

TWENTIETH-CENTURY URDU LITERATURE¹

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This introductory summary, of the course of Urdu literature in the twentieth century must continuously refer back to the nineteenth. This becomes necessary because, depending on one's point of view, it was Urdu's destiny or misfortune to gradually become identified as the *lingua franca* of the Muslims of India in the latter half of the last century. Consequently, the still unresolved dilemmas of the politics of Muslim identity in South Asia are difficult to separate from their expression in and through the development of Urdu.

For our purposes then, the most significant consequence of the failed rebellion of 1857 was the gradual emergence of group identity among the recently politically dispossessed and culturally disoriented Muslim elite of North India. This effort to define Indian Muslim nationhood in the new colonial environment placed issues of past, present and future identity at the center of elite Muslim concerns. Not only were these concerns expressed largely in Urdu, but the literary legacy of Urdu formed the terrain through and on which some of the more significant debates were conducted. The Muslim leadership that emerged after 1857 looked to this pre-colonial literary legacy as an authentic, but highly problematic repository of the Indian Muslim identity; and the Urdu language itself as the most effective medium for the renewal and reform of the Muslims of British India. As Muslim identity politics gathered strength in colonial India, and Urdu was turned into the print language of the emerging nation, discussions of an apparently purely literary nature became a veritable mirror of ideological and sociopolitical change among India's Muslims. For example, calls for the reform of pre-colonial Urdu poetics mirrored analogous reform initiatives in the religious, social, and political spheres. This relationship has continued, in different ways, since the division of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947. It is this ongoing dialogue between the reform of Urdu and issues of Muslim identity that I will attempt to highlight here as the major literary trends, works and writers in Urdu in the twentieth century are surveyed.

¹I wish to thank Professor C. M. Naim for his comments on an earlier version of this paper. I am also grateful to Faisal Fatehali Devji, Osman Qureshi, and M. Mustafa Ulucan for their helpful remarks. Of course, I alone am responsible for the views expressed herein.

Origins

The origins of Urdu are a matter of some dispute among scholars. Depending on which of the numerous linguistic, historical, literary, and geographically diverse sources scholars make use of, many plausible speculations are possible. The minimal explanation on which most scholars agree, and which is probably the least misleading, is that a literary written language similar to what we now call Urdu, gradually began to replace Persian in importance in early eighteenth century Delhi; and "...while still resting firmly on its Indic grammatical and lexical base, was steadily enlarging its repertoire of Persian genres and imagery."² From Delhi and nearby Agra this literary Urdu spread to Avadh, Panjab, the Deccan, and Bihar. In time, Lucknow, Lahore, and Hyderabad, as well as Delhi, became major centers of Urdu publishing and scholarship. Before the eighteenth century various dialects of a proto-Urdu were probably widely spoken over a very wide geographic area across India.

In other explanations, the emergence of Urdu has been traced as far back as the first arrival of Persianized Muslims into North India in the eleventh century; to the introduction of Arabic, Persian and Turkish expressions into the local Indian languages over the centuries; and to areas as diverse as the Deccan, Gujarat, the Ganga-Jamuna region and Panjab.³ Still others hold the view that the mixture of West Asian and Indic linguistic and literary traditions took place at the Mughal court, especially in the military camp and market place on the environs of the Delhi fort and the court of Shahjahan (r. 1628-1658).⁴ The word Urdu itself is of Turkish origin and refers to a military camp. It only came into sole usage at the end of the nineteenth century. Until the nineteenth century Urdu was also known by a number of other names including *Khari Boli*, *Braj Bhasha*, *Zaban-i Urdu-yi Mu'allah*, *Rekhtah*, *Dehlavi*, *Dakkani*, *Gujri*, *Lahori*, *Hindavi*, *Hindi*, *Hindustani*, etc.⁵ In its literary variant Urdu is most commonly written in the *nasta'liq* style of the Arabic alphabet, which was borrowed from Indo-Persian.

In short, by defining Urdu essentially in terms of the grafting of West Asian and classical Islamic linguistic and literary traditions onto Indic, local, and largely colloquial languages, Urdu scholars agree to place Urdu firmly at the points of Muslim interaction with and experience in South Asia. For example, the Urdu literary canon, with its

²Frances W. Pritchett, Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 4.

³For a detailed discussion see Annemarie Schimmel, Classical Urdu Literature from the Beginning to Iqbal, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975), and Anvar Sadeed, Urdu Adab ki Mukhtasar Tareekh, (Islamabad: Muqtadirah Qaumi Zaban, 1991).

⁴Sadeed, p. 41.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 51.

emphasis on works of West Asian expression and its exclusion of works in local dialects, is an apparent but little examined reflection of this view. The process of formation of this now generally accepted canon in the nineteenth century holds important implications for Urdu's close ties to Muslim nationalism in South Asia.⁶

Consequences of 1857

The failure of the rebellion against British rule by sections of the North Indian populace resulted in incalculable loss and tragedy for Delhi's Muslims in particular, and for large sections of the Muslim elite of North India generally. Delhi had served as the symbol of local sociopolitical autonomy and as the cultural capital of Mughal India. After their victory over the rebels, the British mainly held the Muslims of Delhi and surrounding areas responsible for the revolt. Many Muslim notables were executed. Muslim institutions in Delhi, including libraries, were destroyed, while the majority of the Muslim population was expelled from Delhi. According to one commentator, [t]he savage British suppression of the Mutiny and Rising, with its destruction of Delhi as a center of Muslim culture, and the dispersion of the descendants of Akbar and Aurangzib by execution and exile, at last forced educated Muslims to realize not only that the British were in India to stay, but also that they intended to stay on their own terms.⁷

The traumatic events of that summer represented the final passing away of an age for the Muslim elite, and initiated moves to adjust to European rule, with its technological superiority and efforts to rule over India through the introduction of administrative and educational reforms. For the next half-century Urdu's fortunes were intertwined with moves to come to terms with the colonial regime and with efforts at Muslim reform.

Aligarh Movement and Its Critics

Muslim efforts to adopt Western knowledge while attempting to retain traditional values were led by Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) and his successful movement to set up a college for Muslim gentlemen at Aligarh along modern educational lines (1877).⁸ Through his writings and political activity and, later, through the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, Sayyid Ahmad attempted to convince fellow Muslims that if they hoped to reverse their declining fortunes they

⁶C. M. Naim, "Urdu in the Pre-modern Period: Synthesis or Particularism?" New Quest (Bombay, 1978), No. 6, pp. 5-12.

⁷P. Hardy, The Muslims of British India, (Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 61.

⁸For dates of birth and death I have relied on Shamsur Rahman Faruqi and Frances W. Pritchett, compilers, "A Date List for Urdu Literature - A Work in Progress," Annual of Urdu Studies, (1994), No. 9, pp. 173-211. When the date of birth is given it indicates that the person is living, otherwise only the date of death is used.

must assimilate European thought, and understand that the bases for Western worldly success lay in nineteenth century rationalism. He argued that Muslim religious beliefs, if rationally understood, did not necessarily conflict with Western insights, but Muslims must still reform their political, social, cultural, and moral values when contradicted by more rational and “natural” Victorian modes of thought and conduct.

Sayyid Ahmad was of the view that a selective adoption of Western science and rationality would allow the depressed Muslim elite to begin to improve its lot. To this end, he adopted a clear, precise and functional language for his forceful reformist essays, and avoided the ornate and plastic language of the Mughal court. Precedents for Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s style exist in the large number of translations from European languages into Urdu that took place at Delhi College (founded in 1825), and in the Urdu works compiled under the supervision of John Gilchrist (d. 1841) at Fort William College in Calcutta (founded in 1800).⁹ Sayyid Ahmad’s writing may also have been inspired by the unaffected prose of the letters of Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (d. 1869), and the religious tracts of Shah Isma’il (d. 1831). Moreover, his utilitarian views of language, in turn, influenced a whole generation of writers in Urdu. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was a prolific writer and produced works on a wide range of topics, including theology, architecture, archaeology, politics, and apologetics, etc. *Tahzeeb-ul-Ikhlāq*, the journal he started in 1870, and which remained in publication for twelve years, contains the best examples of his writing style and views.

To resist Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s westernizing influences among Muslims, a group of Muslim *‘ulama* or learned scholars founded a religious seminary in the small district town of Deoband, north of Delhi, in 1867.¹⁰ While Deoband accepted the reality of British political rule, it sought to preserve correct Muslim belief and practice in the face of a rapidly changing society. Its devotion to a revival of Islamic practice and learning soon manifested itself in a mushrooming of similar institutions in North India, and Deoband itself attracted students from all over India. Since the language of instruction in these *madaris* or schools was Urdu, and much of the popular religious proselytizing and debate against Aligarh or competing religious groups was also conducted in Urdu, these religious institutions (and other religious reform movements) should also be credited with the rapid spread of Urdu in the nineteenth century. Deoband’s founder Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi (d. 1880) matched Sayyid Ahmad in

⁹Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1964; 2nd revised ed., 1984), pp. 290-291, 315-318.

