

BOOK REVIEWS

BHARTRIHARI, *Iqbāl kā ēk Mamdīb*, ‘Azīm Sanskrit Shā’ir aur Mufakkir: Tāḥqīqī Muṭāli‘a aur Us kē Mustanad Kalām kā Urdū Tarjuma. Tāḥqīq aur tarjuma, ‘ABDU’s-SATTAR DALVI. Mumba‘ī: Dā‘iratul-Adab, 2004. 214 pp.

As indicated by the title of this book, the classical Sanskrit poet Bhartrihari is of interest to us not only for his poetic achievements but also because he and his ideas make an appearance in the Persian and Urdu works of Muhammad Iqbāl. In Iqbāl’s Persian *maśnavī*, *Jāvēdnāma*, the modern poet-philosopher travels through the paradisal spheres in the company of Rūmī and encounters distinguished characters such as Nāṣir Khusrau, Ṭipū Sultān, Vishvamitra, and Bhartrihari. Annemarie Schimmel has pointed out the place of the ancient poet’s philosophy in the mental landscape of Iqbāl who

has chosen the Indian sage Bhartrihari whom he even allots a seat in Paradise—for expressing his own ideas about action as determinative force in human life; the Indian poet-philosopher recites a ghazal [...]; and the same Bhartrihari recurs once more as the leading figure in the motto of the *Bāl-e Jibril*[quoted below].¹

Dalvī discusses the complex relationship of Iqbāl to Bhartrihari and introduces the latter’s poems to Urdu readers along with translations that are the product of twenty years of devotion to this topic.

In the first half of the book, Dalvī provides a survey of Sanskrit literature and literary theory, positioning Bhartrihari in his proper place in its literary canon. Not much is known about the life of this fifth-century court poet; the scattered references and anecdotes about him are gathered together here from various sources, but, unfortunately, they do not tell us much about him. There is also a discussion of how Iqbāl may have come across Bhartrihari’s writings—the possibility that he read the original Sanskrit poems is not ruled out—and the influence of the ancient poet’s concept of karma on the modern philosopher’s views on action as a force in man’s life. The poet Bhartrihari is known for his *Shatakatraya*, a work comprised of three parts with a hundred poems in each; the poems are in the form of shlokas (also called *dōhās* by the author) on each of these subjects: *nīti* (political

¹Gabriel’s Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), 334.

wisdom), shringar (erotic passion), and *vairāgya* (renunciation). Apparently the first translation of these poems into Urdu was in prose by Bābū Gaurī Shankar Lāl and printed in Delhi in 1913 under the title *Jauhar-e Tašlis*. Since then several writers have published translations of the poems in Urdu verse and prose, but mostly just a few poems from the *Shatakatraya*. Among these translators are Mīrājī, Aśar Lakhnāvī, Krishan Shankar Čaudhrī, Tilōk Čand, Jazb Ḵālīpūrī, Imtiāzuddin Ahmād, Yūsuf Nāżim, Iṣmat Jāved, and Raghūnāth Ghai, some of whose versions are provided by way of example. The gnomic quality of these poems has often inspired some poets to render them as quatrains, and they do have a Khayyām-esque quality, but the translator here presents them in a different form.

Many of the poems that have come down as Bhartrihari's work are now considered apocryphal by scholars (as is the case with Khayyām's quatrains). The second half of the book has Dalvī's free verse translations of two hundred of the shlokas that were accepted as authentic by the late D. D. Kosambi and translated into English so finely by the eminent Sanskritist Barbara Stoler Miller. In fact, Dalvī's Urdu versions of the Sanskrit poems are actually translations from Miller's English text, although he does mention in the introduction that he consulted the Sanskrit as well with the help of a colleague who had an expert's knowledge. He follows the tripartite division of the work: *akhlāqiyāt* (75 poems), *jamāliyāt* (73 poems), *rahbāniyāt* (52 poems). The starting point of this work as discussed above is Bhartrihari's famous poem that Iqbāl masterfully compressed in a single couplet as the epigraph of his *Bāl-e Jibril*, viz., “*Phūl ki patti se kāt saktā hai hīrē kā jigar / Mard-e nādāñ par kalām-e narm-o-nāzuk bē-āsār*” (A flower-petal can cut a diamond's core, / Soft and gentle words have no effect on an ignoramus). Here is Miller's translation of the poem from the original Sanskrit:

A man may tear a jewel
from a sea monster's jaws,
cross a tumultuous sea
of raging tides,
or twine a wrathful serpent
garland-wise on his head,
but no man can please
the mind of an obstinate fool.²

which Dalvī translates as follows:

*ādmī ūf-shikan bhī hōtā hai
shēr-o-aždar kō mār letā hai
baḥr-e zakhhkār kē talāṭum mēñ*

²The Hermit & the Love-Thief, Sanskrit Poems of Bhartrihari and Bilhana (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 33.

