis* (“abridgment”) and *tarjuma* (“translation”). In order to retain the force of the argument I have also quoted at many places from the original texts so that the philosophical issue or the insight of the thinker might reach the Urdu reader with its full impact. To every section of the book I have attached a bibliography of all its sources. Further, in the bibliographies, I have marked with a star the books that I used much more extensively than others. Let me make it clear: the ideas are not mine, they are of Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Roman Jakobson, Lacan, Derrida, Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva, Shklovsky, Bakhtin, etcetera. That is why I have dedicated my book to all the philosophers and thinkers whose ideas it consists of. And I have clearly indicated in my Introduction: “The concepts and ideas (*khayalat aur nazariyat*) are of the Philosophers, the understanding, explanation, and language (*afham-o-tafhim aur zuban*) are mine.”

Dr. Narang is right about the lack of established terminology in Urdu literary criticism. We must, therefore, take him at his precise word when he claims that the first two chapters of his book were “analytical” (*tashrihi*), and that what he had done as a whole was to first comprehend (*afham*) and then explain (*tafhim*)—in his own language (*zuban*), Urdu—the ideas and concepts of the people whom he calls the “New Philosophers.” That, however, is exactly what Bhinder has solidly refuted. According to him, only the language (Urdu) is Dr. Narang’s; the analysis and exposition are by other people—

Raman Selden, John Sturrock, Catherine Belsey, Terence Hawkes, and many more who find no mention in the interview. Nor are their names mentioned in the “Introduction” and the “Dedication.” They make only desultory appearances in the expository chapters, and seldom when whole lines of their English become Dr. Narang’s Urdu. To give just one example from the many that Bhinder meticulously identifies, Christopher Norris, in his book *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (3rd edition, London, 2002), writes on Derrida at some length on pages 18 and 19. Bhinder has quoted fifteen lines from those pages (*Akkas International*, #9, p. 87), and identified them as the original of ten lines in Dr. Narang’s book (pp.217–8). One might say that turning fifteen lines into ten was a nice act of summarization (*talkhis*), but what is one to make of the fact that every Urdu sentence in those ten lines is the exact translation—not a summary—of some sentence in the fifteen lines of English—and the Urdu sentences occur in the original English order?

When I looked up the Urdu pages cited by Bhinder, I found that Dr. Narang had actually mentioned Norris’s book two pages earlier, calling it “the best and most comprehensive” book on “Deconstruction.” It is also listed in the bibliography of his sources for the chapter. The book is starred—as explained by him above—but then so is also Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, listed two names below Norris. No page numbers are listed in either case. Are we then to assume that Dr. Narang used Norris and Wittgenstein equally extensively in his “analysis” and “exposition” of Derrida’s ideas?

Rereading Bhinder’s first article in the special issue of *Akkas International* and checking its accuracy, I stumbled upon something else. On pages 29 and 30 of the journal, Bhinder states that Dr. Narang had extensively translated passages from Catherine Belsey’s introductory textbook, *Critical Practice*. One of the examples he cites is this passage in Belsey’s book:

Saussure’s argument depends on the different division of the chain of meaning in different languages. ‘If words stood for pre-existing concepts they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next; but this is not true’ (Saussure, 1974: 116). The truth is that different languages divide or articulate the world in different [ways]. Saussure gives a number of examples. For instance, where French has the single word *mouton*, English differentiates between *mutton*, which we eat, and *sheep*, which roams the hills. (pp. 36–37.)

I compared it with the passage he mentions in the Urdu book (p. 68). The Urdu is a meticulous translation of the English—it even includes the page number in Saussure’s book, which, as Bhinder points out, creates the false impression that Dr. Narang was quoting directly from Saussure. As I compared Dr. Narang’s page 68 with Catherine Belsey’s page 39 (a different edition from what Bhinder used), I realized that Dr. Narang had twice done the same injustice earlier. In support of Saussure’s argument Belsey had quoted more examples as given by Jonathan Culler and Louis Hjelmslev in their separate books—properly acknowledged by Belsey. Dr. Narang has translated those examples, without mentioning Belsey, and then cited the page numbers given by her as if he were quoting directly from Culler and Hjelmslev.

But what really surprised me was on the opposite page (p. 69), where Dr. Narang, leaving the safety of translation, offers his own examples for Saussure's contention. "If we wish to see," Dr. Narang begins, "there is no lack of such examples even in Urdu where words are similar but meanings are different. Just take [the terms for] kinship. *Baba* is used in Urdu for 'father,' the same as *Abba*, while in Hindi it is used for 'grandfather.'" He then goes on in that vein for the next 13 lines, citing how some words mean one thing in Urdu but quite another in Arabic, from which Urdu borrowed them. Apparently, Dr. Narang totally failed to comprehend (*afham*) Saussure's radical notion that different languages *divide the world* differently—even after Belsey further explained it by citing examples given by Culler and Hjelmslev. (A correct example for Urdu readers would have been how Urdu divides the world of "parents' siblings" into *chacha*, *phuphi*, *mamun*, and *khala*, while English divides the same world into "Uncle" and "Aunt.")

Dr. Gopi Chand Narang is presently a "Member, Advisory Committee on Culture, Government of India," which is symptomatic of the bigger, truly serious issue: the utterly cynical and self-serving attitude of a great many people who walk the corridors of power in New Delhi, wearing cloaks labeled "Culture" and "Education" and bartering favours among themselves. The big issue is not the individual, who did what he considered was necessary in order to prosper in Indian academia and win patronage from politicians. Let us also not forget that it was the literati of India who chose Dr. Narang to preside at the Sahitya Akademi, over Mahashweta Devi, one of India's most honest and courageous writers. The rot has settled deep and at many places, and unless more people begin to protest, challenge, and condemn publicly what they shake their heads over privately, nothing much is going to change in Education and Culture.