¹⁰On Deoband’s services to Urdu see Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India, Deoband, 1860-1900*, (Princeton University Press, 1982).

the sobriety of his argumentation and writing style. He counted among his followers Mahmudul Hasan (d. 1920) who participated in the founding of *Jamia Miliyah* in Delhi in 1920 which combined elements of Aligarh and Deoband, and became a center of language instruction in Urdu; and Ashraf Ali Thanvi (d. 1943), who in turn influenced a whole generation of followers largely through his careful pedagogic style and religious charisma. His influence was spread by his copious writings which were learned and easy to understand. His *Bihishti Zavar* (1906), a reform manual for women, is a classic and best-selling example of his style.¹¹

Hali's Revolution

Before Altaf Husain Hali (d. 1914) unleashed his wide-ranging condemnation of Urdu literature in his *Muqaddamah-i Sher o Sha'iri* in 1893, Muhammad Husain Azad (d. 1910) had already shown the way through his influential history and anthology of Urdu poetry, *Ab-i Hayat* (1880). Azad was not directly connected with the Aligarh movement, but had come under the influence of reformist ideas through his association with the *Anjuman-i Panjab* in Lahore, where he had moved from Delhi in 1864. As part of his activities for the Anjuman, Azad wrote and lectured extensively on the need to reform Urdu literature so that it would be better able to bear the demands of the new society. "Azad made a passionate appeal for the avoidance of abstract themes, high flights of imagination, and complex traditional metaphors which he saw as outworn."¹² Sayyid Ahmad Khan also praised Azad for his efforts to bring Urdu closer to a simpler and natural style, and for his critique of the artificiality of traditional poetry.¹³

Like Azad, Hali was also influenced by the British educators associated with the Anjuman-i Panjab during his brief stay in Lahore. This reformist zeal combined with a deep admiration for Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his reform movement to ensure that Hali would go even beyond Azad, whose work he admired, in his call for a new poetics that would serve the interests of the emerging Muslim community. The one continuous strand in the *Muqaddamah* is the call for a poetry that is able to reflect changes taking place in Indo-Muslim society, and which can be true and natural. Hali stood for a careful editing of the literary tradition to save only those elements that were morally

¹¹For an abridged translation, but an informative introduction and commentary see Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's Bihishti Zavar*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Also her "Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi and Urdu Literature," Christopher Shackle, ed., *Urdu and Muslim South Asia*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹²Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "Modern Urdu Literature," K. M. George, ed., *Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology*, (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1992), Vol. 1, p. 422.

¹³Pritchett, p. 38.

uplifting and socially useful.¹⁴ While Hali did not call for a complete rejection of traditional poetry,

[d]rawing upon what he thought were reliable sources for western literary theory, and also making abundant reference to Arabic and Persian where it suited his argument, [he] created a literary theory which was an odd combination of Platonic idealism and Benthamite utilitarianism. He found much in Urdu literature that was morally unsatisfactory, artistically weak, and almost utterly useless as an instrument of social change ... But the reason for the tremendous influence of Hali's thought was not so much the power of his logic as the emotional and mental state of his audience.¹⁵

Hali's ideas were widely discussed and largely accepted, and the subsequent history of Urdu literature became an endeavor to come to terms with Hali's vision in myriad ways.¹⁶

One of the major consequences of Hali's critique was a devaluation of the lyric or *ghazal* form in Urdu poetry which is fundamentally concerned with the concept of '*ishq* or love in the widest sense. The *ghazal* had been the major component of Urdu literature and poets such as Mir Taqi Mir (d. 1810) and Ghalib had produced *ghazal* poetry of the highest standards. Moreover, the universe of the *ghazal* form apparently contained within it the ideals of Indo-Muslim culture that had developed in the Mughal period, and which were now being viewed with ambivalence by the Muslim community, which saw them as impotent and debilitating in face of the colonial onslaught.¹⁷ Probably for this very reason Azad and Hali picked on the *ghazal* as the major target of their criticism, and through it of the pre-colonial legacy as a whole. Yet, the ambivalence of the reformists about modernizing while retaining traditional values was also visible here. For example, the attraction of the *ghazal* was such that neither Hali nor Azad could quite escape its charms; and Hali, for instance, continued writing traditional *ghazals* of a high order. Hali also tried to write *ghazals* based on his

¹⁴Laurel Steele, "Hali and His *Muqaddamah*: The Creation of a Literary Attitude in Nineteenth Century India," *Annual of Urdu Studies*, (1981), No. 1, pp. 1-45. Steele appends a summary of the *Muqaddamah* in English translation.

¹⁵Faruqi, p. 424.

¹⁶See Pritchett for an excellent discussion of the views and legacy of Hali and Azad. Also Saleem Ahmad, "The *Ghazal*, A Muffler, and India," John A. Hanson, tr., *Annual of Urdu Studies*, (1982), No. 2, pp. 53-83.

¹⁷This appears to be Askari's thesis. For instance, see Muhammad Hasan Askari, "*Mazedar Sha'ir*," *Sitarah ya Badban*, (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1977, original ed., Karachi, 1963.), pp. 197-229. Faruqi seems to be making a similar point in the introductory material to his monumental selection of and commentary on Mir's *ghazal* poetry. See Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Sher Shor Angez*, (Delhi: Taraqqi-yi Urdu Bureau, 1990-1994), 4 vols.

recommendations for the reform of poetry and was the first to introduce overtly reformist themes into the ghazal. Nevertheless, his poetic genius really showed in his long narrative poems after the Western fashion, especially his immortal *Musaddas-i Madd-o Jazr-i Islam* (1879), which traced the rise and decline of the Muslims and tried to exhort them to change their old ways. The *Musaddas* also condemned past literature for its decadence.

Hali's Contemporaries

Prose: Shibli Nomani (d. 1914) was associated with Sayyid Ahmad Khan's reformist efforts, and like other nineteenth century Indian Muslims he too was internally ambivalent about the wholesale rejection of the pre-colonial heritage. He eventually became a powerful critic of the excesses of Aligarh and tried to steer a middle path between Deoband and Aligarh through his association with the *Nadwat-ul 'Ulama* in Lucknow (founded in 1894). Although he wrote scholarly works of literary criticism, they never commanded as much influence as Hali's seemingly more relevant views.¹⁸ Nevertheless, his literary work is important for the emphasis it places on the centrality of classical Islamic literature, especially Persian, as the model for a reforming Urdu. In Shibli we observe a demotion of Urdu as the Indian Muslims' language of identity in favor of an imagined West Asian golden tradition. Instead of rejecting the literary heritage completely, Shibli divides it into the non-Indic older, and the more recent decadent Indic, and views the former as more properly constitutive of Indo-Muslim identity. Therefore, while Shibli complicates Hali's blanket critique of the tradition by viewing earlier portions of it as more progressive, he does so by strengthening the distinction between the West Asian and Indic parts of Indo-Muslim identity. Finally, Shibli's great contribution lies in his introduction into Urdu of Western methods of research and historical criticism through his writings on Islamic history, which are still valuable as much for their content as for their style.¹⁹

The didactic novels of another contemporary, Nazeer Ahmad (d. 1912), are straightforward application of the Aligarh philosophy of "...productive work, socially responsible behavior, frugality, and a code of conduct which had very little place for pleasure, and none for levity."²⁰ His novels are the first in Urdu and were instantly successful, especially *Mira't-ul Uroos* (1869), *Taubat-un Nusuh* (1877), and *Banat-un Na'sh*

¹⁸The two most important being *Mavazannah-i Anees o Dabeer* (1907) and the five volume *Sher-ul Ajam* (1906-1908).

¹⁹For example *Al-Faruq* (1899), the incomplete *Sirat-un Nabi*, and a collection of essays *Rasail-i Shibli* (1898).

²⁰Faruqi, p. 425.

(1873), but were paradoxically accompanied by *Ibn-ul Vaqt* (1888) which savagely satirized the imitation of English manners and customs and the excesses of reform.²¹ Both Hali and Nazeer Ahmad were particularly interested in the reform of Muslim households through the education and proper training of women.²²

Like them, the novelist Rashidul Khairi (d. 1936) also wrote against useless customs and superstitious beliefs on the part of women, exhorted them to serve as sensible guardian-educators of their households, and saw the home as the sanctuary of the Muslims' identity.²³ In contrast to Nazeer Ahmad's satire, Khairi adopted a more emotional style.

Nazeer Ahmad was also followed by Ratan Nath Dar Sarshar's (d. 1902) attempts to mold the oral romance (*dastan*) tradition into the novel form, by the historical novels of Abdul Halim Sharar (d. 1926), and the social novels of Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva (d. 1931), especially *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899), a novel about the experiences of a reformed Lucknow courtesan.

Poetry: Paradoxically, the efforts of Hali and Azad to reform the Urdu poetic tradition gave rise to a new breed of poets who used their newly acquired socially responsible literary talents to criticize Sayyid Ahmad's political loyalty to the crown and reformist excesses. They did this precisely within the modern framework of Hali's reformed and reformist spirit. As already noted, Hali himself continued to write ghazals in the traditional mode while composing his ameliorative poems. Similarly, the colonial government service had in its employ Urdu's greatest satirical poet, Akbar Allahabadi (d. 1921). Akbar also wrote traditional ghazals of great worth, but adopted the Halian poem to point to deeper philosophical inconsistencies in the reformist movement. Akbar's vitriolic wit made his poetry instantly popular, and allowed him to express his opposition to colonial rule coupled with telling criticisms of modernization.

Like Akbar, Hasrat Mohani (d. 1951) was also an inconsolable opponent of colonial rule, but his objections to Hali's aims were of a more literary nature. Hasrat

²¹For a discussion of Nazeer Ahmad see C. M. Naim, "Prize-Winning *Adab*: A Study of Five Urdu Books Written in Response to the Allahabad Government Gazette Notification," Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 290-314.

²²For details see Faisal Fatehali Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform in Muslim India, 1857-1900," *South Asia*, (1991), Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 141-153. For Hali's views on women see Altaf Husain Hali, *Voices of Silence: English Translations of Majalis-un Nisa and Chup ki Dad*, Gail Minault, tr. & ed., (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986).

²³For details see Gail Minault, "*Ismat*: Rashidul Khairi's Novels and Urdu Literary Journalism for Women," in Christopher Shackle, ed., *Urdu and Muslim South Asia*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).

sought to defend Urdu poetry from Hali's criticisms but without the latter's theoretical sophistication. Rather, Hasrat's real contribution was to struggle with the legacy of the ghazal in his own poetry. He saw the ghazal as fundamentally love poetry, and stressed its continuing ability to appeal to people's emotions with great facility. Hasrat is a ghazal poet of some distinction and was the first "... to introduce overtly political themes in the ghazal," as well as revivifying it more generally.²⁴ Hasrat was also active in compiling and editing the works of poets of the classical period. Braj Narayan Chakbast (d. 1926) and Isma'il Mairthi (d. 1917) adopted the new narrative or descriptive poem, and experimented with form and theme to pave the way for the powerful populist poetic expression of opposition to colonial rule during the Khilafat movement.