*tair kar us kō pār jātā hai
 bāñ! magar voh badal nahiñ saktā
 mard-e nādāñ kī fikr kā andāz*

(Poem 9)

It is clear that the *nazms*, ranging from four to thirteen lines, are free translations of the Sanskrit poems. At various times the translator discusses the challenges of translating a given poetry into modern Urdu idiom, even confessing his inability to render some of Bhartrihari's poems into verse. Such personal statements in the author's introductions are a valuable commentary on the process of translating into Urdu while working with a myriad of texts and languages.

The second set of poems on the theme of love is a celebration of the feminine element in all its physical and emotional aspects, and thankfully Dalvi is not prudish about translating even the most sexually explicit imagery. The celebration of a woman's beauty is a trope of Indic love poetry that has traces in Dakhni ghazals, thus these images are resurrected once again in some of the translations here:

*sandal meñ nab'ī h'ī naukhēz ḥasīna
 birnī kī tarah shōkh čamaktī h'ī ānkhēñ
 kuhsār kē dāman meñ ko'ī vādī-e ashjār
 aur chāndnī rātōñ kā voh māhāul khiradsōz
 voh phūl čañbelī kē, voh badmāst havā'ēñ
 kāfī haiñ ke insān kō dīvāna banā dēñ*

(Poem 99)

Bhartrihari's attitude towards love is tinged with wistfulness and he warns men to be wary of the entrappings of a woman's body. Following this, the third set of poems is appropriately on the theme of renunciation, in a mode that would strike a resonant chord for readers familiar with the spiritual underpinnings of Persian and Urdu poetry. The following poem addresses the essence of the mystic's quest:

*ai dil-e nādāñ!
 vaqt zā'i kar rahē hō kyoñ?
 husn-e karam kī justujū mēñ ghair kī
 karb kī jhāri mēñ ghus jātē hō kyoñ?
 gar tumhēñ khud apne andar hī sukūñ mil jā'ēgā
 gauhar-e maṭlūb ban jā'ēgā phir husn-e khayāl
 shauq-e āzādī tumhāri khvāhishōñ kō
 khatm kar dālegā phir*

(Poem 167)

The poet's disenchantment with the world and his career as a court poet, his impatience with fools, and quest for spirituality, are the main topics addressed

here.

Dalvī's efforts to introduce the work of Bhartrihari through his free translations is commendable. The possibilities for comparative literary studies are numerous and unexploited within the languages of South Asia. In the case of this book, the two classical poetic traditions, Sanskrit and Persian-Urdu, offer enticing points of comparison and contrast in terms of the rhetorical conventions and aesthetics that are deployed in them. Furthermore, these traditions did not merely exist at different times in the same geographic space but also interacted with each other at critical historical moments, as shown by Iqbāl's reading of Bhartrihari. Both Rafiq Zakaria and Ali Sardar Jafri who have written introductions to this book laud the literary and social need for producing such works. Dalvī, now retired from his position as head of the Department of Urdu, University of Mumbai, is still an active presence in the academic and literary scene there, and his scholarly publications in Urdu cover a multitude of topics from linguistics to a history of Muslims in Pune. This newest work by him, printed on good paper and with a readable font, is a useful addition to the corpus of translations of world literature available in Urdu. □

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SHAUKAT KAIFI. *Yād kī Rahguzar*. New Delhi: Star Publications, 2006. 223 pp. Rs. 250. ISBN 8176502006. [English edition: *Memory Lane*. Translated by NASREEN RAHMAN. New Delhi: Zubān Books (An imprint of Kali for Women), 2007. 250 pp. \$36.95. ISBN 8189013750.]

I FIRST READ this book in the Urdu original. It is a very remarkable book, made all the more remarkable for reasons which I should perhaps begin by declaring that Shaukat Kaifi is the widow of Kaifi Azmi whom I knew of, and may have met, during my first year's study leave in India in 1949–1950. I knew that he was a leading Urdu poet in the Progressive Writers' Association, and in addition there was the attraction that we were both members of our respective communist parties, and very dedicated members at that. Shaukat writes of him, "He always carried his Party card in his briefcase and would often take it out and say proudly, 'This is my most valuable capital'" (217). I last met him in the late 1990s in Lucknow where we were both participants in a seminar on Faiz. I asked him then whether he was still a Party member. He said, "Yes, card-carrying."

I think it relevant to say all this because, obviously, he looms large in this book. Until after his death I never knew that he was married and that Shabana Azmi, the famous film star, was his daughter. Even then I did not know anything about his wife until I received this book.

I began reading it at once, and it held my interest to the end. Its most striking quality is a sort of naïveté, a naïveté of a very positive and admirable kind. It seems that Shaukat has never been a Communist Party member, but to me this doesn't matter, because I realized more than 50 years ago that (obviously) not every good person is a communist and (much more important) that not every communist is a good person. It is the good people who are to be valued and Shaukat is emphatically one of these, with, like Kaifi, a lifelong commitment to a sincere and honest life in which she exploited no one and worked constantly for the well-being of the common people and against those who oppress and exploit them. For her, this is what politics is all about. In her long and active life she has known scores, if not hundreds, of well-known left-wingers, but she makes no "party political" (so to speak) judgments of any of them, because it is their personal qualities and the way they relate to her that concerns her. For instance, of the terrible days of B. T. Ranadive's domination of the Communist Party (1947–1950) she expresses no opinion about the political line, but speaks of the way in which in that period everyone came to suspect everyone else, and of the distress this caused her. Incidentally, the book gives a vivid picture of Communist Party life before Ranadive's advent to power, a way of life which I myself witnessed at close quarters when I was in India, both in 1943–1945 and in 1949–1950.

