Hali's Musaddas

Western liberalism (cf. 3:7 below) here denoted in characteristic style by Hali through use of the English loan words 'republic' and 'public' (S133):

Sunt hai gharibon ki faryad ust ne
Kiyah hai ghulami ko barbad ust ne
Ripablik ki gali hai bunyad ust ne
Banaya hai pablik ko azad ust ne
Muqayad bht kart hai ye aur rihah bht
Banati hai azad bht ba-vaza bht

The sorry state of the Muslims is due to a lack of education (S136-S143), resulting in a general lack of skills. The consequent dearth of indigenous industry necessitates a reliance upon the imported goods and skills generated by British 'mechanics' (S140):

Agar ik pahinne ko toh banahen
To kape va ik aur dunyaa se la’een
Jo sine ko vo ek sakt maqaa’en
To mashiriq se magnibr men lene ko jaa’een
Har ik shai men ghairon ke muktaj hain vo
Makainabi ki raun men taraaj hain vo

Since everything is imported, commerce too is adversely affected. Hence there is an urgent need to foster education in the community and to put the same proper value upon the acquisition of skills as the ancient Greeks did (S144-S151). These changes should usher in the hoped for revival in community spirit (S152-S158), for which the last of Hali's similes from everyday life provides an ideal example in the industriously selfless life of the anthill (S156):

Zakhira hai jab chhuyuj ko’i pata
To bhag jamata men hai apni aia
Unhen sath le le-ke hai yah se jaia
Futah apni ek ek ko hai dukhata
Sada un ke hai tis taraf kam chaite
Kama’t se ek ik kti lakhon hai nala

22 It is education which has heard the cry of the poor, which has destroyed slavery, / Which has laid the foundation of republic, / Which has set free the public, / Which both confines and sets more free, which brings both freedom and faithfulness.

23 If they make a hat to wear, they bring the cloth for it from another world, / If they need a needle to sew with, they go from East to West to get it. / In everything they are dependent upon others, and are destroyed by the onslaught of 'mechanics'.

24 When any ant finds a store, he comes running to his community, / And, taking them with him, goes from there to show each of them his supplies. / This is how things ever proceed amongst them: from the earnings of each individual hundreds of thousands are nourished.

25 The Musaddas

The Supplement ends with a prayer to God to look after the Prophet's community before it is too late (S159-S162).

The same mode of supplication is taken up in the final addition to the Musaddas, the Petition (P) whose appeal to the Prophet to attend to his community begins (P1):

Ai khaas-e khais-e ruse vaqt-e du’a hai
Ummat pai tirt a-ke ‘afab vaqt paraa hai

Many of the themes of the Musaddas are again reiterated more briefly in the Petition, which bewails the community’s loss of all but its religion. As another gloomy picture is drawn of the ruin into which the once mighty Muslims have fallen, familiar images make their appearance (P40):

Faryad hai ai khaas-e ummat ki nigahban
Behti ye tabahi ke qarib an lagh hai

In keeping with this poem's devotional nature, however, the Petition suggests that the ultimate solutions to the community's problems lie not so much in education and industrious self-help as in a renewal of that Islamic faith which is still so particularly expressed in passionate devotion to the Prophet (P50):

Iman jise kahhte hain ‘aqide mein hamare
Vo teri mubabat tin ‘irat ki vilaa hai

While the community still loves the Prophet, there is still hope for it. Having enjoyed its turn of glory, it may now endure its disgrace, provided that its faith remains intact.

24.1 The style of the Musaddas

A critical reading of almost any poem will demand at least some cursory analysis of the inextricable link between its semantics and its form, of the relationship between its message and its medium. The overt message of the Musaddas, its poetic articulation of Sir Sayyid's aggressively formulated reformism, will have been sufficiently introduced through the preceding summaries. The verses already quoted in transmutation may also have conveyed some idea of the nature of its medium. But since it is by definition dependent upon both the

25. O most noble of the noble messengers, it is the time for entreaty. Upon your community a strange time has come.

26. The cry goes up, O guardian of the ship of the community, 'This fleet has begun its approach to destruction.'

27. The faith which is said to reside in our belief is our love for you, our devotion to your family.
Urdu language and the poetic conventions associated therewith, more now needs to be said about the style of the Musaddas.

