

PLAGIARIZE AND PROSPER

There was a time when people wrote a literary piece and then ascribed it to someone whom they held in high esteem out of love, admiration, reverence or some other strong sentiment. Jalaluddin Rumi wrote a magnificent volume of ghazals but did not put his name to it. It has always been known as *Diwan-i-Shams-i-Tabriz* (The Diwan of Shams of Tabriz). An unknown poet wrote another, smaller *diwan* of ghazals and ascribed it to Khwaja Mu'inuddin Chishti of Ajmer. Later some other people concocted 'table-talks' of some of the Chishti Sufis and circulated them as genuine collections. In Urdu literary history, two examples of something similar immediately come to mind. When Muhammad Husain Azad desired to publish a definitive edition of the ghazals of Shaikh Ibrahim 'Zauq,'—the first poet laureate of Bahadur Shah 'Zafar'—he felt no qualms in composing new ghazals and verses to fill in the gaps he felt his beloved master would have filled in himself. Then there is the fascinating case of one of the foremost modern poets in Urdu: when Sana'allah Dar took on the name "Miraji" after a woman named Mira whom he obsessively loved, he might have had in mind the exemplary bond between Rumi and Shams.

Urdu literary culture, however, has known many more cases where someone took the work of another person and claimed it as his own. Particularly among the poets. The practice of *ustadi/shagirdi* in Urdu poetry encouraged it. Many an *ustad* or master poet earned his meager living by giving away his verses to his pupils or *shagird*, who in turn provided for his needs. Some *ustad* openly sold verses to anyone who came with money the night of a *musha'ira* (a gathering of poets). A nawab or king would appoint some good poet as his *ustad* and then quite as a norm expect him to put together a volume of ghazals in his name. It also happened in prose. Imam Bakhsh 'Sahba'i', a contemporary of Ghalib and teacher at the famous Delhi College, reportedly wrote for a Mughal prince a *tazkira* or account of the poets of his time. The book, *Gulistan-i-Sukhan*, carries the name of Qadir Bakhsh 'Sabir' as its author, but Ghalib always referred to it as "Sahba'i's *tazkira*." Much later, when the Anjuman-i-Taraqqi-i-Urdu ("Association for the Development of Urdu") published *The Standard English-Urdu Dictionary* in 1937, the organization's Secretary, Maulvi Abdul Haq (a.k.a "Father of Urdu"), put his own name on the cover as its editor, instead of the Anjuman's. But at least he was honest enough to clearly acknowledge in the Introduction that the work had mainly been done by Dr. Abid Husain of Jami'a Millia. Since then, however, things have been going downhill in Urdu, particularly in its academia. The late Azhar Ali Farooqui of Allahabad earned his living by writing Ph.D. dissertations for others, with the full knowledge of the university's professors. I personally witnessed how he worked.

In the old literary culture plagiarism of the ordinary kind was also common and not made much of. The stakes were not high then. But now the stakes are quite high in the academic world. Ambitious university teachers no longer can make do by merely taking

care of their patron's grocery shopping and milk cows—I witnessed both at Aligarh. Now they must publish “research” in order to get coveted promotions and titles. Sadly, quite a few take to plagiarism as the shortest route. I became involved in the case of one such ambitious academic at Aligarh back in the early 1980s. The Department of Urdu, Aligarh Muslim University, had obtained some money from the government for a professorship in Aesthetics, and advertised the job. One of the candidates was a Reader in the department, who was far better known for his fiction than research—he wrote at least one superb novella that will always be admired. In no time that gentleman managed to publish a volume on Urdu Aesthetics. I was most surprised when I came across the book in our library at the University of Chicago. Having known the person since our shared college days, I couldn't imagine him as the author of the book. A couple of hours of digging around in the library solved the mystery. The talented academic had taken a well-known book on Aesthetics in English by a Bengali scholar and diligently translated most of it into Urdu. Dutifully I prepared a short article, presenting page-and-line references to the original. It was published in Urdu, and received plenty of notice. But nothing actually happened. The gentleman didn't get the job—no one did, as I remember—but he went on to become a full professor, and soon chaired the department for a while. Needless to say he received—justly, I must add—a ‘Padma Shri’ as a fiction-writer.

Presently the Urdu literary/academic world has been violently shaken by what must be termed “the mother of all plagiarisms” in Urdu. Instead of the out of fashion field of Aesthetics, it is the currently much more fashionable field of Literary Theory that is at issue, and the person at the ‘heart of darkness’ is no less than Dr. Gopi Chand Narang, Professor Emeritus, Delhi University, who from 2003 to 2007 presided over the Sahitya Akademi and has received two “Padma” awards from the Indian state—the latest being “Padma Bhushan” in 2004. (A full list of his honours and publications may be seen at his website <http://gopichandnarang.com/>. At the center of the scandal is the book *Sakhtiyat, Pas-i-Sakhtiyat Aur Mashriqi Shi'riyat* (“Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and Eastern Poetics”), for which Dr. Narang received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1995. Though the title suggests that it might be a comparative study, bringing out the commonalities and oppositions between two contemporary Western literary/linguistic theories and their counterparts in Sanskrit and Urdu—a rather curious undertaking—but in reality it only describes and explains the three topics in the book's title, and the major thinkers who contributed to them.

