

A History of Urdu Literature

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1932

PREFACE

THIS short history of Urdu Literature, completed in 1929, aims at describing Urdu and its literature down to the end of 1928. All writers who were alive then are excluded. The only living author to whom detailed reference has been made is Iqbāl, whose fame seems to warrant his inclusion.

The Bibliography shows what books are available for further study; there is very little in English.

The following are special features of this work:

(a) The views on the origin and early history of Urdu differ greatly from those of previous authors, particularly in the antiquity attributed to it and the importance attached to Panjabi and the Panjab in connection with its development. The remarks on the problem of the name 'Urdu' are new, and in explanation of the term 'Kharī Bolī' I have tried incidentally to correct prevailing misconceptions on the subject.

(b) Much of what has been said about the Deccan and Dakhnī writers is new. The place of the Deccan in Urdu literature has not been fully understood, and many Dakhnī authors are unknown even by name to people who live in the north of India. I have therefore endeavoured to make this section as full as possible, hoping that the mention of these little-known or unknown names will not only induce students to read Dakhnī works already in print, but lead to the publication of those at present in MS., and to the study of the valuable material contained in them.

(c) New information has been given too about Tahsīn's

Nau Tarz i Murassa', Mir Amman's *Bāg o Bahār*, and Amīr Khusrāu's supposed work *Cahār Darvesh*.

I would draw the attention of readers to certain points:

(i) Many authors are repeatedly referred to; the fullest treatment will be found at the place first mentioned in the Index of Persons, i.e. according to the consecutive number of each. Thus, 'Naẓīr, Valī M., of Āgra, No. 125: 4, 20, 32, 41, 42, 98, 100.' Here the account of Naẓīr is given under No. 125.

(ii) Names of persons and works, Urdu words, and nearly all names of places are spelt with full diacritical marks. A few well-known words, chiefly place-names, are printed in their usual forms, or in some cases first with diacritical and subsequently without. They are those in the subjoined list:

Āgra	Marāthā
Deccan (Dakhan)	Marāthī
Delhi (Dihli)	Oudh (Avadh)
Gujrāt	Panjāb
Gujrātī	Panjābī
Hindī	Paṭnā
Lahore (Lāhaur)	Turkī, Turkistān
Lucknow (Lakhnaū)	Urdū

(iii) The majority of Urdu authors have called their works by Arabic names. I have transliterated most of these with Arabic vocalisation, but in a few cases have treated them as if they were Urdu.

(iv) The system of transliteration of Urdu words is that of the Royal Asiatic Society, except for 'sh' and 'ng,' which I have allowed to stand without special marks, and n to indicate a preceding nasal vowel. I have been unable to use the usual *tilde*, as the press did not possess it. A list of signs will be found on p. 108.

(v) The words 'religion' and 'religious' usually refer to Islām. Sometimes, as will be clear from the context, religion in general is intended.

(vi) The word 'Mugāl' is employed in the usual conventional sense. The so-called Mugal emperors of India, Bābur and his descendants, were actually Barlās Turks.

In order to give an idea of Urdu poetry I have inserted translations of seven poems. These are all my own. Most of them have appeared in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, and I am under obligation to the Editor of that Journal for permission to print them here.

I wish to express my thanks to an old student of my own, Dr. Mohiuddin Qadri, of the Osmaniya University, for having read all the proofs of the volume and made valuable suggestions.

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London,
April, 1932.

ADDENDA

1. Page 7. The relationship of father, son, and grandson, said on p. 17 to have existed between Nos. 5, 6 and 8 (Shāh Mirā Jī, Shāh Burhān and Amīn ud Dīn A'lā), is according to popular report. Obviously one or two generations have dropped out.

2. On page 79, No. 184, line 1, for 'Urdu verse' read 'Urdu prose.' Āzād is the sole source of information about Saudā's prose, and his statements lack confirmation.