As is shown by his remarks at the end of the First Introduction, Hali was fully aware of the criticisms that his consciously new style was likely to attract from connoisseurs of the classical school of Urdu poetry:

Our country’s gentlemen of taste will obviously have no liking for this dry, insipid, plain and simple poem... Flights of fancy or elegance of style are nowhere to be found in it, and it lacks both the seasoning of exaggeration and the flavouring of artifice. In other words, it contains none of the things with which the ears of my fellow countrymen are familiar and to which their taste is accustomed... This poem has not, however, been composed in order to be enjoyed or with aim of eliciting applause, but in order to make my friends and fellow feel a sense of outrage and shame. It will be a sufficient kindness on their part if they will look at it, read it, and understand it.

An extreme sensibility to language and its stylistic implications seems always to have been a strongly marked characteristic of the Urdu literary world, as the perhaps inevitable consequence of its situation in both the Persianate and Indic worlds. So it was hardly surprising that contemporary critics were indeed to be united in the view that the medium of the Musaddas was quite as revolutionary as its message. For supporters, the new style which Hali called ‘natural poetry’ (nechara sh'ir) was an essential and exciting concomitant of the new ideology. For opponents, the ‘natural poetry’ of the Musaddas was tarred with the same brush of infidelity to tradition as Sir Sayid’s rationalist attempt to bring Islam into conformity with ‘natural law’—the heretical position for which he was widely execrated as a ‘nature-ist’ (nechari).

These conflicting contemporary reactions are vividly illustrated in the various imitations of the Musaddas discussed in section 2.5 below. To understand how its style was able to arouse such passions, it is first useful to take note of the established poetic standards against which its divergences were judged. For present purposes it is hardly necessary to go into detail about the historical evolution of these norms, whose function in the Urdu art-poetry of the mid-nineteenth century has been described elsewhere (e.g. Pritchett 1994:77-122; Shackle 1996a). From the critical perspective Hali later elaborated in his Miqaddama, which advocated the subordination of poetic structures to higher moral purposes, the trouble with contemporary Urdu poetry was that any message had become quite overlaid by layers of medium, as true art had come almost entirely to be replaced by mere artifice.

Although the contemporary taste for elaboration may be seen in the wider context of Islamic literary history as but one phase of a cycle regularly alternating over the centuries in Arabic, then Persian too, latterly also in Urdu poetry, to Hali it represented an absolute nadir, reached after a long process of steady decline from the glorious simplicities articulated in the Persian classics, or still more effectively in earlier Arabic poetry. The artificiality Hali regarded as so degenerate was associated particularly with the so-called ‘Lucknow school’ centred upon the pupils of Shaikh Imam Baksh Nasik (d. 1838), a remarkable figure who was extraordinarily influential in his day for his success in imparting to Urdu poetry all the glitter of the sixteenth century ‘Indian style’ of Persian poetry (Heinz 1973).

Like most artistic styles, this is less effectively captured through description than through brief example. A passage in a long qasida by Hali’s near contemporary Muhssin Kakorvi (1827-1905), a third-generation pupil of the Nasik school, uses a characteristically elaborate rhetoric to play with contrasts between the clouds and the lightning of an Indian monsoon. In one verse, for instance, lightning and cloud appear neatly contrasted types of non-Muslims (Sperl and Shackle 1996b: no. 33, verses 6-7):

Dhur kā tarsā-bacha hai harq lye jil men āg
Abr choq kā birahman hai lye āg men jil\(^{26}\)

In the next, cloud and lightning are even more neatly contrasted as senior officials of the British Empire:

Abr Panjāb talātum men hai a’lā nāzīm
Barq Bangīla-e zulmat men gāvarnār jandī\(^{28}\)

These are verses which demand a sophisticated audience, able without commentary to appreciate the subtle aptness of choq kā, both ‘supreme’ and ‘with a Brahmin’s lock’, or of talātum, whose ‘turbulence’ fits the cloud, and whose five letters in the Urdu script fit the Punjab, the Land of the Five Rivers. They also address an audience appreciating the devotion of such highly wrought art to serious purpose. Muhssin’s qasida of 1876 is an extended eulogy of the Prophet Muhammad, for any Muslim poet a theme of no less profound gravity than Hali’s Musaddas of 1879.