Khilafat Movement

Although the movement to safeguard the caliphate in Istanbul was fundamentally misguided, the Khilafat movement represented a great moment of hope and optimism in the India of the early twenties. Not only was this period marked by great shows of Hindu-Muslim unity, but also by anti-colonial fervor and pan-Islamic idealism. The first great mass struggle against the colonial regime resulted in a renewal of Urdu journalism. Muhammad Ali Jauhar (d. 1931), a leader of the Khilafat and a product of Aligarh, produced patriotic prose and poetry of great popularity which exhorted the Muslims of India to unite against the Western powers. Meanwhile, Abul Kalam Azad (d. 1958) combined a conservative religious view with an openly anti-colonial attitude to produce moving editorials of great passion in his newspapers *al-Hilal* and *al-Balagh*. Azad also served as Shibli's factotum for a time, but differed from the latter's scholarly style by producing Urdu prose of almost poetic inspiration. Zafar Ali Khan (d. 1956), editor of the newspaper *Zamindar* and an accomplished satirist, also produced poetry and prose of some power, and served as an important popularizer of Urdu in the Panjab.

The massive support provided to Urdu scholars by the government of the Nizam of Hyderabad also deserves mention. Not only did the Hyderabad state government provide scholarships and stipends to countless Muslim writers and scholars all over India (among them Iqbal and Shibli), but also established Usmania University in Hyderabad in 1919 which became a great center of Urdu scholarship, employing the noted Urdu scholar Abdul Haq (d. 1963) among many other luminaries.²⁵

²⁴Faruqi, p. 427.

²⁵Abdul Haq was instrumental in recovering Dakkani poetry.

Iqbal

The Khilafat movement's failure to comprehend the internal politics of the Middle East should not distract from the immense impact it had on the psyches of colonial India's Muslims. The Khilafat represented the first time since 1857 that Muslims had come out in large numbers against British rule. One way to understand the Khilafat movement's consequences is in terms of its resistance to the modern idea of nationalism. Through the Khilafat, Indian Muslims seemed to be making two points. By stressing their transnational loyalties they marked their disagreement with the international system of nation-states then emerging in Asia under colonial rule. And by garnering Hindu support for what was considered a Muslim minority issue, they seemed to be registering their refusal of a corporate minority status within the nationalist struggle against colonial rule or in a future Indian state. The Khilafat's immense sense of community also indicated a distrust of the idea of the modern, legal individual and citizen.²⁶ Urdu literature of the Khilafat period reflects a new appreciation of the historical and cultural heritage of Indian Muslims in the face of disenchantment with wholesale westernization.

The Khilafat was the formative period for the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), who is undoubtedly the towering figure in Urdu poetry this century. In addition to a deep knowledge of the traditional Indo-Islamic sciences, Iqbal was also well versed in, and deeply influenced by European philosophy. His knowledge of the latter meant that Iqbal understood the Western economic and political systems with considerably more depth than the generation preceding him. This of course meant that he was also conversant with the critique of European thought and practice attempted by European thinkers from Marx to Nietzsche. Partly with the assistance of these philosophies, Iqbal was able to think through the rationality that was leading to the increasing brutalization of humankind in a supposed age of progress. From Marx, Iqbal learned to distrust unchecked capitalism as an economic system, and Nietzsche helped him to recognize the spiritual and existential emptiness of modernity. Moreover, as Iqbal himself claimed, the English and German romantics helped him to look to religion as a source of possible alternatives to the abuses of capitalist modernity.

Subsequently, Iqbal turned to the Indo-Islamic tradition to examine its potential as basis for a critique of, and for an alternative imagining to colonial modernity. Like Hali and Shibli, Iqbal was insistent in holding large portions of the textual legacy responsible for the decline of the Muslims, but, following Akbar, he saw other parts of it

²⁶I am indebted to Faisal Devji for this suggestion.

as dynamic exhortations to creative activity that did not always participate in dominant European definitions of subjectivity. Similarly, Iqbal questioned the bases on which Muslim reformers had up to now attempted to define the Muslims as a nation, and instead tried to outline a pragmatic ethics that would limit, but deepen the claims of community. Iqbal subsequently developed his idea of *khudi*, or dynamic selfhood, as a response to what he saw as the dehumanizing results of virulent nationalism and unbridled capitalism. Through the idea of *khudi* Iqbal tried to visualize a self-defining individual who accomplished the task of resisting and re-forming totalizing modernity (and a fatalistic, decadent tradition) through Will rooted in an ethical community.

Iqbal's genius lay in combining these disparate elements in such a fashion that they seemed inherently and organically connected. Iqbal's censure of the West, and his explicit disagreements with admired European thinkers demonstrated his confident and non-deferential attitude toward his European sources, and his rediscovery and respectful utilization of the Indo-Islamic spiritual tradition gave it new vibrancy and relevance. In Iqbal's poetry it becomes impossible to separate the Western or Indo-Islamic content from his own interpretations, and these from their expression in language. Thus, it is no accident that he admired the Muslim mystic Rumi, and Nietzsche, both of whom are similarly considered great stylists of their respective languages, as well as important thinkers.

Iqbal's accomplishments are important for several reasons. First, without really adopting new poetic genres or imagery, Iqbal revived and transformed traditional forms and images by investing them with new meanings. While the utilization of a familiar style assured Iqbal's works instant recognition and popularity, his radical expansion of the subjects and language usage that the old genres could handle also made his poetry fundamentally unsettling and thought-provoking for many readers. Iqbal's use of Urdu (and Persian) for his message gave the language the depth and the expanse to be able to manage newer and larger issues, some that were raised so explicitly for the first time. Second, Iqbal continued Hali's example of using poetry for pedagogic purposes, but he deepened the concerns that this poetry addressed, and made the use of language itself an essential element of his project of renewal. Thus Iqbal is explicitly not a utilitarian, as Faruqi would have it.²⁷ Rather, Iqbal is advocating an existential and sociopolitical re-imagining, instead of the very limited goal of practical means-ends efficiency. Third, Iqbal's greatest contribution is his success in making the

²⁷Faruqi, p. 427-428. Nothing could be more misleading than to view Iqbal as a Benthamite, as Faruqi does.

Indo-Islamic tradition relevant as a fruitful source of artistic creativity in Urdu through which modern human issues could now be adequately explored.²⁸

Iqbal's Contemporaries

Iqbal's stature is such that other exceptional writers who happened to be producing at the same time as him are eclipsed. This is unfortunate. Some of his contemporaries we have already mentioned; others are listed below. What has now become known as the age of Iqbal saw a reassertion of the ghazal as a result of new appreciation of the tradition, and consequently produced many ghazal poets of note. That is not to say that the ghazal had ever really ceased being written, read or heard with great enthusiasm. After Ghalib and his contemporaries, there had been several good ghazal poets including Dagh (d. 1905), Ameer Meena'i (d. 1900), and Hali himself. Yet, these poets, by and large, continued to write within the framework of traditional poetics. With Akbar and Hasrat the ghazal had begun to change under the influence of modernization. This change became even more apparent in the ghazals of Mirza Yas Yaganah Changezi (d. 1956) and Firaq Gorakhpuri (d. 1982).

Yaganah expressed skepticism both toward the new socially useful poetry, and toward the return of the ghazal to more traditional topics (Hasrat had combined both trends). Yaganah also thought Iqbal's all-encompassing vision vacuous. Thus rejecting all options, Yaganah turned inward to express the desolate loneliness of a lover, whose traditional relationship with his beloved had forever vanished, but who continued to resist the new, legal self imposed by the colonial regime, and the more pragmatic self devised by Iqbal. The egocentrism and inflated pride that resulted from Yaganah's radical individualism moved him closer to his imagined nemesis, Ghalib, than to Mir. But while Ghalib's claustrophobia was often due to external circumstances, Yaganah's was self-imposed. Yaganah's poetry provides unflinching insight into a frightful aspect of the modern individual.

In some ways Firaq was the opposite of Yaganah. Devoted to the Indian National Congress' struggle for Indian independence, associated with the Progressive Writers' Group (see below), Firaq attempted to go back beyond Ghalib to Mir to try to imitate his style and revive his conception of love. In some ways this was an important step. Ever since Hali's biography of Ghalib (*Yadgar-i Ghalib*, 1897), and Abdur Rahman Bijnori's (d. 1918) influential and adulatory study of Ghalib (*Mahasin-i Kalam-i Ghalib*, 1921), Ghalib had become established as the representative of the classical tradition. As Hali had

²⁸In this sense, the poetry of Rashid and the fiction of Intizar Husain is only possible after Iqbal. In some ways this can also be said of Meeraji and Qurratul Ain Haidar (see following sections).

recognized, Ghalib's poetry had already anticipated the deeper changes that would be brought about by modernization in a colonial environment.²⁹ The move toward Mir meant that a more objective view of the classical tradition would emerge. In his literary criticism and in his poetry Firaq attempted to learn from Mir, and in turn to enrich the "... traditional framework of the ghazal by incorporating into it themes untried before."³⁰ As a result, a sensuous and earthy view of the beloved marks Firaq's ghazals and poems, which present *'ishq* as fulfillment of body and soul.³¹ In an attempt to bridge the divide between Indic and Islamic elements within Urdu, Firaq also invested his poetry with insights from the Hindi literary tradition. His influence on Urdu criticism and poetry has been significant, but increasingly he is being viewed critically, especially for his careless use of language.³²

Other noteworthy poets of this period who were more traditional but nevertheless informed by modern sensibilities to some degree are: Shad Azeemabadi (d. 1927), Asghar Gondvi (d. 1936), Safi Lakhnavi (d. 1950), Aziz Lakhnavi (d. 1935), Arzu Lakhnavi (d. 1951), Fani Badayuni (d. 1941), Jigar Muradabadi (d. 1961), Seemab Akbarabadi (d. 1951), and Vahshat Kalkatvi (d. 1965).