3. Page 60. Gālīb probably did not hold the opinion attributed to him on p. 60. His phraseology is, however, sometimes like that of Lucknow writers.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
Urdu Metre	2
The Principal Forms of Urdu Poetry	2
The Most Important Urdu Poets	4
CHAP.	
I. THE HISTORY OF URDU	5
How Urdu Began	5
Early History of Urdu	8
The Name 'Urdū'	10
The Place of Urdu among Languages	12
 II. THE BEGINNINGS OF URDU LITERATURE	 14
A. The 'Religious Period,' A.D. 1350-1590.—(Nos. 1-19)	16
B. The First Literary Period of Urdu in the Deccan, A.D. 1590-1730	19
The Qutb Shāhi Poets. (Nos. 20-42)	20
The 'Ādil Shāhi Poets. (Nos. 43-55)	27
Literature under the Mugals. (Nos. 56-75)	30
Vali's Younger Contemporaries. (Nos. 76-92)	34
 III. THE FIRST CENTURY OF URDU POETRY IN DELHI (A.D. 1730-1830)	 38
A. The Age of Hātim. (Nos. 93-107)	42
B. The Age of the 'Four Pillars of Urdu,' Maḡhar, Saudā, Mīr and Dard. (Nos. 102-113)	46
C. The Age of Muḡhafi, Inshā and Naḡīr (Nos. 114-128)	53

xii A HISTORY OF URDU LITERATURE

CHAP.				
IV.	URDU POETRY IN LUCKNOW IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.			
	(Nos. 129-160)	...	...	60
V	THE SECOND DELHI PERIOD AND THE FOUR POETS OF RAMPUR	...	...	70
	A. The Second Delhi Period. (Nos. 161-177)	...	...	70
	B. The Four Poets at the Rāmpūr Court (Nos. 178-181)	...	...	75
VI.	URDU PROSE	...	...	78
	A. Early Prose Writers. (Nos. 182-185)	...	...	78
	B. The Fort William Translators. (Nos. 186-198)	...	...	80
	C. Urdu Prose Writers of the Nineteenth Century. (Nos. 199-230)	...	...	83
VII.	THE NEW AGE			
	(Nos. 232-240)	...	...	94
VIII.	CONCLUSION	...	...	100
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	...	...	105
	SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION	...	...	108
	INDEX OF PERSONS	...	...	109
	INDEX OF WORKS	...	...	115
	INDEX OF SUBJECTS	...	...	120

INTRODUCTION

INFORMATION about the early Urdū poets is ultimately derived from old Persian anthologies, the great majority of which are unpublished. The earliest known are *Nikāt ush Shu'arā* by Mir (1752), and *Tazkira e Gurdezī* (1752). Other famous anthologies are *Makhzan i Nikāt* by Qāim (1754); *Gulzār i Ibrāhīm* by 'Alī Ibrāhīm Khān Khalil (1783); *Tazkira e Hasan* by Mir Hasan (1776); *Tazkira e Shu'arā e Hindī* by Muṣhafī (1794). The first anthology in Urdu is 'Alī Luṭf's *Gulshan i Hind* (1801).

There are several special difficulties in the study of Urdu literature:

1. Very little early literature has been published. Thus, the extant poetry written before 1800 is nearly all in MS. If we except Valī, Saudā, Mir, Dard and Qāim, all the writers whose works have been published with any completeness were men who lived till after 1825. Many published works, especially those which were first printed in magazines, are not now obtainable.

2. It is often impossible to get access to original MSS., and we have to depend upon quotations in books. The anthologies are often inaccurate and their information is meagre. This accounts for the similarity between the various remarks made by modern authors about old writers; their authorities are the same.

3. There is considerable doubt about dates, particularly the earlier ones. The anthologies frequently omit dates, and often differ in the dates they give.

4. It is nearly impossible to be sure of the genuineness of early Urdu poetry.

Libraries in Great Britain and in some of the Feudatory States of India possess important Urdu MSS.; if these could be published, most of our problems would be solved.