Hali carefully denied himself such extended transmutations of reality in his own mature poetic practice, whose later codification in the Muqaddama condemned them as morally indefensible distortions and aesthetically unacceptable rhetorical tricks. While distinguished by its continual restraint from stylistic exuberance of this kind, much of Hali’s poetry does, however, closely follow the same underlying rules. The petition added to the Musaddas, for instance, is a quite traditional type of poem. Like Muhssin’s, it is a qasida addressed to the Prophet, albeit in supplication rather than in praise. The ‘ground’ (zāmin) of Muhssin’s poem—the formal scheme of its rhyme and

\(^{26}\) So outstanding a fire-worshipper is the lightning that in water it carries fire, so supreme a Brahmin is the cloud that in fire it carries water.

\(^{28}\) The cloud is Governor in the Punjab of turbulence, the lightning is Governor-General in the Bengal of darkness.
metre—is precisely based on one cultivated by Sauda, the great master of Urdu 
gasida, and he in turn derived it from the twelfth century Persian master 
Anvari’s ode beginning jirn-e khyurshid chu az hât dar âyad ba-hamal ‘When the 
disk of the sun enters Aries from Pisces.’ So too does Hall’s Petition use 
another metre which Sauda, in imitation of many classical Persian exemplars, 
particularly favoured for the gasida. This comprises successive pairs of long and 
short syllables, although its symmetry is somewhat obscured by its analysis in 
traditional Urdu prosody (cf. Thiesen 1982) as a variety of hazaj, divided into 
four feet with the pattern maʃ‘ālu maʃ‘ālu maʃ‘ālu faʃ‘ālan. The scansion 
may be illustrated with the aid of the symbol ˮ to indicate an overlong syllable (P23):

- - ˮ / - / - / - / - / ˮ - 

‘Ishrat-kade âbād’ the jis qawm’ ke har sū

- - ˮ / - / - / - / - / ˮ / -

Us qawm’ kā ek ek’ ghar ab bazm-e âzā hāi

For all its modernist emphasis on the familiar key term qawm ‘community, 
pople’, there is nothing very revolutionary about this neatly composed verse, 
with its modestly Persianized vocabulary and its entirely traditional structure, 
governed by the placement of a phrase at its beginning (‘Ishrat-kade ‘pleasure- 
places’) chiastically designed to contrast with the expression which forms the 
stanza at its close (bazm-e ‘âzâ ’assemblies of mourning’). The accepted poetic 
practice of the time might indeed be defined as a spectrum at whose most 
edited end lay works like Muhsin’s gasida, while Hall’s Petition represented 
an extreme of simplicity at its other limit.

It was the deliberate flaunting of this limit in the search for still more 
unadorned and barren expression which made the style of the Musaddas so 
controversial. As is clear from the Muqaddams, much of the inspiration for this 
revolutionary ‘natural’ style certainly came from Hall’s understanding of English 
poetics, most obviously those articulated by Wordsworth (Pritchett 1994:166-7). 
But the Musaddas itself is chiefly concerned with staking out a new position for 
Urdu poetry in the literary tradition of the Islamic world. It does this in a 
whole variety of ways.

One of these is its prosodic form. An Urdu poem’s choice of metre was 
traditionally an important self-statement, one of the main methods—along with 
direct and indirect quotation—which served to align it with recognized Persian 
or Urdu masterpieces of the past. The mutaqârîb selected by Hall for the 
Musaddas is similar to that used in Persian in the great Shâkânâma (1010) by 
Firdausi, whose epic overtones he may have wished to suggest, although a 
likelier analogue would be another famous Persian poem in Firdausi’s metre by 
the Persian poet whom Hall admired above all others, the highly instructional

30 The pleasure-places of that community were flourishing on every side—but its every abode now 
houses assemblies of mourning.