An early part of the book gives a vivid picture of her girlhood and youth in Hyderabad (in Andhra Pradesh) and goes on to describe how she fell in love, virtually at first sight, with Kaifi and he with her. No other book that I know of has done anything like this, and the picture is a fascinating one in which one sees the mingling of traditional, conventional social Muslim values with the intense romanticism which these produce in those who break with them. Thus, before Kaifi ever declares his love for her he responds to her speaking of a marriage that has been arranged for him by telling her, "I will never marry," without adding the unspoken words "anyone but you" (40). And she tells us how soon after this she wrote to him, "I love you, Kaifi, I love you boundlessly. No power in the world can stop me coming to you—no mountain, no river, no sea, no people, no sky, no angel, no God"—adding, with a touch of humor, "and God knows what else" (55). Later, when, not knowing that her letters to him had been intercepted by her family, he feels that she is no longer writing to him and no longer loves him, he cuts his wrist and writes her a letter in his blood. Their marriage caused a breach between her father and her mother. Her mother, as a believer in traditional values, never expresses in words her strong disapproval of her husband's support for their daughter, but doesn't speak to him for a whole month.

To those who do not know that supremely popular genre of Urdu poetry the ghazal, the extravagant romanticism of this story may seem a bit over the top. To those who do know the ghazal it presents a wonderful picture of the love which the ghazal portrays, brought fully to life, so to speak, with all the main ghazal characters identified and introduced to the reader—the lovers, their sympathizers, and the stern upholders of convention (in this case in Shaukat's own family) who

do all they can to thwart the lovers.

Kaifi and Shaukat are both communists—that she is not a Party member is not significant—and live their lives in accordance with communist principles as they understand them. Shaukat writes

Kaifi was not only my husband, he was my friend who never imposed his own wishes on me and never made me do anything I didn't want to do. He always respected my wishes and my desires. He always tried to help me to go forward, achieve fame, be independent, and win people's praise.
(210)

Kaifi is not an actor, but Shaukat is and has a long career both on the stage and in films from 1944 to 1988, and Kaifi is fully involved and fully supportive of her. Occasional disagreements are not concealed, and are resolved by happy compromise. Thus, when after many years they acquire a house of their own, they discuss how it is to be furnished (148). Shaukat thought Kaifi's suggestions were absurd and, she writes, "He thought mine were. Kaifi was a keen gardener, and we agreed that he should do what he liked with the garden and I should do what I liked with the house."

Sometimes they seem to have been guided, perhaps quite unconsciously, by more traditional values. Thus Shaukat is not a conventionally religious person, but she believes in the power of prayer. In 1973, when Kaifi suffered a stroke (which eventually left his left arm paralyzed) and his life was in danger she says, "Of all his many friends, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh, there was not one who did not go to his mosque or temple or gurdvara to pray for him, and it was the effect of their prayers that he gradually recovered consciousness" (176–77). And much later on in the story, when Kaifi decides that they should leave Bombay and spend the rest of their lives in Mijwan, the extremely backward village in which Kaifi had spent his boyhood and youth, one wonders whether it is only their great mutual love which determines what they do. She says of this decision:

The object of his life was to change the world, to banish poverty, hunger and ignorance. But when he saw that to change the whole world would take a very long time, he turned to his village. And there he did indeed achieve a huge transformation. (199–200)

Anyway, the husband decides and the wife accepts. Shaukat merely comments, "I was living very comfortably in Bombay, and besides, I had always been a town dweller and the thought of living in a village filled me with dismay. But I knew that Kaifi would never change his mind. What could I do?" (187). So that was that. She did live in Mijwan and worked shoulder to shoulder with Kaifi to achieve improvements in village life which in quality and quantity seem almost miraculous. And in all this their unflagging efforts were paralleled by an equally unwavering patience. She clearly concurs with Kaifi's words to her daughter, "When you

are working for change you must realize that the change may not come in your lifetime, but even so you must keep working for it" (217).

Shaukat's behavior towards her two children is also determined both by her traditional and modern values.

There is much else in this book. I had not known that, like her daughter after her, she too had been a famous actress, and those more knowledgeable than I am about these things will find the full list of the plays and films in which she has performed.

When I first read the book I learned from the foreword that Nasreen Rahman had translated it into English, but I had not seen the translation. Now I have. It is an excellent translation, and I am very happy to have had the opportunity, at the translator's own request, to sit with her and help her finalize it. Here it is, making Shaukat's story available to a much larger audience than the Urdu original could reach. □

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HAMEEDA AKHTAR HUSAIN RAIPURI. *My Fellow Traveller, a Translation of Humsafar*. Translated from the Urdu by AMINA AZFAR. Foreword by MUSHFIQ KHWAJA. Introduction by ASIF FARRUKHI. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006. 384 pp. Rs. 495. \$35. ISBN 0-19-547147-4.