1936-1947

While the tension between traditional poetics and a perceived Western and modern sensibility characterized the period before Iqbal, after Iqbal a return to an unmodified tradition seemed impossible. Faruqi makes a telling point when he writes that

... because Iqbal's utterances about the nature of poetry were cast very much in ... Hali's mold, he also helped strengthen the notion that our classical ideas about poetry were inadequate, not to say *inutile* - embarrassing baggage, that we had luckily jettisoned in the course of our 'progress' ... classical poetics was all but gone ... In many ways, Iqbal's poetry can be taken as the fulfillment of Hali's mission. Hali inaugurated modern style theoretical and practical criticism in Urdu. He taught us comparative literature; he made us look beyond our immediate literary and cultural environment. There is no one writing in Urdu who is not in

²⁹Even before 1857 Ghalib had written: *Sambhalne de mujhe ai na-umeedi kiya qayamat hai / keh daman-i khayal-i yar chhoota ja'i hai mujh se*; and, *Ba-qadr-i shauq nahin zarf-i tangna-yi ghazal / kuchh aur chahiye vus'at mire bayan ke liye*.

³⁰Sadiq, 516.

³¹For a discussion of love and eroticism in classical and modern Urdu poetry see Zameeruddin Ahmad, *Khatir-i Ma'soom: Urdu Sha'iri Men Mehboob ki Jinsiyat ka Mutali'ah*, (Karachi: Ahsan Matbu'at, 1990).

³²Sadeed, p. 356.

his debt. But he also gave us a terrible guilt complex ... By shaking our once-firm belief in the superiority of our literary values, he broadened our perspective - but also narrowed it. For after Hali it became very difficult for an Urdu writer to value poetry for its own sake.³³

Thus, instead of the old debates, Urdu writers began to explore new avenues, among them a critical appraisal of the potential of Iqbal's vision. Partly through Iqbal's example, Urdu writers began to delve more deeply into Western philosophies like those of Nietzsche, Bergson, Darwin, Marx, and Freud, etc., and into Western literary criticism and social theory.³⁴ For facility rather than for any analytical value post-Iqbal literary trends in Urdu are usually divided into three tendencies: Romantic, Progressive, and those of the group around the *Halqa-yi Arbab-i Zauq* (Circle of Connoisseurs). It is very important to remember that these are not absolute categories and obviously many writers are inclined toward more than one tendency, and, in fact, many are not bound by any category.

The Romantics

To date the beginnings of the romantic movement in Urdu would be difficult as there were similar inclinations in the writings of the pre-Iqbal generation, and Iqbal's poetry itself contained strong elements of romanticism.³⁵ The romantics were extremely sensitive to their surroundings, especially to nature, and used that as a means to free their imaginations and feed their spirit. There were certainly utopic tendencies within the movement. The romantics quickly gave way to the Progressives and others, all of whom were heavily indebted to romantic ideas.

If we exclude Iqbal, the romantics produced only a few poets of note. Probably the best of them was Ihsan Danish (d. 1982) whose poetry is "born of the rarity of happiness and the excess of disappointment."³⁶ Ihsan Danish's poems and ghazals reveal a sensitive individual who is able to feel the grief of humankind, and who is still surprised by the moral decline of society.

Josh Malihabadi (d. 1982) liked to think of himself as a political and religious revolutionary, but his feudal background often reduced him to a nostalgia for the old order. Probably as a consequence of this conflict, Josh was never able to maintain a philosophy of life that would inform his poetry. His best poems are characterized by

³³Faruqi, p. 429.

³⁴Sadeed, p. 423.

³⁵For reasons of space I have not attempted to distinguish between romanticism in Urdu literature and Romanticism as a literary and philosophical movement in Europe.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 437.

infectious rhythms and evocative images, and the worst tend to be overlain by unnecessary verbiage. He had great facility in composing poetry, but there is much that is mediocre. But at times his protest against the injustices of colonial rule, and religious superficiality can be quite precise. He will probably be remembered more for his prose autobiography, *Yadon ki Barat* (1970) which is a stylistic masterpiece, even if it is not always completely truthful.

Hafeez Jalandhari (d. 1982) was influenced by Hali, Iqbal and the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, and made nature and religion his topics. Musicality, lyricism, and a degree of evocative power mark his poems. Although Hafeez's long poem about the glories of Islam, *Shahnamah-i Islam* enjoyed some popularity, he is now chiefly remembered as the author of the Pakistani national anthem, and a handful of other poems. Akhtar Sheerani (d. 1948) wrote adolescent, pulp romantic poetry with some skill. He invented for himself a repertoire of beautiful, virginal young women to whom he addressed his verses. He found it hard to face his poetic beloved (or much else), and found it safer to dream about her in imagined heavenly surroundings. Nevertheless, he remains an influential Urdu poet.

The Progressives

Under the influence of socialist ideas, the Progressive Writers' Movement was formally launched in 1936.³⁷ In the context of rampant class oppression prevailing in Urdu-speaking societies, Progressive views understandably enjoyed considerable influence and popularity among Urdu writers. The Progressives have provided the valuable service of keeping Urdu writers sensitive to their socio-political environment and its injustices.

... [T]hey shifted the centre of literary experience from *afaq* (the universe in the abstract) to *anfus* (people and things). In the Islamic and Indo-Muslim traditions, the stress was on *afaq*. That is why our classical literature has so little nature poetry of the 'concrete' type, and our traditional narrative so little 'characterization'.³⁸

However, the movement produced good rather than exceptional poets. Its inability to accept that ideologically correct literature is not inevitably good, or that non-Marxist literature may be of some worth, results in doctrinal nit-picking and periodic purges. Its contributions to literary criticism and prose fiction are more substantial.

³⁷For details see Carlo Coppola, *Urdu Poetry, 1935-1970: The Progressive Episode*, 2 vols., Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1975.

³⁸Faruqi, p. 432.

Poetry: The only Progressive poets deserving mention are Faiz Ahmad Faiz (d. 1984), Ali Sardar Jafri (b. 1913), and Asrarul Haq Majaz (d. 1955). Faiz is arguably the best known Urdu poet. His imprisonment by military authorities in Pakistan and periodic martial law in that country, combined with Faiz's doctrinal correctness, adolescent romanticism, and use of modified traditional imagery has ensured that he is read in both India and Pakistan with much enthusiasm and self-righteous, bourgeois indignation against the oppression of the poor. Faiz's heavy use of Arabic and Persian expressions also ensures that his poetry evokes an image of Urdu as a courtly, cultured language among those who show a predilection for such sensations. Faiz's poetry moves one to wallow in an individualistic and ultimately self-defeating oppositional mode, and breeds a sense of superiority over a society that refuses to reform, and thus ultimately leads to inaction. Like Josh, Faiz takes a voyeuristic view of the beloved, but without Josh's aggressive eroticism. Faiz is more passive, and prefers watching the beloved disrobe through the haze of a drunken stupor and a smoke-filled room, all the while discussing revolution with fellow comrades. Ultimately, the poet is merely self-involved, and refuses to problematize any relationship, including that with the working class.³⁹ At best, the working class exists so that the poet may wax eloquent about his quixotic attempts to save it. When the beloved gets too demanding, Faiz invokes the oppressed, and when that reality gets too overwhelming, he returns to the beloved, never really able to connect with either. Faiz began as a romantic, and his best collection is his first, where he still seems to be working out his poetic impulses. The instant popularity which followed the publication of *Naqsh-i Faryadi* (1942) discouraged Faiz from moving beyond its successful formula, which had a debilitating effect on Faiz's language and technical abilities. He has been devastatingly criticized for verbosity and non-sensical use of Arabic, Persian and other constructions.⁴⁰ However, Faiz has produced a few ghazals and poems of rare beauty, especially those that problematize his relationship with the beloved and with the coming revolution and its aftermath. His stylistic manner has proved irresistible to many. He has been quite influential among younger poets, the best of whom have succeeded in avoiding some of the more blatant pitfalls.

Majaz, like Faiz, is also torn between revolutionary and romantic impulses, although his romanticism includes naturism and active rebellion. Hence, his poetry is

³⁹Saleem Ahmad, "Na'i Nazm aur Poora Admi," *Na'i Nazm aur Poora Admi*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1989; original ed., 1962), pp. 65-75.

⁴⁰Rasheed Hasan Khan, "Faiz ki Sha'iri ke Chand Pehlu," *Talash o Tabeer*, (Delhi: Urdu Academy, 1988), pp. 50-101.

abundant with nature themes, and with an equation of anti-British nationalism and revolution. He also seems to have a fascination with revolutionary violence. Majaz's poetry is direct and lyrical, but tends toward monotony. Ali Sardar Jafri is guilty of some of the same faults as Faiz, although he is more experimental in form and theme, and has contributed nuanced criticism of some value.⁴¹ Since his initial espousal of unflexible socialist themes, Jafri has adopted a more realistic view of the individual. Majrooh Sultanpuri (b. 1919) remains a good ghazal poet for his nuanced treatment of socialist themes. Other Progressive poets include Makhdum Mohiuddin (d. 1969), Sahir Ludhyanvi (d. 1980), Jan Nisar Akhtar (d. 1976), Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi (b. 1916), Kaifi Azmi (b. 1918), Salam Machhlishchri (d. 1973), Safdar Mir [Zeno], Farigh Bukhari (b. 1917), and Moeen Ehsan Jazbi (b. 1912).

Short Stories and Novels: In prose, the Progressive Movement has made immense contributions to Urdu literature, although as Faruqi indicates, some of the best writers were expelled for failing to conform to the party line.⁴² Faruqi speculates that because "... fiction lends itself more easily to social concerns, the Progressives' greatest achievements were in fiction, especially realistic fiction."⁴³ Premchand (d. 1936) preceded the Progressives and was one of the earliest writers of short stories in Urdu. Social realism, a taut plot, and good character development are reliable features of his novels and short stories. He is equally good at evoking the atmosphere of a city, town or village using a simple and versatile language. Premchand's fiction has a progressive and reformist message, and points to the poverty and injustice of the Indian city and countryside and the human tragedy which result from this under colonial capitalism. His novels include *Bazar-i Husn* (1917), *Chaugan-i Hasti*, *Gosha-yi Afi'at*, and among his short stories are *Kafan*, *Mantar*, *Kaffara*, *Kash-makash*, and *Najat*. Premchand remains one of the better fiction writers in Urdu, although he switched to writing in Hindi in 1914.