31 ‘Beware!’ I said, ‘Do not go into the sea. And if you do, entrust your body to the storm.’
Musaddas are quite flexible, too flexible indeed for some of the critics alluded to in the following section below. They may vary in length from a single syllable up to five syllables, as in the final -ar ahl-e kishit below. Two-syllable rhymes are the commonest, like the opening -ā hai which is exactly the same as the undemanding monorhyme of the Petition:

```
Yāhā lāl' dūndā men us quum' kā hai

Bhatvar men jahāz å-ke jis kā ghirā hai

Kīnār ālās dār aur' tājān ho-pā hai

Gumān ālās ye āh-dāmi kā ab āb'īā kā hai

Nāhīn lete karvāt magar ahl-e kishit

Page sote lāhī be-khabar ahl-e kishit
```

While this simple rhythm was certainly a factor encouraging the popular diffusion of the Musaddas and its message, its aesthetic consequences were not always entirely happy, as will be further illustrated below. The keen awareness of these weaknesses on the part of contemporary critics is well captured in the satirical definition of 'natural poet' offered in the Avadh Punch of 1904 (quoted in Sandilavī 1960:288) as:

One who is unsophisticated in prosody and ignorant in rhyme, rampant as a lion in bragadocio, whom his grubby creation fills with conceit.

While this is of course wildly unfair, the unvarying beat of Hali's mutaqārib certainly lacks the rhythmic flexibility offered by metres like mutārī which have been generally preferred by Urdu poets of all periods (cf. Matthews and Shackel 1972:212-3).

Its metre is only one possible instance of the influence of Arabic example on the Musaddas. Others are more obvious, including its highly explicit reliance on paraphrases from Arabic sacred literature, whose original texts are so carefully indicated in Hali's notes. The overt influence of Arabic poetry is less easy to establish, although mention here might be made of the device of establishing a framework for nostalgia through the citation of exotic proper names. Deployed at finely judged intervals throughout the magnificent elegy (Arberry 1965:72-81) on the ruined Sassanian palace at Ctesiphon in Iraq by al-Buhūtī (812-97), this device is rather a favourite of Hali's, as is to be seen in his deeply felt— if rhythmically rather awkward— laments for the glories of Muslim Spain (M83):

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Huvādā hai Gharnātā se shauk un kā
Ayān hai Bishanīya se qudrat un kā
Batalās ko yād hai 'azmat un kā
Tāpakāl hai Qādis men sar hasrat un kā
Nastīl un kā Ishāhliya men hai soīd
Shab-o roz hai Qurābā un ko roā
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Just as such lists of exotic names help to tilt the new Urdu poetry's whole frame of reference away from its Persianate past, so too does Hali's choice of vocabulary crucially define the 'natural' style by largely stripping it of the Persian phraseology which for many centuries suffused and defined all the poetic literatures of the Persianate tradition. This represents a quite radical break with the past, quite different from the the paths followed from the later nineteenth century onwards in Persian (Karimi-Hakkak 1996) or in Arabic poetry, where the way forward seemed typically to lie rather in re-establishing fresh links with the literary past of their own languages. Such, for instance, was the case for the so-called neo-classicist movement in Arabic (Cachia 1990:180-4) led by Hali's contemporary al-Barūdī (1839-1904), exiled by the British from Egypt to Ceylon, where much of his finest work was produced (cf. Arberry 1965:148-55). His greatest successor in the next generation too, Ahmad Shauqi (1868-1932), was able derive fresh inspiration from great masters of the Abbasid period like al-Mutanabbi (d. 965), while also elaborating new references to the Pharaonic past of his native Egypt (Boudot-Lamotte 1977).

For would-be modernist poets in composite languages like Urdu or Ottoman Turkish, the choice was not so simple. In their desire to express an ideal future, there was no comparably unambiguous distant past for them to reclaim, in compensation for their rejection of what they commonly identified as the Persianate effeminacy of immediate past and their present. There were, of course, major differences between the political situation of the disempowered Indian Muslims and the Ottomans, a Muslim elite still in control of a multilingual and multireligious empire. But the mid-nineteenth century Turkish reformers (Andrews and Kalpakli 1996) could identify neither with the highly

32 Precisely this is the condition in the world of that community, whose ship has entered the whirlpool and is surrounded by it. / The storm is raging. At every moment there is the apprehension that it is just about to sink. / But the people on the boat do not even turn over, as they lie asleep and unconscious.