OUR THANKS are due to Dr. Jamil Jalibi for persuading Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri (with a little help from well-known poetess Fahmida Riaz) to take pen in hand, imagining that he was sitting in front of her, and say whatever she had to say about the journey of her life in the company of husband Akhtar Husain Raipuri. Throughout the book readers feel they are simply listening in on a conversation between two friends.

But why a translation into English of a memoir originally published in Urdu in 1996? Presumably, anyone familiar with her husband's literary work in Urdu and with the Urdu literary scene would already have read the original Urdu edition? Who, then, are the intended readers for this English edition and what will they find? My own experience would suggest that the English reader is not, necessarily, someone who is familiar with her husband or his work; nor is the English reader necessarily someone who has read her husband's autobiography, *Gard-e-Rāh*, and would not, therefore, be in a position to appreciate this book as, in some sense, an appendix to it.

What I personally found most interesting—and the reason I read the book not once but twice—was the very endearing portrait Madame Raipuri paints of Maulvi Abdul Haq, Baba-i-Urdu. I agree wholeheartedly with Mushfiq Khwaja's assertion in the foreword he wrote for the original Urdu edition of this work that Maulvi Abdul Haq is the "person who astonishes us most in these pages" (xi).

Only here do we catch a glimpse of the “fun-loving” side of this truly renowned scholar who was normally seen only from behind “thick curtains of scholarship and gravity” (*ibid.*).

What readers see in this portrait is a sensitive, lonely man as attached to Akhtar Raipuri as he might have been to his own son if he had had one and delighted by Hameeda joining the household after her marriage. We see a man who is stubborn and temperamental but, nevertheless, kindhearted. A man who brought tears to Hameeda’s eyes when she thought about how he had managed to secretly make special preparations for her first Eid away from her parental home, how he had arranged for new clothes for her and had even caused the flowers to “bloom” in the garden by having twigs with canna blossoms pinned to their tops placed between the petunia seedlings she had planted there (188–89). We see a man who loved animals and felt pained if he heard that one had suffered (198), a man who wanted only for Akhtar to be like a son to him and follow in his footsteps but feared he would leave (101). A man who warned Hameeda to be on guard as well because, he says, Akhtar is a “mad, reckless, and stubborn fellow perfectly capable of going away if he is thwarted, and will never look back” (100).

And, although Hameeda clearly has the deepest respect and affection for her “fellow traveler,” the portrait she paints of Akhtar Raipuri suggests that Maulvi Sahib’s characterization of him is on the mark and his fears are well-founded. We learn later that Akhtar had every intention of holding Maulvi Sahib to their agreement and planned to leave when the work on the Urdu pocket dictionary he was assisting with was finished. He confided to Hameeda that it hurt him “to think how unhappy Maulvi Sahib will be when we leave him” (191). Unfortunately it doesn’t hurt him enough for him to stay in order to spare Maulvi Sahib this anguish, and Akhtar himself admits that his “nature is such that it cannot tolerate checks and restraints for very long” (192). Akhtar is not someone who bends, he insists on pursuing his dream of bringing out a weekly paper in Delhi at all costs (191)—and he does not gain readers’ respect or sympathy in the process. Again, it is Maulvi Sahib’s loving nature that comes out and wins respect when it is he who bends, assisting Akhtar by providing a letter addressed to a press in Darya Ganj (194) and eventually coming himself to Delhi to visit (199) despite the “deep sadness” Hameeda saw reflected in his eyes at the prospect of being left in the house alone (195).

The last third of the book is actually much less interesting after Maulvi Abdul Haq largely disappears and Akhtar himself, his accomplishments, and his difficulties become the focus of the narrative. A reader is unlikely to take pleasure in what Akhtar does or feel sympathy for the wrongs he suffers when the portrait of him painted up until then is not one to win respect or affection. I found myself reading on in hopes of hearing more about Maulvi Sahib, hoping to discover there was eventually some reconciliation and reunion with this “great and noble man” (190).

While the title *My Fellow Traveller* suggests that this memoir is about Akhtar,

in fact, his life really seems to be used as a subtext for a memoir of Hameeda Raipuri's own life—and her story also makes interesting and engaging reading. She speaks of her upbringing in a way that reveals she herself is very unusual, and perhaps a bit of a rebel. For example, she explains that when she was young it was not customary for girls to read whatever they came upon, parents decided which "magazine or book was suitable" (9). But she and her friends enjoyed sharing materials that would never have gotten such approval, including the magazine *Nigar*, "which was considered to be solely men's reading" (*ibid.*), and it was here that she encountered the short story by Akhtar Raipuri that attracted her to this young author and changed the course of her life. The tale of her "courtship," her wedding and her first morning as a new bride in Maulvi Sahib's household (65–67) are highlights of her memoir. Indeed, the story of her days in Maulvi Sahib's household prove to be the most entertaining segment of her memoir. But can it all be believed?