The controversy caused by the publication in 1932 of *Angare*, a collection of short stories by four writers, probably also encouraged the Urdu short story. For supposedly containing blasphemous and obscene material the book was banned by the government in 1933. The authors included Ahmad Ali (d. 1994), Rasheed Jahan (d. 1952), Mahmuduzzafar (d. 1956), and Sajjad Zaheer (d. 1973). The stories were not particularly sophisticated, but attempted to handle class oppression, women's issues, sexuality, and

⁴¹*Ibid.*, "Zaban o Bayan ke Baz Pehlu," pp. 263-287.

⁴²Faruqi, p. 434.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 432.

religious obscurantism in a more open manner.⁴⁴ Except for sexuality, the other themes became standard fare for the Progressive writers.

Krishan Chandar (d. 1977) was a prolific writer of short stories, and his fiction is characterized by a mixture of realism and romanticism, and modernism and a nostalgia for the past.⁴⁵ He is a good stylist, but often becomes artificial and verbose, and cannot be easily typecast. His best stories are *Firdaus*, *Ta'i Isree*, *Muskurane Valian*, and *Phir Mujhe Deeda-yi tar Yad Aya*. He produced many shrill stories about Partition, for instance, *Peshavar Express*, in which he was unable to suppress his nationalist prejudices, and was widely criticized.

Rajinder Singh Bedi (d. 1984) was a short story writer of great subtlety and social realism. His best stories include *Garam Kot* and *Lajvanti*, the latter a masterpiece of psychological insight concerning the abduction of women during Partition. His novelette on a similar theme, *Ik Chadar Maili Si* (1962) also remains important.⁴⁶

Ismat Chughta'i (d. 1991) depicts the world of middle-class Muslim women with great sensitivity combined with a willingness to treat delicate subjects, especially women's sexuality. She employs women's idiomatic spoken language, as well as her sharp wit to great effect. Her short stories include *Chauthi ka Jora*, *Do Hath*, *Choten*, and *Lihaf*, the last about a lesbian relationship. Other Progressive short story writers and novelists include Upindar Nath Ashk (b. 1910), Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Balvant Singh (d. 1986), Akhtar Husain Raipuri (d. 1992), Suhail Azeemabadi (d. 1979), and Mohinder Nath (d. 1974).

Other Fiction Writers

By far the greatest Urdu short story writer is Sa'adat Hasan Manto (d. 1955). Manto was a great observer of human nature, and through his use of a reticent language, or through reproduction of the idiom of his various characters, he was able to convey his characterizations with great effect. Manto wrote about the individual in extreme situations, and attempted to discover and communicate her or his underlying humanity. Many of his stories are about prostitutes, criminals, violence, and sex, in which he succeeds in conveying the motives of the characters with disturbing detachment. His portrayals of less appealing aspects of human nature remain unsurpassed in Urdu. Manto was an important innovator, and experimented with form

⁴⁴For details see Carlo Coppola, "The Angare Group: The *Enfants Terribles* of Urdu Literature," *Annual of Urdu Studies*, (1981), No. 1, pp. 57-69.

⁴⁵Sadiq, p. 586.

⁴⁶For a discussion of an important aspect of Bedi's corpus see Jamila Feldman, "To be or not to be a Goddess: Rajinder Singh Bedi's Women Characters," *Annual of Urdu Studies*, (1990), No. 7, pp. 67-75.

and technique till the end of his life. Partition violence, and the red-light areas and slums of Bombay inspired some of his greatest stories. His masterpieces include *Thanda Gosht*, *Khol Do*, *Dhu'an*, *Lazzat-i Sang*, *Hatak*, *Kali Shalvar*, *Bu*, *Toba Tek Singh*, *Yazeed*, *Blouse*, *Phaha*, etc. Both Manto and Ismat also produced insightful and frank character sketches of their contemporaries which are a pleasure to read.

Ghulam Abbas (d. 1982) is also an author of great distinction. His fiction, which examines society with sympathetic detachment, conveys its understanding through understatement, and by attempts to make the insignificant significant. His most important short stories are *Anandi* and *Ovar Kot*. Other important writers include Aziz Ahmad (d. 1978), Mumtaz Mufti (d. 1995), and Qudratullah Shahab (d. 1986). All are important novelists as well. Shahab has also posthumously published an important and best-selling autobiography. Muhammad Hasan Askari (d. 1978) also wrote important short stories, and remains an influential critic.

Halqa-yi Arbab-i Zauq

Although the Halqa was not formed in opposition to the Progressives, it did attract many disaffected writers. It was devoted to an exploration of the inner self and eschewed politics, while the Progressives, complementarily concentrated on social involvement. Nonetheless, the circle was critical of the Progressives' one-dimensional view of human nature, and instead encouraged the asking of new questions. Members of the group have often been accused of advocating "art for art's sake" views, but this seems an over-simplification. They were however drawn to the psychological exploration of the modern, urban, middle-class individual in their poetry, and in the process produced works of a very high standard indeed.

Still it seems a shame to restrict Meeraji (d. 1949) and N. M. Rashid (d. 1975) to this category, as is traditionally done, since they rank as the two most profound Urdu poets since Iqbal. Meeraji was well-acquainted with Indic and European literary traditions, especially with *Bhakti* poetry (Meerabai) and Sanskrit poetics, and the French Symbolists. He was also well read in European literary criticism, and was a critic and translator of distinction, who introduced Urdu writers to new points of view, especially to psychology. Meeraji has a more Indic expression than most Urdu poets. His poems also show considerable influence of Baudelaire and Poe, and are similarly deceptively easy to grasp. In his poems, Meeraji attempted to disentangle the various strands of the sexual psychoses of the South Asian Muslim male, and his inability to either understand or overcome his exile from woman. To this end he examined "... the

mystery of human desires, the sorrows and pains of loving, the sin and rapture of sex ...” and coupled these with meditations on time and death.⁴⁷ Meeraji’s great accomplishment was to tie these concerns with the psychological health or sickness of the individual and society, and thus provide us with insights into other psycho-social problems as well. Unfortunately, Meeraji still awaits proper appreciation and elucidation in Urdu scholarship.

Rashid began with concerns akin to Meeraji’s, but quickly moved on to a more metaphysical treatment of them. Rashid saw the modern, colonized individual as not only sexually damaged, but also lacking a meaningful, rooted existence generally. While Rashid viewed the latter condition as an opportunity for greater freedom, he was also aware of its schizophrenic potential and nihilistic attractions. Rashid tried to question the ungraspable yet remembered past, deceased Gods, and fellow colonized societies in an attempt to understand the political and psychic predicaments of men of color, and to point a way toward a more authentic and meaningful existence.⁴⁸ In addition, he remained concerned with the imperatives of creativity in art, and his style progressively becomes more symbolic.⁴⁹ Rashid’s style differs from Meeraji’s in his reliance on Arabic and Persian rather than Indic elements, and on his complete avoidance of the ghazal and other traditional genres.

Other poets associated with the Halqa include Yusuf Zafar (d. 1972), Qayyum Nazar (d. 1989), Ziya Jalandhari (b. 1923), Anjum Rumani (b. 1920), and Hafeez Hoshiarpuri (d. 1973). Ziya is interesting for his attempt to combine elements of Meeraji and Rashid.

Other Poets

Among poets not associated with either the Halqa or the Progressives, the most important is Majeed Amjad (d. 1974). His poetry apparently contains a mood of desolation and grief, but on closer examination presents the poet as someone who accepts, nay, is thankful for whatever life has to offer him with sober serenity. Majeed Amjad has the ability to connect the most mundane details to an experiential universe and vice versa with profound introspection accompanied by slight surprise. In the

⁴⁷Faruqi, p. 435. Also Geeta Patel, “Re-Naming Oneself: Meeraji and the Politics of Gender,” Annual of Urdu Studies, (1993), No. 8, pp. 109-118.

⁴⁸I say ‘men’ because of the following quote about the important feminist poet and author Fehmeedah Riyaz attributed to Rashid by Saqi Farooqi. Asked to evaluate Riyaz’s work, Rashid commented, “A tiny girl with a tiny pain.” See Saqi Farooqi, “Hasan Kooza-gar,” Rafey Habib & Faruq Hassan, trs., Annual of Urdu Studies, (1985), No. 5, pp. 3-17. The comment appears on page nine.

⁴⁹Faruq Hassan, “‘Beyond Blasphemy and Prayers’: The Concept of God in Rashed’s Poetry,” Annual of Urdu Studies (1985), No. 5, pp. 23-34.

mood of his poems, and in his less self-absorbed attitude to nature, Majeed Amjad presents a strange contrast to Rashid and Meeraji.

Despite being influenced by the Progressives, Akhtarul Iman (b. 1915) has fashioned his own subjects and style. He writes about the impossibility of fulfilling relationships within the increasing isolation of the urban environment. His recognition that unsatisfactory relationships are unavoidable gives his verse a bitter edge. At times he fashions almost Kafkaesque (surreal, as well as material) images, probably as a result of his keen sensitivity to industrialization. His poems seem surrounded by an atmosphere of gloom and a sense of futility.⁵⁰

Shad Arifi (d. 1964) is an important but undervalued poet who went even further than Hasrat Mohani in introducing realism into the ghazal. In contrast to the formally idealized beloved of the ghazal, the beloved in Shad's poetry is ordinary and familiar, and the relationship with the beloved is rooted in everyday social and domestic reality and remains unfulfilled. He was also a good satirist and produced many sharp poems on day to day problems and events that rival the Progressives' concern with similar topics.⁵¹

Partition and Independence

1947 is an important date in the development of Urdu. In that year Pakistan and India became independent nation-states, with Pakistan adopting Urdu as its national language, and India still containing a substantial number of Urdu-speakers within its borders. Therefore, this seems a particularly good point to pause to assess the implications of Partition for Urdu, within the general argument of this essay about the increasing identification of Urdu as the language of the politics of Muslim identity in South Asia. I will do this through a dialogue with Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's comments on Partition's effects, and attempt to argue for a different view.⁵²

Many Urdu critics have viewed the division of British India as an unmitigated calamity for Urdu.⁵³ While it is certainly true that in many ways Partition was a disaster for independent India's Muslims, and the accompanying violence unbearably tragic, the effects on Urdu may not have been as severe as is usually noted. For one, the decline of

⁵⁰Sadiq, 565.