Urdu Metre depends on quantity, not accent. Compared with Greek or Latin it has a fondness for long syllables. Thus among the commonest metres are

˘---/˘---/˘---/˘---/
 and -˘---/-˘---/-˘---/-˘---/
 and ˘--/˘--/˘--/˘--/.

The Principal Forms of Urdu Poetry are:

Gazal, usually a short love lyric, sometimes a poem on a general subject. Strictly speaking it should have the same rhyme throughout. Urdu gazals are for the most part artificial and conventional.

Qaṣīda, a kind of ode, often a panegyric on a benefactor, sometimes a satire, sometimes a poem dealing with an important event. As a rule it is longer than the gazal, but it follows the same system of rhyme.

Marṣiya or elegy, nearly always on the death of Ḥasan, Ḥusain and their families, but occasionally on the death of relatives and friends. It is usually in six-lined stanzas with the rhyme *aaaabb*. The recitation of these elegies in the first ten days of Muḥarram is one of the great events in Muslim life. A fully developed marṣiya is almost an epic.

Maṣnavī, in the majority of cases a poetical romance. It may extend to several thousand lines, but generally is much shorter. A few maṣnavīs deal with ordinary domestic and other occurrences. Mīr and Saudā wrote some of this kind. They are always in heroic couplets, and the commonest metre is bacchic tetrameter with an iambus for the last foot, ˘---/˘---/˘---/˘-/.

Tazkira, biographical anthology, almost always of poetry alone. This is often a mere collection of names with a line or two of information about each poet, followed by a specimen of his composition. On the other hand it may be a history of Urdu poetry with copious illustrative extracts. There are no really good tazkiras. The best give biographical details, but fail in literary criticism, and we get little idea of style or poetical power, still less of the contents of poems. Even the large anthologies do not systematically review an author's work. Most of them have the names in alpha-

betical order, but one or two prefer the historical order. The majority quote only lyrics, and the quotations, usually chosen at random, do not really illustrate the poetry.

Divān, a collection of poems, chiefly gazals.

Kulliyāt, literally a complete collection of poems, but often applied to any collection containing poems of various kinds. Thus Akbar Ilāhābādī published three kulliyāts.

Takhalluṣ, the name under which a poet writes. Every Urdu poet takes a special name by which he is generally known. It is introduced into the last line of all his gazals. Sometimes it is part of his personal name. Thus in the case of the poets Babar 'Alī Anīs and Salāmat 'Alī Dabīr, *Anīs* and *Dabīr* are the takhalluṣ. Examples of poets using part of their ordinary names are Mīr Taqī Mīr and Mīr Ḥasan Ḥasan.

In order to avoid unnecessary Urdu terms in the text, certain English words have been used with a particular sense except where the context requires another. Thus:

Lyric (or love lyric)	= <i>Gazal</i>
Ode	= <i>Qaṣīda</i>
Elegy	= <i>Marṣiya</i>
Romance (or poetical romance)	= <i>Maṣnavī</i>
Anthology (or biographical anthology)	= <i>Tazkira</i>

Rekhta is a Persian word meaning 'poured.' In Persia it has no literary significance, but in India it was used for the Urdu literary language, i.e. the language of poetry, or for Urdu poetry itself. Often it had the sense of gazal or couplet in a gazal. In the time of Nāsikh, d. 1838, Lucknow poets gave up the word rekhta and began to use 'Urdū' for the language, and 'gazal,' a word occasionally found in the eighteenth century, for the poem. In Delhi rekhta continued in use down to the Mutiny. Various explanations of rekhta are given.

1. It meant 'verse in two languages,' e.g. one line Persian and one Arabic, or one Persian and one Urdu. The earliest verse in north India was sometimes of this kind and was called rekhta. The name once given remained.