33 Their majesty is manifest from Granada, their greatness is made apparent by Valencia. / Their glory is recalled by Badajoz, Cadiz throb with longing for them. / Their fortune sleeps in Seville, and Cordoba weeps for them night and day.
Persianized Ottoman associated with the discredited regime nor with the simple Turkish of the uncultured Anatolian peasantry. The search undertaken by Young Turks like Namik Kemal (1840-1888)—another almost exact contemporary of Hali’s—for an idiom which would one day match French (or English) as a language of modern culture accordingly led them to exploit the third strand of their complex linguistic heritage. This was Arabic, whose enormous resources of abstract vocabulary were drawn upon to fill the gap left by the now discredited rose and bulbul. The opening verse of the well known ‘Freedom qasida’ by Namik Kemal illustrates the typical consequences of this change to a poetic environment in which subtleties of the kind presented in Muhsin’s poetry had previously dominated (Sperr and Shacke 1996b: no.26,1):

Görüp ahkâm-i āsr mühürif fidik u selâmeteden
Çekildik ‘izzet û ikbâl û bâb-i hukûmeteden’ 34

The effect of the verse is entirely dependent upon its plethora of Arabic words, which would be spelt for Urdu as ahhám-i āsr ‘laws of the age’, munharif ‘turned’, sidq-o salâmât ‘honesty and decency’, ‘izzat-o iqbal ‘glory and fortune’, bâb-e hukûmat ‘gate of government’.

Hali does exactly the same sort of thing in the Musaddas. Many of its verses rely for their structure on sequences of Arabic abstract nouns ending in -at. A large inventory of these may be found in our glossary, which also shows that only some of them belong to the technical vocabulary of Islam whose use is necessitated by the poem’s theme. Typically consisting of three syllables, these nouns tend to coincide all too closely with the musâzârât rhythm, just as—with the addition of Turkish suffixes—they do with the equally regular hazâj of Namik Kemal’s poem. As an illustration, the rhythmic accents which fall on the last long syllable of each foot are marked in the following example (M42):

Ghânimat hai tâhidat ‘a‘lalat se ‘pahle
Fa’raghat ma’shâqul kî khasrât se ‘pahle
Jâvânt i’rahdâ kî za’hamat se ‘pahle
Iqâmât mu’sâmîr kî ‘râhlat se ‘pahle
Fa’irat se ‘pahle ghanimat hai ‘daulat
Jo ‘karmâ hai ‘kar li kî ‘thoir hai ‘muhaulat’ 35

Neither Namik Kemal nor Hali can have derived this sort of Arabized diction from classical Arabic poetry itself, which is famously so much more concrete in its vocabulary. Actually, the Islamicate patina which this consciously

34 The laws of the age aswerved before our eyes from honesty and decency: and so turned we, and
glory and fortune from government’s gate.

35 You have your opportunity in health before sickness, in leisure before abundant occupations:/In youth before the afflication of old age, in halting before the traveller goes on:/ You have your
opportunity in wealth before poverty. Do what you ought, for there is little time to spare!—
The profundity of these influences from Western example upon the language and structure of the Musaddas are far more important than the few English loanwords Hali chooses to flaunt, which are confined to 'nation' (M62), 'liberal' and 'liberty' (M97), 'office' (M135), and 'chemistry' (M247). Together with a few more indicated in the foregoing summary of the Supplement, e.g. 'republic' and 'public' (S133) or 'mechanics' (S140), these are interesting for the semantic fields they indicate. They do not add up to a very long list, although a more detailed investigation would certainly add a larger number of calques to it, including Arabic abstract nouns of the type already mentioned, e.g. faathat 'agriculture' and stydhat 'travel' (both M75), besides those formed on other patterns like tamaddun 'civilization' and tarqqa 'progress' (both M8), and such compound phrases as azd-e taa 'freedom of opinion' (M273).

At the superficial level of vocabulary, therefore, English influences on the language and structures of the Musaddas are thus rather slight, however great their role in helping mould the new poetic rhetoric of the 'natural' style. So, in a highly typical reflection of local linguistic concerns (cf. Shackle and Snell 1990:6-11, 73), local critics have instead generally chosen to fasten on a phenomenon which might be regarded as exhibiting the reverse characteristics from those to be associated with English, namely Hali's use of 'Hindi' vocabulary. That way in the Avadh Punce of 1904 described 'natural propaganda' as containing 'torrents of pure Hindi (i.e. hindī) and heaps of unfamiliar words' (Sandilavī 1960:289).