⁵¹For a reappraisal of Shad see Muzaffar Hanfi, *Shad Arifi: Shakhsiyat aur Fan*, (Delhi: Maktabah-i Jamiah, 1977).

⁵²Faruqi, pp. 435-436.

⁵³Faruqi entitles his section on partition "The Trauma of Independence." Interestingly, this heading is missing from a version of the same essay entitled "Images in a Darkened Mirror: Issues and Ideas in Modern Urdu Literature," printed in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, (1987), No. 6, pp. 43-54, an American publication.

Urdu in India due to the defensive insecurity of India's Muslims, coupled with the discriminatory attitude of the Indian state, was balanced by the flourishing of Urdu in Pakistan due to official patronage, and the arrival of Urdu-speaking refugees from India. Also, Partition violence turned out to be an unhappy blessing for Urdu, as it inspired a flurry of good writing. Nonetheless, what is most noticeable in the post-independence period is the remarkable affinity between critical and literary trends in Urdu on both sides of the border, despite some interesting differences.⁵⁴

Why is this? I propose that Urdu scholarship should concentrate for a possible answer on the decade preceding Partition which witnessed profound ideological and socio-economic changes in colonial India. For instance, the two world wars caused substantial physical and social dislocation among the native population, especially through increasing urbanization. At the political level all hopes of Hindu-Muslim unity seemed ended, with Muslims arguing for some degree of autonomy and the Congress insisting on a strong, centralized state. In this environment, the generation of Urdu writers immediately following Iqbal attempted to describe and diagnose the condition of the contemporary individual and society. We must remember that almost all the authors and poets we have mentioned above, and whose formative period was the decade preceding Partition, also produced a substantial corpus after independence, but despite the ideological demands of the two nation-states' official nationalisms, the best Urdu writers (e.g., Manto, Bedi, Meeraji, Rashid, Firaq, etc.) continued to look beyond nationalistic controversies, and produced good literature. Without ignoring politics, these authors successfully unmasked more fundamental human issues.

In my opinion this was possible largely because of Iqbal's influence. He is the transition figure between two very different literary periods in Urdu. While Hali's challenge had been specifically directed toward the Muslims (as his *Musaddas* makes clear), Iqbal interrogated issues of identity at more fundamental levels. Iqbal was forced to concede that modernization had created a new human being, against whom he sought to present an alternative. Islam and Muslims are merely allies in this quest. Hali had sought to save Islam and Muslims from the consequences of 1857, while Iqbal's desire was to understand and rescue the modern human. The generation following Iqbal inherited his romanticism and his anti-modernism and applied that to a more

⁵⁴One difference is in the number of important women writers in Pakistan. Another is the different ways in which Urdu has been and will continue to be influenced by the various languages in India and Pakistan. Also, Urdu has not only become involved in different ideological debates in India and Pakistan (Faruqi only mentions Pakistan), but Urdu in Pakistan has become complicit with actual state policy and regional linguistic reassertions. For example, Bengali nationalism, which led to East Pakistan becoming independent Bangladesh, was opposed to the imposition of Urdu as the sole national language.

complex understanding of the individual formed by colonial modernization. In other words, since Iqbal Urdu has been preoccupied with the contradictions of modernity and with understanding the modern individual and society at a more basic level, rather than only at the level of identity politics or the nation-state. This is one reason for the similarity of Urdu writing in India and Pakistan. Urdu critics themselves acknowledge the differences between the pre- and post-Iqbal period when they usually map the Hali to Iqbal period in historical and political terms, and the period following in terms of literary categories.

Faruqi then is quite mistaken when he writes about Pakistan that "... a people who cannot make up their minds whether they should include the likes of Ghalib and Premchand, the *Kathasaritsagara* [an Indic work] and the *Dastan-i Amir Hamza* [a work of West Asian inspiration], in their literary heritage, cannot be too far along toward achieving a viable cultural consciousness."⁵⁵ It is not our purpose to unpack Faruqi's assumptions or to ask what he could possibly mean by "a people" and "their literary heritage" and "a viable cultural consciousness." Neither is it our purpose to point to the sort of philosophical and political assumptions that make these terms operative.

Rather, the more important question is about the politics of formation of the Urdu canon which precedes both the formation of Pakistan, and the coming into being of the Muslims of independent India as a minority corporate group. If we assume that the formation of this canon is, at least broadly, connected to the politics of Muslim identity in South Asia, as I have schematically tried to show, then the ideological assumptions behind the formation of the Urdu canon inform both Pakistani nationalism and the identity politics of India's Muslims. This is the second reason for the similarity of Urdu writing in Pakistan and India. After all, the questions that Faruqi accuses official Pakistani nationalism of burdening Urdu with have been asked of Urdu in various forms since the nineteenth century: "What is and has been the nature and place of Islam and Muslims in South Asia?" For instance, as Askari has observed, the *Musaddas* of Hali and the *na't* of Muhsin Kakorvi (d. 1905) contain fundamentally different views of the Prophet.⁵⁶ Muhsin's prophet seems more culturally indigenous, while Hali's is more Arab/foreign. Even before Partition, Hali's image of the prophet is canonized, not Muhsin's. Consequently, while it is true that Urdu in Pakistan has been involved in rather tiresome debates about the nature of the Pakistani identity, Askari's "traditionalist Islamism" (Faruqi's description) and the Pakistani Urdu scholar Jameel

⁵⁵Faruqi, p. 436.

⁵⁶Askari, "Muhsin Kakorvi," *Sitarah ya Badban*, pp. 238-266.

Jalibi's (b. 1929) somewhat confused book on Urdu's relationship with a specifically Pakistani identity, still seem much more within the established Urdu tradition than the platitudinous nods toward Indian secularism attempted by Indian Urdu writers.⁵⁷ In other words, the Islamization of Urdu began much before the search for an Islamic Pakistani identity, and remains more hegemonic.

Furthermore, how true is it in fact that "... Indo-Muslim culture ... had been shared by Hindus and Muslims alike in most of pre-Partition India?"⁵⁸ By this does Faruqi mean that Urdu was not made into a Muslim language in colonial India? Conversely, does he also mean to suggest that there was no movement for Hindi to be recognized as the language of North Indian Hindus? If the contribution was "alike" why was there a need to construct Hindi and Urdu as separate languages, and what made the post-Partition rupture so possible? Furthermore, what Faruqi must really be claiming is that Hindu *men* have contributed to Urdu. As far as I am aware, Hindu women have not particularly written in Urdu, and there are inherent and interesting connections between nineteenth century attempts at Hindu women's reform and the Hindi language movement. The real question that should be asked is about the different ways in which Hindus and Muslims participated in and contributed to Urdu, and how those have changed over time.⁵⁹ Otherwise, Faruqi's statement is patently inaccurate and represents another disingenuous attempt at espousing a superficial secularism.

Urdu scholars should be careful about overemphasizing the importance of debates about official nationalism conducted through the medium of Urdu, and instead pay some attention to the lack of debate about the Urdu canon, which has been uncritically accepted at least since Iqbal. This is the more fundamental issue. In the same essay, Faruqi praises the novelist Intizar Husain (b. 1925) for tapping the *Kathasaritsagara* as a source. Now, Intizar Husain writes in Pakistan and all the debates about the propriety of using the *Kathasaritsagara* in Pakistan do not prevent him from writing or his many readers from reading him. Nor for that matter is Vazeer Agha (b. 1922), another respected Pakistani critic, prevented from advocating the superiority of

⁵⁷Jalibi explicitly places his discussion within the context of pre-Pakistan Muslim nationalism. See Jameel Jalibi, *Pakistani Kalchar: Qaumi Kalchar ki Tashkeel ka Mas'alah*, (Karachi: Mushtaq Book Depot, 1964).

⁵⁸Faruqi, p. 436.

⁵⁹A starting point would be a critical assessment of the place and contribution of Chakbast and Premchand, and of Urdu's treatment of them. Chakbast is a particularly interesting figure because of his attempt to employ Urdu for reform among Hindus. For Premchand's complaints about the discriminatory treatment of Hindu Urdu writers by the Urdu establishment see Premchand, *Premchand: Adabiyat*, (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1993).

an indigenous Indic aesthetic.⁶⁰ Conversely, Nayyar Masood (b. 1936), the Indian writer, looks to classical Islamic romances and Persian literature for inspiration. Good Urdu writers have been remarkably resilient in resisting serving a parochial Pakistani nationalism (or for that matter, an unthought Indian secularism, and a centralizing Pan-Indian nationalism), and this is probably because Pakistani nationalism has not had an advocate as sincere as Hali, or a theoretician of Iqbal's profundity. Also, according to Faruqi's view, Urdu-speakers in India would be less resistant to the evocation of elements of "purely Indic" origin. Is this really true? Has the Urdu canon changed so much in India over the past fifty some years? As long as Urdu speakers and writers on both sides of the border are in general agreement about the literary legacy of Urdu, they are immersed in the politics of Muslim identity and their more immediate, separate concerns will not much affect the status of Urdu.

Similarly, I do not want to equate Urdu completely with Muslim identity politics. As I have argued above, we should thank Iqbal, both for sidelining Urdu as the repository of Muslim identity, and for secularizing Urdu by forcing it to deal with larger and more fundamental human questions to some extent, rather than being solely concerned with the defining of Muslims, as Urdu was in the period between Hali and Iqbal. It was the Urdu speaking Muslim elite of North India which had made Urdu an essential element of Indo-Muslim identity, and Pakistani nationalism is merely one variant of an identity that Muslims on both sides of the border share, largely through Urdu - for better or for worse. I believe Iqbal tried to escape this linguistic definition of the Indian Muslim.