As far back as 1997, an Indian Urdu critic named Fuzail Ja'fari had explained in some detail how Dr. Narang's book shied away from original thinking and analysis, limiting itself simply to what X wrote and Y said in Western languages (*Zahn-i-Jadid*, Delhi, #22-3). In fact, he described the book as a “compilation” (*talif*), adding that it was not an original piece of writing (*tasnif*). Now a young scholar Imran Shahid Bhinder, a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at the University of Birmingham, U.K., has made a much more serious charge. Bhinder published in 2006 in the annual issue of *Nairang-i-Khayal*, a Pakistani journal, an essay entitled “Gopi Chand Narang is a Translator, not an Author.” A year later, a revised and expanded version of the essay appeared in the journal *Jadeed Adab* (July–December, 2007), which at the time was printed at New Delhi—now allegedly stopped under pressure from certain people—and published from Germany. (It

is also available on the web: <http://www.jadeedadab.com>). In 2008 Bhinder published two more articles in *Jadeed Adab*, the first in its January–June issue, entitled “Plagiarism in Urdu Literature – How Long will it be Defended?” and the second in the July–December issue, entitled “Gopi Chand Narang’s ‘Truth’ and ‘Context’ [as] Thievery.” Both articles found plenty of circulation in both India and Pakistan, and excerpts were reproduced in a couple of Indian journals. Now a Pakistani journal, *Akkas*, published from Islamabad, has brought out a special issue devoted to Dr. Narang’s oeuvre and career, including a more detailed analysis by Bhinder. (Also available on the web: http://www.urdudost.com/library/index_mutafarriqat.php)

In summary, Bhinder has most convincingly established that Dr. Narang’s achievement in that award-winning book is not that of an author but only of a translator, and that too of a reprehensible kind. According to Bhinder, Dr. Narang did not read the original authors—Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude LeviStrauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and others). He read only their well-known interpreters, and then transferred the latter’s analyses and interpretations into Urdu, doing so verbatim and without giving the reader any indication of what he was doing. In his third article mentioned above, Bhinder has given extraordinary details of the Dr. Narang’s “authorial” enterprise. He has quoted excerpts from the Urdu book and then placed them next to their unacknowledged English original. Further, he has listed with precision the countless pages in Dr. Narang’s book that correspond almost word-for-word with the English pages of American and British scholars. For example, pages 79–106, 234–240, 243–267, and 288–329 of Dr. Narang’s book, according to Bhinder, are exact translations of pages 27–42, 149–158, 86–103, and 49–70, of Raman Selden’s book, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (1985). The other exploited scholars that Bhinder similarly identifies are Terence Hawke, Catherine Belsey, John Sturrock, Jonathan Culler, Christopher Norris, and Robert Scholes. (I must add that Bhinder’s critique has some other dimensions too that are important and relevant for all academics in a general manner. See: <http://pakaffairs.com/about-2/>.)

The evidence Bhinder presents is quite irrefutable. When, for example, I checked the pages he points out in Selden’s book, they indeed turned out to be the unacknowledged source of Dr. Narang’s remarks. I also stumbled upon something equally interesting. Dr. Narang has a note on Michel Foucault (pp. 193–8) in the second chapter in his “Book Two,” i.e. the second section of his book. The text on pages 194–6, as pointed out by Bhinder, is merely a translation of pages 158–9 in Selden’s book. I checked the “sources” that Dr. Narang’s has helpfully listed for each chapter, and found that he does list Raman’s book as a source for that particular chapter. And gives exact page numbers too: 79–84 and 98–102. The first reference, however, turned out to be where Selden discusses Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. The second was equally curious: in Selden’s book, page 98 deals with Frederic Jameson, but pages 99–102 contain only a bibliography. Again, the opening paragraph of Dr. Narang’s note on Jonathan Culler (pp. 318–9) is, as per Bhinder, entirely Selden’s (p. 62). But in the sources, Selden’s name is listed with page numbers 106–27! In other words, while Dr. Narang twice went to the trouble of indicating precise—though unrelated—pages in Selden’s book, he somehow failed to include the pages he had actually abused.

Bhinder's charges are extremely serious. They are also thoroughly documented. First made three years ago, his accusation has remained unchallenged—unlike in the past when the slightest criticism of Dr. Narang promptly produced a spate of articles in his defense and diatribes against the critic. This time he and his admirers are remarkably silent. And for good reason. They understand that any attempt would only bring more notoriety. Sadly, they also know that the academic circles in India in general, and the university departments of Urdu in particular, take no notice of inconvenient details. With them it is always “business as usual.” After all, soon after Bhinder's original article came out in 2006, Dr. Narang received the degree of ‘D.Litt. *Honoris Causa*' from the Central University at Hyderabad. Then after two more articles, two similar honorary degrees were conferred on him in the past six months, by the Maulana Azad National Urdu University and the Aligarh Muslim University.

Sahitya Akademi has an excellent policy of making its award-winning books available in other major languages of India, including English. Dr. Narang's book received the award some fourteen years ago, but, to my knowledge, it has so far been translated only into Hindi (2000). May I ask the Akademi to do a major favour to Urdu letters? Marathi and Bengali scholars, in my experience, are usually far more knowledgeable about modern and pre-modern literary theories than an average Urdu academic. (I very much include myself among the latter.) The Akademi should have Dr. Narang's award-winning book translated into both Bengali and Marathi so that it can properly be judged by his peers in India. Given the international protocols on copyright, however, an English translation might not be advisable at this time.