Some have questioned the reliability of Hameeda Raipuri's memory and claimed the work is pure fiction. However, as Asif Farrukhi points out in his very informative and insightful introduction, this should not really be an issue here (xxvii). As with all memoirs, questions about the accuracy of what is being said may arise, but this memoir is simply Hameeda Raipuri's perspective. Others, including her husband and Maulvi Sahib, might have very different perspectives, but her perspective can be accepted and enjoyed for what it is. And she may indeed have something to "fear" when she "goes up" and has to look Akhtar Sahib in the eye after all she has written (xxii). What *will* she say when he asks what she's been up to?

The translation of *Humsafar* itself is quite readable, but information about the translator, Amina Azfar, is absent. I had to look elsewhere to learn that she is a former editor at Oxford University Press, has worked as an English language teacher, and is now a freelance writer, editor and translator. English readers have her to thank as well, along with Jamil Jalibi and Fahmida Riaz, for bringing this memoir to print. □

—JANE A. SHUM
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Redefining Urdu Politics in India. Edited by Ather Farouqui. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006. 309 pp. Rs. 595. ISBN: 0-19-567739-0.

URDU HAS FUNCTIONED as an identity symbol of the Muslims of India from the Hindi-Urdu controversy period (1860–1947) and has remained a political rallying cry after Partition. This aspect of Urdu has been written about by Paul Brass

whose work covers the period between 1947 and 1972.¹ The present author brings this period up to 1998.² A number of foreigners, such as Ralph Russell,³ have also written about aspects of Urdu in India. However, the ones who have written, experienced, and agonized over the future of Urdu in India are Indian Muslims such as Omar Khalidi⁴ and, above all, the editor of this book, Ather Farouqui. Farouqui's name is familiar to those who have studied the role of Urdu in India. He has written scholarly research articles, letters to the editor, newspaper columns and speeches for the cause of Urdu in India. That Farouqui is the editor of this work, comprising four parts and seventeen chapters along with a preface by Salman Khurshid, is very reassuring for those who understand India and the condition of Urdu there.

The book is an outcome of an international conference on Urdu held in India in February 2002. The conference was organized by Mr. Salman Khurshid, an enthusiast of Urdu and a minister in the Indian government. Originally planned for 2001, it was postponed because of the Gujarat earthquake. I believe, but for Khurshid's initiative, such an authoritative work on the state of Urdu in India could not have seen the light of the day.

The basic problem of Urdu in India owes its existence to the Hindi-Urdu controversy. It had its peaks and quiet periods, but it was one of the factors contributing to the antagonistic, religion-based identity formation among Hindus and Muslims during the period leading up to the partition of India.⁵ In short, Urdu came to be seen as the language of Muslims. And, in that capacity, it was actively replaced by Hindi from 1949 onwards and consigned to being a minority concern. As the Muslim minority was unevenly distributed across India—and not all of it owns Urdu as a mother-tongue—Urdu could not find a place befitting its former significance in the social makeup of post-independence India. This, essentially, is the problem of Urdu in India which the book addresses.

There is, however, another view about Urdu which Salman Khurshid points to and which many writers subscribe to. It is that Urdu is an Indian language and, therefore, must be cared for and owned by all Indians and not only Muslims. Its ancestor was born in India. It absorbed a number of Persian, Arabic and Turkish words from the languages of Muslims and came to be written in the Perso-Arabic

¹*Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 233.

²*Language, Ideology and Power: Language-Learning Among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 234, 62.

³"Urdu in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34 (1/2):44–48.

⁴*Indian Muslims Since Independence* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995).

⁵King, Christopher R. *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth-Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994).

script. It is, therefore, a symbol of the syncretic, composite, high-culture of urbanized North Indian Hindus and Muslims. As such it should be specially protected and patronized by the state.

In this context, Salman Khurshid notes:

It is worth noting that atavism succeeded in having Article 351 of the Indian Constitution declare "Hindustani" as a style of Hindi, which was at one stage supposed to be the *national language* of free India and perhaps the only solution to the negative politics played in the name of Urdu and Hindi. (xiii–xiv)

Ather Farouqui points out that the Muslim élite of North India has abandoned the language because jobs are no longer available in it. However, it survives in the Islamic seminaries (madrasas). Thus, those Muslims who want to preserve Urdu sometimes send their children to the madrasas. As the madrasas are linked with Islam, often of a narrow variety, this could hardly be a welcome trend in this post-9/11 world.

The four sections into which the articles are divided are: 1) "Contextualizing Urdu," i.e., situating it in the backdrop of history; 2) "Urdu and Identity Politics," which looks at the relationship between these two variables with reference to the present; 3) "Civic Space, Education, and Urdu," which examines the state of Urdu education in India and other parts of the world; and 4) "Minority Language and Community-Legal Concerns," which looks at the legal aspects of religious and linguistic minorities with a focus on Urdu.

The above description is a bit simplistic and, therefore, misleading, as synoptic encapsulations generally are. In fact, a number of contributions do not fit into any one rigid category and almost everyone has a rich range of references and a vast archive to refer to. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, included in section 1, gives an incisive analysis of how iconicity is achieved. In the case of Urdu, he says, becoming an iconic language "doubly disadvantaged" it (17). For, after all, the same iconic use helped Pakistan. He calls, therefore, for a new national identity for Urdu.