Finally, in Faruqi's terms, traditional literature is concerned with the abstract universal (*afaq*) and the post-Iqbal generation is concerned with people and things (*anfus*). Therefore, the significant point to make is that in the period between traditional poetics and the post-Iqbal period, that is the Hali to Iqbal period, what was Urdu poetics concerned with if not the intermediate questions of Muslim identity? Only when this question was in some ways settled by Iqbal did Urdu turn to more important questions. Thus, one way to make sense of Iqbal's concept of *khudi*, or dynamic selfhood, is precisely to understand it as an attempt to bring together the two seeming extremes of *afaq* and *anfus* in a new aesthetic.

To summarize, I have tried to argue that Urdu is powerfully joined, rather than divided, across the border between Pakistan and India by its pre-Partition participation in Muslim identity politics, and paradoxically by the moves toward exploring more

⁶⁰For details see Vazeer Agha, *Urdu Sha'iri ka Mizaj*, (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1974).

fundamental human concerns by the generation immediately preceding Partition. Struggling with the former in its Pakistani or Indian Muslim variant, at the same time as recognizing the essential truth of the latter is the story of the dynamism of Urdu literature after 1947.

Post-1947

The nearly fifty years since independence are marked by the proliferation of experiments in poetry and prose as a response to the experience of post-colonial state-building in Pakistan and India, and rapid socio-economic changes. In poetry, there have also been more attempts to renew contact with the tradition of the ghazal and other traditional genres.

Ghazal: The ghazal has maintained its popularity and has increased its expanse to include even more subjects of concern to poets. Ghazal poets may be divided into three groups: Progressives, traditionalists, and others. Among the competent Progressive poets are: Arif Abdul Mateen, Muhsin Ihsan (b. 1932), Khatir Ghaznavi (b. 1925), Ahmad Faraz (b. 1931), Zaheer Kashmiri (d. 1994), and Qateel Shifa'i (b. 1919). Those who have remained within the traditional ghazal to exploit its possibilities include: Raees Amrohvi (d. 1988), Jagannath Azad (b. 1918), Shanul Haq Haqqi (b. 1917), Mehshar Badayuni, and Murtaza Barlas.

Poets belonging to neither of the above two groups have been the most innovative. They have attempted to expand the ghazal form so that it is able to express a variety of contemporary concerns. Nasir Kazmi (d. 1972) is influenced by Mir and Firaq, and wrote ghazals that are stylistically traditional and modern at the same time. His ghazals present a bohemian protagonist saddened by the weight of nostalgia, the experience of exile, and the thirst of loneliness. Ibne Insha (d. 1979) adopts the guise of a wandering minstrel to express a certain critical indifference toward the world. Khalilur Rahman Azmi (d. 1978) was a pioneer of "new" poetry (*jadidiyat*) in Urdu, and wrote insightful poems as well as ghazals. His sensitive portrayal of unrealized potential in the complexity and fragmentation of modern existence give his poetry a wistful air. His ghazals' underlying concern with life's more mundane dilemmas betrays his Progressive origins. Muneer Niyazi (b. 1928) attempts to make the familiar surreal, especially in his use of words, and describes a world of fear and mistrust. Mustafa Zaidi (d. 1970) created a character who compensates for other disappointments by aggressively pursuing the embrace of the beloved, while remaining self-centered. Shikaib Jalali (d. 1966) tries to formulate a new relationship between man and nature that is not bound by space and time. Shahzad Ahmad (b. 1932) attempts to will meaning in the face of hopelessness. Zafar Iqbal (b. 1933) is a great experimenter of the ghazal

and has written some excellent ghazals. He fashions an easily irritated, sarcastic protagonist who refuses to be satisfied with the finiteness of human relations. He has also been a pioneer of the “anti-ghazal.” Ahmad Mushtaq (b. 1929) is able to convey innocence and surprise amid ruin with great affect. Some other notable ghazal poets include the literary critic Saleem Ahmad (d. 1983), Rajindar Bani (d. 1981), Baqi Siddiqi (d. 1972), Saifuddin Saif (d. 1994), Jameeluddin Aali (b. 1926), and Bimal Krishan Ashk (d. 1982),

Non-Ghazal Poetry: Non-ghazal poetry in Urdu has also made great leaps since 1947. Its various forms have proven ideal in conveying the increasing mechanization and alienation of the contemporary condition. It has been equally effective in dealing with issues of the inner self, as well as conveying the social and natural world. Vazeer Agha’s use of unfamiliar nature imagery in his poems serves as a means to expose the spiritual needs of the self. He is also a good ghazal poet. Ameer Hanfi’s (d. 1988) poems present the dissatisfaction and unhappiness of the present, and seem to be searching for an affirmation of human existence. Other important poets include Mazhar Imam (b. 1930), Balraj Komal (b. 1928), Jeelani Kamran (b. 1926), Saqi Farooqi (b. 1936), Shaz Tamkinat (d. 1985), Himayat Ali Sha’ir (b. 1930), Kumar Pashi (d. 1992), Shaharyar (b. 1936), Nida Fazli (b. 1938), Anees Nagi (b. 1939), Iftikhar Jalib (b. 1936), Muhammad Alavi (b. 1927), Afzaal Ahmad Sayyid (b. 1946), Iftikhar Arif (b. 1940), and Zeeshan Sahil.

Short Stories and Novels: After being side-lined by poetry for most of its career, Urdu fiction has come into its own in the years since independence. A strong base had already been prepared by the writers we have indicated above, who also of course, continued to write after 1947. As mentioned, fictional prose received a boost from the shock of communal violence during Partition, and subsequent writing continued to examine issues of communal and national identity. The condition of post-colonial nationality was examined from both psychological and Progressive points of view, and special emphasis was placed on the dystopia which quickly set in after independence. Short stories have usually been of better quality than the novels.

Qurratul Ain Haidar (b. 1927) and Intizar Husain are probably the most highly regarded authors of the post-independence period. Haidar writes about the dilemmas of middle-class existence, and her work is marked by sensitivity toward issues of cultural and social constraints, the legacy of history, the devaluation of values, and the predicament of women in Indo-Muslim familial milieu. She has complete control over her language, and has produced worthwhile short stories as well as novels. Her most important contribution remains her ground-breaking novel *Aag ka Darya* (1959) which

tried to examine issues of identity in the context of the civilizational history of South Asia.

Intizar Husain's novels and short stories have made important contributions toward further developing these genres in Urdu. His work is marked by the experience of migration and exile. He laments the passing away of a more holistic and integrated civilizational world, and is pessimistic with regard to the current ethical decline. Intizar Husain foregrounds the decline of humanity against the backdrop of myth and history. His short stories include *Kaya Klap*, *Voh Jo Deevan Chat Nah Sake*, *Akhri Admi*, *Intizar*, and *Shajrah-i Nasab*. His novel *Basti* (1979) is justly praised for its creative use of a traditional world-view to comment on contemporary social and personal predicaments.⁶¹

Abdullah Husain (b. 1931) appeared on the literary scene with the publication of his prize-winning novel, *Udaas Naslen* (1963), which attempted with some success to excavate the characteristics of the individual under colonial rule and the socio-economic changes brought in its wake. He also writes short stories. Ahsan Faruqi (d. 1978) depicted the old culture of Lucknow in his popular *Sham-i Avadh*. Shaukat Siddiqi's unblinking depiction of the poverty, brutality, and injustice of a post-colonial urban sprawl prevents his novel, *Khuda ki Basti*, from becoming a mere statement of Progressive ideology. Other important novelists and short story writers are Zameeruddin Ahmad (d. 1990), Ashfaq Ahmad (b. 1924), Bano Qudsiyah (b. 1928), Altaf Fatimah (b. 1929), the sisters Khadeejah Mastoor (d. 1982) and Hajirah Masroor (b. 1929), Ram Lal (b. 1923), A. Hameed (b. 1935), Jogindar Pal (b. 1925), Mumtaz Shireen (d. 1973), Jameelah Hashmi (d. 1988), and Ibraheem Jalees (d. 1977).

Still other writers have been more courageous in their explorations and have conducted interesting experiments. Their writing makes use of fantasy, myth, magic, and hallucination. One drawback is that they create "... highly wrought but very nearly opaque stories which refuse to observe the conventions of plot and character."⁶² Good examples of such allegorical writing are provided by Anvar Sajjad (b. 1936), Khalidah Husain (b. 1938), Nayyar Masud, Surendar Prakash (b. 1930), Ahmad Hameesh (b. 1941), Balraj Komal, Asad Muhammad Khan (b. 1938), Zahidah Hina (b. 1946), Mansha

⁶¹For details see Muhammad Umar Memon, "Partition Literature: A Study of Intizar Husain," *Modern Asian Studies*, (1980), Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 377-410; and "Reclamation of Memory, Fall, and the Death of the Creative Self: Three Movements in the Fiction of Intizar Husain," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, (1981), No. 13, pp. 73-91.

⁶²Faruqi, p. 439.

Yad (b. 1937), and Mazharul Islam.⁶³

Compared to short stories and novels, Urdu plays have been of poorer quality. On the other hand, Urdu prose is abundant with the following relatively more developed genres: essays, autobiography, letters, travelogues, journalism, humor, and literary criticism.

Women Poets of Pakistan

In at least one important respect Faruqi is quite wrong that “[t]he Pakistani quest for new ideas on literature ended with the advance of fundamentalism in the late seventies.”⁶⁴ This was precisely the period in Pakistan that produced some of the most powerful protest poetry from many excellent poets who are women.⁶⁵ Although important women writers had appeared before that, this period saw a proliferation of poetry by women which critiqued the patriarchal cultural, social, and political system with profound insight and great passion. In contrast to the Progressives this poetry also represents an instance where overtly socio-political concerns have also generally led to good literature. Moreover, the work of women writers may be viewed as a complement and response to Meeraji and Rashid’s enterprise. Women’s writing insists that any adequate treatment of the important issues raised by these two poets will be futile until and unless the concerns of women are addressed.