2. It meant 'fallen,' and Urdū, supposed to be fallen and worthless, received the name.

3. Urdū was called *rekhta* because it consisted of Hindi into which Arabic and Persian words had been *poured*.

4. It is a musical term introduced by Amīr *Khusrau* to mean a harmonising of Hindi words with Persian melodies.

5. It means a wall firmly constructed of different materials, as Urdū is of diverse linguistic elements. This is the opposite of (2).

The Most Important Urdu Poets. Urdu poetry is such a maze, that a useful purpose may be served if the leading poets are indicated. There will be diversity of opinion about such a list, for people differ in temperament and in attitude towards modern thought. No finality is claimed for the views here expressed, but they may be a guide. The names of poets from the Deccan may occasion surprise, for their greatness is not realised in north India. The old *tazkira* writers say little about them and only Valī is generally known.

1. THE GREATEST POETS. The groups are in order of rank, the names within each group in order of date. (a) Mīr, Gālib, Anīs. (b) Valī, Saudā, Naẓīr of Agra, Iqbāl. (c) Dard, Mīr Hasan, Dāg, Hālī, Akbar.

2. THE BEST GAZAL WRITERS in order: Mīr, Valī, Dard, Gālib, Muṣṣafī, Ātish, Dāg, Amīr Mināī.

3. THE BEST QAṢĪDA WRITERS in order: Saudā, Zauq, Nuṣratī.

4. THE BEST MARSIYA WRITERS in order: Anīs, Dabīr, Mūnis, Khaliq, Zamīr; and the Dakhnī writers Hāshim 'Alī, Mīrzā.

5. THE BEST MAṢNAVĪ WRITERS in order: Mīr Hasan, Aṣar, Mīr, Nasīm, Mūmin, and the Dakhnī writers Gavvāshī, Nuṣratī, Tab'ī, Vajhī.

6. POETS WHO EXCELLED IN GENERAL POETRY in order of date: King Qulī Quṭb Shāh, Naẓīr of Agra, Hālī, Akbar, Kaifi of the Deccan, Iqbāl. During the past 50 years perhaps the best, apart from poets already mentioned, have been Āzād, Jalāl, Taslīm, Ismā'īl, Shād.

The greatest poem of the last 100 years is probably Hālī's *Musaddas*, unless we regard Anīs's Elegies as one poem.

I

THE HISTORY OF URDU

How Urdu Began. Much has been written on the origin of Urdū. The word 'urdu' itself is Turkish and means 'army' or 'camp'; our English 'horde' is said to be connected with it. The Muslim army stationed in Delhi from 1193 onwards was known as *the Urdū* or *Urdū e Mu'allā*, the Exalted Army. It is usually believed that while this army spoke Persian, the inhabitants of the city spoke the Braj dialect of Hindi. There is no reason however to think that Braj was ever the language of Delhi. The people of the capital spoke an early variety of that form of Hindi now known as *Kharī Bolī*,¹ which is employed to-day in all Hindi prose and in most Hindi poetry. The idea that the army spoke Persian also requires reconsideration.

Maḥmūd of *Gaznī* annexed the Panjab in 1027 and settled his army of occupation in Lahore. The famous scholar, Alberuni of *Khivā* (973-1048) lived there for some time while he studied Sanskrit and prosecuted his researches into Hinduism. Maḥmūd's descendants held the Panjab till 1187, when they were defeated by their hereditary foes under Muḥammad *Gorī* who had already sacked *Gaznī*. The first sultan of Delhi was Quṭb ud Dīn Aibak, a native of Turkistan, but a servant of Muḥammad *Gorī* and afterwards his chief general. He captured Delhi in 1193 and on the death of his master in 1206 took the title of Sultān. From that time foreign troops were quartered in

¹ As I have explained in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, October, 1926, pp. 717-23, the word *kharī*, feminine of *kharā*, means standing, and *Kharī Bolī* means the standard, current or established language. The word was first used during 1003 by Sadal Mīsr in *Nāsiketof-zkhyān* and by Lallū Lāl in *Prem Sāgar*. *Kharī* has nothing to do with *kharī*, pure.