Yogendra Singh, whose writings on Indian Muslims and Islam are very well known, tells us that "Maharashtra has emerged as most successful in promotion of Urdu education." While Uttar Pradesh, once considered the home of Urdu, has very few Urdu-medium schools, "Bombay city alone has 124 registered Urdu-medium high schools, while there are 230 such institutions throughout Maharashtra" (46). Despite these oases in the desert, so to speak, Singh does not consider the future of Urdu assured. He suggests that the Muslim community must redefine its aspiration for cultural identity, "when contextualized in terms of religion and politics" (61).

Theodore P. Wright has approached the problem of Urdu through an analysis of the languages of formerly dominant "élites." Specifically, he has referred to the cases of Manchu in China, Coptic in Egypt, Gaelic and Latin in the British Isles, Quechua in Peru, Arabic in Spain and German in Eastern Europe. These have died

out, but another set has flourished: Anglo Saxon over Norman French, Spanish and Portuguese over the Amerindian languages, Afrikaans in South Africa and French in Canada have achieved bilingual status with English, Hebrew over Yiddish and Arabic in Palestine/Israel and Catalan along with Spanish in Spain. He brings out two interesting points: that the aristocratic culture of Lucknow (especially qawwalis and music) may be Urdu's greatest asset and that English may be Urdu's greatest threat. Indeed, he is the only one who warns against the globalized culture of the "flat world" (to use Thomas Friedman's phrase), which is another name for "the invasion of pornographic and violent American popular culture via satellite television, cinema, and video" (81).

This is a useful insight. Indeed, foreigners sometimes contribute very interesting insights to the understanding of Urdu. Barbara Metcalf tells us how she was congratulated on her "chaste Hindi" in India when she had learned Urdu in Lahore—they are, as Hindi films assure us, the same language when spoken by ordinary, urban people. Thus, Christina Oesterheld, who teaches Urdu at Heidelberg, Germany, tells us that the construction of Urdu as a "language of love poetry" commercializes and trivializes it. However, like Wright, she also agrees that it is "exactly the entertainment value of these forms ... which keeps at least part of it alive" (197), but which, if Amina Yaqin's reading of Anita Desai's novel *In Custody* is to be believed, is nostalgic and should be changed in order to move on (120). However, while at one end Urdu is associated with love and romance, on the other it is also associated with Islam. It has a huge depository of religious texts and is used in the madrasas of both Pakistan and India as a medium of instruction and examination. Arjumand Ara, in her chapter on "Madrasas and the Making of Muslim Identity" gives a detailed account of this which concludes with the suggestion that Muslim children should be given schools, and in North India these schools should be Urdu-medium (101). This, incidentally, brings us to the central themes of many important articles: identity and education. Both are linked, as Daniela Bredi has brought out, to the place of Urdu in India—especially in the educational system. For all Dr. Zakir Husain's efforts on behalf of Urdu, Urdu (especially the script) was phased out of the educational system. Bredi suggests that both Hindu and Muslim communalization—the latter because it uses Urdu in political negotiation with the state—must be resisted (138). Kelly Pemberton, in a detailed analysis of the future of Urdu in the context of the power politics of India, agrees with this conclusion (157). However, even though Syed Shahabuddin blames the Urdu élite for being content with gaining small political advantages for themselves (high jobs, élitist institutions, conferences, etc.), the fact is that even those who genuinely want the language to thrive at lower levels—such as those Ather Farouqui's chapter (10) on Urdu education describes—have found no method except creating pressure groups, that is, the political method.

In short, as the historical reference by Kerrin Grafin Scheverin (chapter 12) to the Wardha Scheme reminds us, when a politics of division prevails—as it did during the Wardha days of 1937—language cannot avoid politicization. Thus Hin-

dustani, often regarded as another name for ordinary Urdu, was considered Hindi—and this meant Sanskritized Hindi—in free India. A way out of the past and towards the future is suggested by every contributor, Hasan Abdullah and J. S. Gandhi, however, have given solutions which need to be examined (chapters 13 and 14 respectively).

Like many other contributors—Farouqui has the details—Abdullah suggests that the Three Language Formula should be modified to include Urdu. He then goes on to say that there should be a transition to English and, at the end he quotes a verse from Ghālib saying that Urdu should be learned in order to appreciate such quotes—i.e., should be learned for aesthetic, nostalgic reasons. One wonders whether people engrossed in globalization and English will even need to turn to Ghālib. Moreover, Abdullah leaves out exactly how Urdu would be taught in schools in the Hindi belt to Muslims who would rather pursue a career (and globalization) in that belt. This, it must be pointed out, is too vague to translate into a policy. However, J. S. Gandhi's biographical snippets lamenting the communalization of languages do not stop at sentimentality. He gives the useful suggestion that non-Muslim supporters of Urdu should help to save the language and that madrasas need not be ruled out, as centers of terrorism, when it comes to teaching the Urdu script. As for the legal papers, they are very cogently argued but the law never functions against the wishes of the majority—is it the will of the majority in India to save Urdu? That is the central question.