Speculatively, the reason for the many fine women poets in Pakistan, as compared to almost none in India, may have something to do with the different ways in which women in Pakistan and Muslim women in India are members of civil society and participate in the public sphere. It is beyond the scope of this paper to indicate the aspects in which their socio-political status differs, but it is probably safe to say that to the extent that women are part of civil society in Pakistan they are so as women rather than as Muslims. For example, during the colonial period women were viewed as keepers of the tradition, but after the creation of Pakistan this function in many ways shifted to the state. While this liberated Pakistani women from quite a burden, it also made them more vulnerable to state laws directed against them. In India, it may be argued, Muslim women continue to be held as guardians of a Muslim identity. Furthermore, social conservatism plus the state imposition of Islamic laws has meant

⁶³For a brief survey of the modern Urdu short story see Muhammad Umar Memon, “Introduction,” The Color of Nothingness: Modern Urdu Short Stories, Muhammad Umar Memon, ed., (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. xi-xxx.

⁶⁴Faruqi, p. 437. Faruqi devotes a total of three sentences to women poets!

⁶⁵Space does not permit a discussion of women’s prose writings. Important writers are listed in the previous sections.

that the position of women, as women, is in some ways particularly tenuous in Pakistan. Their subsequent greater ability to participate in public debate in Pakistan has also empowered them in interesting ways.

The first major poet to write as a woman appeared soon after independence. Ada Jafri (b. 1924) wrote of her experiences as a wife and a mother in a modified traditional idiom, but also noticed the lack of fulfillment that accompanied these relationships. She also protests against society's dehumanization of women by its reduction of them to sexual objects, and is keenly aware of discrimination. Ada Jafri's poetry explores women's identity, rather than concentrating on them as a romantic ideal, as poetry up to now had usually done.

She was followed by Zehra Nigah, who attempts to portray a desire for a degree of equality of emotional expression in women's relationships. Zehra Nigah, while staying in a generally Progressive framework, is also keenly aware of the specific exploitation of women in society. Her poetry explores the schizophrenic existence of women that results from social taboos. Therefore, she attempts to give voice to the woman within the one who is forced to compromise with patriarchal society.

The two most influential and important women poets writing today are Kishvar Naheed (b. 1940) and Fehmeedah Riyaz (b. 1945), both of whom started writing in the sixties. Kishvar Naheed rebels against the agreement between religion, society and state to fix the place of woman and determine her personality and desires. Employing a gentle tone or the voice of bitter protest, she can effectively communicate the pain of the truncated spiritual, socio-political and physical existence of women in an oppressive society. For her the poem becomes a weapon with which to undermine such a society. Kishvar Naheed can communicate the contradictions of patriarchal society with a measure of profundity, including questioning the very category of gender as the basis for social and political organization. She has examined all aspects of women's lives from their place in the politics of nation and state-building to their sexual exploitation. She has also translated women's writings from other languages into Urdu, and writes ghazals and poems with equal facility. Lately, her poetry has become more overtly political.

Fehmeedah Riyaz is a poet of woman's emotional reserves which she transforms into critique of patriarchal relations. She writes about the unfulfilled sexuality of women, their creative power, and their closeness to earth with outspoken candor and sometimes anger. Fehmeedah Riyaz is keenly aware of the manner in which social relationships, like marriage, serve to mold women's personalities. Like Kishvar Naheed, she implicitly takes up Iqbal's idea of a constantly self-forming self, and utilizes this

idea to undermine attempts by the state to define and fix the gendered boundaries of official nationalism. She has recently published a widely acclaimed novelette and a travelogue of Bangladesh. Her poetry has also become more apparently political over the years.

A younger generation of women took their cue from these predecessors, but more closely examined the subtleties of human and social relations. From the most mundane activities of women to the contradictions of family and nation these women explore women's lives, and in the process also tell us much about men. Women poets have also experimented in form and style so that they are better able to convey their views. Parveen Shakir (d. 1994) is conscious of her grief as a woman, but examines her attraction for exploitative relationships that results from a need for emotional support and fulfillment. Her poetry may be read as an attempt to complicate the vision of Kishvar Naheed and Fehmeedah Riyaz. Sara Shuguftah (d. 1984) is a profound chronicler and analyzer of women's psychological states in a claustrophobic society which provides them with no escape. Azra Abbas (b. 1950) is particularly concerned with exploring the relationship of women's bodies to their emotions and environment. Ishrat Afreen examines the tension between her new found confidence as a woman and a patriarchal reality. Fatimah Husain writes about the disagreements within the women's movement. Other good poets include Tanveer Anjum (b. 1956), A'ishah Aslam, Mahmoodah Ghaziyah, Yasmeen Hameed, Shahidah Hasan, and Parveen Fana Sayyid. Zahidah Zaidi (b. 1930) writes in India.

"New" Poetry

Somewhat implicitly, this survey has viewed the genre of the ghazal as the common thread that binds contemporary Urdu literature to its immediate past and to the more distant classical tradition. A more detailed examination of the literary debates surrounding the ghazal will help us to review the development of Urdu literature to the present, and hopefully provide us with some insights into future prospects.

As previously detailed, Hali's project laid the foundations for modifying the traditional ghazal to serve the interests of reform. This trend was accompanied by the denigration of the ghazal as a pleasurable but non-serious form of poetry, especially when the pre-colonial legacy of the ghazal became too constricting or seductive. Instead, the narrative poem was utilized to preach the reformist message. Similarly, Iqbal essentially continued the tradition of the non-ghazal poem. Taking Hali's logic further, the Progressives criticized the ghazal as a reactionary and feudal genre, while they paradoxically continued to write ghazals in an attempt to make the ghazal conform to ideological imperatives. The opposition to the creative straight-jacket of Progressive

ideology came from poets associated with the *Halqa-yi Arbab-i Zauq*, but they also chose to express themselves largely through the non-ghazal poem. The more effective challenge to the near monopoly of the ghazal by the Progressives came in the aftermath of Partition, which had dealt a severe blow to the optimism of the Progressive view.

Pioneers like Nasir Kazmi in Pakistan and Khalilur Rahman Azmi in India reacted against the inability of the Progressives to adequately explain the post-independence dystopia, and the massive psychological and social changes brought in its wake. These poets and others now attempted to use the ghazal form to continue to examine issues like the devaluation of values, increasing mechanization, and alienation already raised by Rashid and Meeraji in their non-ghazal poetry. Through the example of ghazal poets like Yaganah and Firaq, among others, they also looked to the pre-colonial ghazal tradition as a source of ideals that would inform their endeavor to understand their present situation. This resistance to the hegemony of the Progressives in the late-fifties in Pakistan, and somewhat later in India, was inspired by the very different nature of the problems of the post-colonial nation-state and individual, and represented a move toward understanding the disintegrating *inner* self. The move to write what was now being called the “new” ghazal, paralleled similar attempts to move beyond Progressive-influenced fiction and non-ghazal poetry.

This literary trend of newness or *jadidiyat* was marked by two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, there was a rejection of the ideological surveillance of art, and a celebration of a new-found freedom from restrictions on creative activity. On the other hand, these new writers also wanted to utilize the tradition, represented by the formal and restrictive form of the ghazal, for inspiration and insight. The question that this tension raised was the extent to which one should free oneself from the classical tradition, and from the legacy of Hali, Iqbal, and the Progressives. Some poets followed the example of Rashid and basically rejected the ghazal, but most have made important contributions both to the new ghazal and non-ghazal poetry.

The new ghazal can be characterized by four areas in which it has made important contributions. One, it takes the idea of *'ishq*, or love, from the traditional ghazal, where it served as the basis of a holistic system, and via Iqbal transforms it into a dynamic force that maintains itself as a response to and despite the angst of contemporary existence. The new poets reject the Progressive reinterpretation of *'ishq*, and other components of the ghazal, as instruments to express political concerns, and instead use the ghazal imagery to analyze the internal psychic state of the fractured individual embedded in the contingency of modern existence. Furthermore, the new ghazal attempts to highlight the social and psychological dislocation caused by political,

economic and societal changes that are no longer easily diagnosed or solved. It particularly rails against the ethical cynicism of the age caused by political expediency, and materialism. Third, the new ghazal is characterized by its creative use of language. New poets tend to stay away from the formally precise language usage of the classical tradition, and from the ideological usage of the Progressives. Rather, they use words to create an atmosphere, evoke a sensation, or tease a personal or historical memory. Through the use of unfamiliar idiom new poets attempt to make the form of expression conform to its content which emphasizes the anxious disturbance of the contemporary self. Last, the new ghazal attempts to satirize and undermine the claims to coherence of the traditional ghazal form, later developments, and itself, by use of jarring or comical words and phrases, and unsettling imagery.⁶⁶

This development of the new ghazal, and analogous developments in non-ghazal poetry and prose fiction seem to have broken the hold of the Progressives, and literary trends are now marked by more openness, eclecticism, and a willingness to experiment. Nevertheless, the increasingly allegorical nature of many poems and short stories raises questions about the lack of comprehensibility of these writing and their increasingly unverifiable value either as art or social critique. Furthermore, new poets are also characterized by an escalating specialization of idiom, and by a fetishization of the historical and literary tradition. The nostalgia for a holistic past and discomfort at the unrooted present that marks the work of many of these writers also seems to indicate a suppressed regret of a loss of manhood. In this sense, the new poets have not yet come to terms with the issues raised by women's writing. Moreover, for some other writers a tension with the tradition remains, and to the extent that they explicitly write outside any reference to the tradition or some other world-view also raises the issue of the lack of ontological and epistemological basis for their critique and re-imagining.⁶⁷ But this may be too much to expect from Urdu or any other literature. On the other hand, Urdu literature, as always, seems eager to take on all these debates, which have contributed to its remarkable energy since the nineteenth century.

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For reasons of space, the following selection is, regretably, restricted to books in Urdu. For translations, Pritchett's bibliography of Urdu literature in English translation may be usefully consulted (listed below). Unfortunately, her survey stops at 1978. Since then

⁶⁶For a good discussion of the "new" ghazal see Shameem Hanfi, *Ghazal ka Naya Manzar Namah*, (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1981).

⁶⁷For a non-Progressive critique of "new" poetry see Saleem Ahmad, *Na'i Sha'iri, Na Maqbool Sha'iri*, (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1989).

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