In order to understand the feelings aroused by this issue, it is helpful once more to recall parallels with Turkey, where the linguistic shifts introduced in the nineteenth century by the Young Turks were abruptly succeeded in the 1920s—after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire—by Atatürk's policies of linguistic nationalism. These resulted in a wholesale replacement of the Persian and Arabic components of Ottoman by 'pure' (özc) vocabulary of actual or fabricated Turkish or Turkic origin.

In India, where the beginnings of the later communal polarization of Urdu and Hindi were already well under way in the nineteenth century, a comparable strategy was never really feasible for those seeking to modernize Urdu by increasing the proportion of its indigenous vocabulary—here termed 'Hindi' in quotation marks to distinguish it from the Sanskritized modern standard Hindi in Devanagari script which is the national language of India. Urdu's indigenous Khari Boli base without its Perso-Arabic overlay looks less like modern Urdu than simple modern Hindi. It was, therefore, not just Hindu linguistic chauvinism which made it plausible to include a poem of Hali's in Devanagari script in an early anthology of Khari Boli Hindi verse (Beva ki munajat in Ayodhya Prasad 1889:39-44, cf. McGregor, 1975:104-111) which was produced at a time when the emerging modern Hindi was fighting its own battles for recognition as a poetic language, only in its case against the established position of Braj Bhāṣā.

The controversy over the proper language for Urdu poetry was being fought in a different arena. Hali's linguistic experiments with 'Hindi' vocabulary were undertaken partly in reaction to the linguistic purism of the Nasik school, where much effort had been devoted to expunging the sorts of native words once freely employed by Sauda and his eighteenth century contemporaries, in favour of what were seen as chaster Persianisms. Since he was here venturing on long-abandoned stylistic territory, Hali's use of 'Hindi' is often rather unassured, as is indicated by the elimination of such words in many of the detailed textual revisions illustrated in the appendix to our translation. Some of those words which do remain might well be unfamiliar to many Hindi readers, let alone the Urdu public, e.g. kheti 'moonrise' (M22), khalaichi 'confusion' (M71), kanaujā 'indebted' (M104), gau 'opportunity' (M125). Nor is such recondite vocabulary, with its strongly rustic overtones, always very happily integrated into the poem's predominantly Arabizing diction. In the following verse, for instance, the oppressively 'Hindi' item dayār 'hard rain' blends very awkwardly with the blandly Persianate ab-e siām 'cloud of tyranny' (M65):

Hava har taraf mauz-yān thi bālā ki
Galoī par chhuraī chaī raḥī thi jāfā ki
'Ugāat ki had thi na purīsh khātā ki
Parī lī khāt thi vādd aśā khudā ki
Zamān par thi ab-e siām kā dayār
Tabātī meth thi nau'-'ī insān kā begha36

In fairness, though, it should of course be said such peculiar words constitute only a quite small proportion of Hali's 'Hindi' vocabulary. On the whole, Hali makes very successful use of this register of the language as an important tool in his strategy of reaching beyond the narrow circles of the literati in order to secure as wide an audience as possible for the 'natural poetry' addressed to the Muslim community as a whole. Everyday words are used to express many of the poem's core themes, e.g. barāhā 'to progress' and barāhā 'to advance', and to underpin many of the poem's core images—those deliberately simple similes, parables and metaphors whose fuller implications are explored in the third part of our introduction below. Often largely excluded in favour of their Persian equivalents from the Urdu poetic vocabulary of the day, these words include the recurring nā 'o 'ship' and bārī 'fleet', besides dīnā 'sink' and dibānā 'drown', or ghatā 'raincloud', khét 'field', and gūjarā 'shepherd'. There is certainly—as has been shown—much more to the poetic language of the Musaddas than such simple items, but there is no denying that its 'Hindi' component did form an important part of the poem's impact on Hali's contemporaries.

36 Everywhere there raged the wind of calamity. Throts were being cut by the knife of cruelty. / There was no limit to torture, nor investigation into wrongdoing. God's trust lay being plundered. / The 'hard rain' of the cloud of tyranny pelted upon the earth. The fleet of mankind lay wrecked.