This question needs more probing. The book might have included detailed surveys differentiated along the lines of religion, area, gender, age, income-group and education to determine exactly who (which group) wants to save Urdu. If it emerges that only the Muslims, and that too middle-aged males, want to do so then the problem is grave indeed. Urdu is often declared a symbol of the composite culture of Muslims and Hindus by politicians in India. However, in Pakistan it is associated only with Muslims and the Pakistan Movement. In the minds of the religious Hindu extremists (including some Bharatiya Janata Party members), it is also associated with Muslim invaders and Pakistani separatists. Under these political conditions, it is really difficult to save Urdu in India. However, a determined movement—such as the one the Israelis launched to revive Hebrew—would work, but such movements need the support of the state, which means politicizing the language—something that often backfires by making the language a Muslim political concern as Urdu is at the moment.

However, despair is not the answer. Perhaps non-Muslim intellectuals and political leaders will take up the cause of Urdu. Perhaps a democratic Indian government will give it the support it needs. Perhaps it will be taken out of madrasas and into mainstream schools through the efforts of the Muslim community itself. And, in any case, it is the Urdu script and parts of Urdu literature which are dying in India. The spoken Urdu language is very much alive in films, songs, soap operas and on the streets. Urdu is too big of a language to die—after all, it is the same language as spoken Hindi and it is also spoken in Pakistan, in the Gulf

states, and among the South Asian diaspora in North America and Britain. □

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ZEESHAN SAHIL. *On the Outside*. Introduction by YASMEEN HAMEED. Translated by TEHMINA AHMED. Karachi: City Press, 2006. 123 pp. Rs. 150. ISBN 969-8380-74-4.

ON THE OUTSIDE is the first book devoted solely to a selection of Zeeshan Sahil's poetry in translation. Previously, some of his poems have appeared in English translation in the *Annual of Urdu Studies* and in an anthology with six other poets (including Afzal Ahmad Sayyid, Tanvir Anjum and Sarvat Husain) appropriately titled *An Evening of Caged Beasts: Seven Postmodernist Urdu Poets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). I think appropriately because the anthology's aim is to make available to English readers a new kind of poetry—restrained, caged—being written in Pakistan, the aim of which is to lower the emotional register of Urdu poetry a notch or two. In Zeeshan Sahil's poems, it is this kind of unexpected reticence of expression combined with a slightly surrealistic narrative and matter-of-fact tone that stumps the unsuspecting reader used to the more explicit, riotous language of Urdu poetry. Yasmeen Hameed concedes in her introduction, which I found to be quite inadequate, that "[o]ne is at a loss for words when it comes to analyzing or understanding the thoughts and utterances of someone like Zeeshan Sahil" (n.p.). What is new and surprising about *On the Outside* is not the severity of this minimalist prosy style, but the persistence with which Zeeshan Sahil applies it to poem after poem, no matter what the subject of the individual poem may be. Even with his metered poetry later in the book, the language is still restrained.

Even more surprising is that his poems, when translated into English, resemble, in some aspects, contemporary American poems as described by the American poet Charles Simic. Though his description is negative, it is useful for he could very well be describing Zeeshan Sahil's work:

The favorite kind of poem [of an American poet] was a first person, realistic narrative that told of some momentous or perfectly trivial experience. It was written in free verse often barely distinguished from prose. Audacious flights of imagination and use of metaphor were rare. In the age of political correctness and the ever-growing lists of forbidden words, topics, and attitudes, irony and wit became suspect. And so did humor. The chief strategy of these poems was to conceal that they were poems by

avoiding anything that seemed too imaginative or too irreverent.⁶

There is a certain commonality in the history of these two very different traditions. I am speaking of the Cold War. The brutality of the Cold War politics, except for a few poems about Vietnam, went largely unnoticed by American poets. Most American poets stuck to the formulation given by Simic, consciously or unconsciously choosing to severely limit the vision and subject of poetry. Here is what Nobel Prize winning poet Derek Walcott had to say in an interview on this subject:

... aren't you, yourself, astonished, and in a way, disappointed, that the rein of American verse is tight, that it's so small, so provincial, and that all it takes in is the neighborhood, the next farm, or the next street? Especially for a country of this size, whose responsibility in the history of the world is, as you know, the greatest responsibility any country has ever faced, in terms of conscience, and in terms of justice. Yet its poetry ... if you looked at it generations down the road, you would say, "What the hell were those people thinking about?"⁷

Though the situation was entirely different for Pakistani poets, the results were similar. The nascent Pakistani civil society was destroyed and cultural luminaries like Faiz Ahmed Faiz were exiled from the country in the late 1970s and 1980s. The whole cultural landscape changed, reflecting a newer, harsher, even more desperate reality than before. In such a society, the new generation of poets could not possibly continue to write like Faiz Ahmed Faiz with his lyrical intensity, public concerns and hopes, and his belief in the possibility of emancipation. I believe that this new poetry spearheaded by Zeeshan Sahil reflects and comes out of the sensibility of the post-cold war Pakistani reality—a post-cold war world where discourse and political possibilities have been further narrowed. Zeeshan Sahil's poetry epitomizes this changed landscape. He stands out among his peers as he is the severest of them.

In the now subdued atmosphere, the subject of poetry could only move back from the public realm to private anguish. If Zeeshan Sahil deftly takes on a public subject in "Open Letter" (118–23) (one of the few political poems in the selection), it is only to express his private anguish—he understands that in the post-cold war world consolation and solidarity have to be tempered with despair. It is this

⁶Paterson, Don and Charles Simic, eds. *New British Poetry* (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2004), xx.

⁷Baer, William, ed. *Conversations with Derek Walcott* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 205.

worldview that informs and makes possible the rest of his work. "Open Letter" lists all the injustices that have been meted out, or will be, and at the same time admonishes the victims that nothing can be done for them and that they need to accept their fate, for "Hamare Pas" (We Have) (the original title) nothing and are nothing. The first few lines of "Open Letter" (I use my own literal translation below because it is closer to the original and better illustrates the point I am making):

Beloved friends!
Lose hope.
Your hopes and dreams are coming to an end.
The golden promises made to you will be broken.
Your hopes of happiness and well-being
Are about to be denied to you forever.
Poverty and destitution is your lot—accept it.
Make misery and death your friends. (119)

This poem is a eulogy to the powerlessness that most of us feel in the world and makes this eulogy with a straight face—there is no sentimentality or irony here. The only act of solidarity with these victims that this completely new sensibility in Urdu poetry allows for is this poem itself. The collection *On the Outside* also arises from this kind of political awareness of Pakistani and recent Third World realities. Zeeshan Sahil's poetic project is to represent his world in a language, form and sensibility suitable to it.

Tehmina Ahmed has done a commendable job of translating Zeeshan Sahil's poems. For the most part she has been able to capture and reproduce in English the tone, the pacing, the syntax and diction of the original Urdu poems. But like many translations from Urdu poetry into English, Ahmed's translations soon run into difficulties when dealing with one of the features Urdu poetry does not share with American poetry: a predilection for the abstract and the non-specific, which does not read well, or at least does not sound satisfactory to the Western ear. Generic lines where no actual people, places or specific things are ever named abound in *On the Outside*.

there was a book of poems
at the bookshop
and a train at the station (2)

Such non-specific references can be taxing for the Western reader who looks for the concrete rather than the universal. Other examples are numerous, but I will only give a few here. In the poem "The Park" (84–85), the park is not "Jinnah Park" or "Shalimar Gardens" but rather a garden variety "park." In the poem "Story Told in Darkness" (88–89), the girl is nondescript, simply "a girl." However, the patient reader is rewarded with the poem, "Karachi" (62–65), where the city is

named “Karachi,” and in “The Return of the Queen” (90–93), where the poet offers a burst of proper names and place names, a total of twenty-four: “a shiny new Mercedes,” “Quaid’s Mazar,” “Diana’s brother,” “South African cricket team,” “Kashmir,” “Golden Temple,” “Duke of Edinburgh,” “Charles,” “Sindhi mangoes,” and so on.

We might expect an English translation to relish these concrete references, but when Zeeshan Sahil is being specific in Urdu, Tehmina Ahmed inexplicably makes the English version generic. In the Urdu original of “Blackbird” (3), “a book” is actually “a new book” in the line above, which is slightly less generic. In the Urdu of “The Tale of the Golden Egg” (25), the more specific “poultry farm,” which has its own peculiar associations in Pakistani culture, becomes merely “farm.” In the Urdu version of “Sunstroke” (29), the more specific phrase “Siberian wind” is translated as “winter breeze.” In “On the Outside,” Ahmed translates the unusual Urdu phrase *tēz āvāzvālē parindē* (high-voiced birds) (9) with a conventional phrase “singing bird.” Though such choices make for consistency, they also make for duller reading.

One of the best aspects of Zeeshan Sahil’s poetry disappears in the English translation when in a few poems Ahmed decides to omit the lines where the poet is at his quirkiest. Missing from “Directions” (26–27) are the lines

Our hearts
like the vine growing behind the wall
put down their roots far away from the wall.

“Scratch” (30–33) lacks “A book of stories falls / near the ladder next to the wall,” and “Karachi” (62–65) drops “Snakes leave their share of milk / for the paper pythons.”

In addition, out of forty poems, thirty got new titles. The effect of these arbitrary title changes can be unpredictable. In one instance, in the poem “The River” (4–5), changing the title, which is “Pānī” (Water) in Urdu, disrupts the ordering of the figurative scheme Zeeshan Sahil had set up for the poem. By titling the poem “Pānī,” Sahil indicates to the reader what the subject of the poem is going to be. In order for the poem to work, the reader needs to know that the poet is obsessing about water from the very start and that for the poet it does not matter where the water is obtained—from a river, a lake or a bowl.

Despite the quibbles I have with the English translation, *On the Outside* gives us a sampling from Zeeshan Sahil’s eight books published between 1985 and 2005. It brings together “selected poems” that introduce English-speaking people to this poet and to contemporary Urdu poetry. □

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