BOOK REVIEWS

Muhammad Alvi. *Čautʰā Āsmān*. New Delhi: Maktaba-e Żehn-e Jadīd, 1992. 160 pp. Rs. 50.00

Muhammad alvi (b. 1927) is a leading, and perhaps the most well-loved, modern Urdu poet. All the same, his being a Gujarati businessman with little formal education would hardly seem to qualify him as a candidate for either position. It is a measure of Urdu's strong base in India that it has produced, and continues to produce, remarkable writers from all over the country. Alvi is bilingual in Gujarati and Urdu, lives in Ahmedabad, and has been a major Urdu poet since the 1960s. *Čautʰā Āsmān* (Fourth Heaven) is his fourth collection of poems. *Khālī Makān* (Empty House), his first collection, was published in 1963 and has long been out of print. Alvi's poetic output is both meagre and interspersed with long silences—a fact which may have something to do with the way in which he views the world: at once tinged with childlike wonder and the sadness of a young old man. He seems more interested in looking at things contemplatively than talking about them.

The opening poem of this collection is "Pēsh-lafẓ" (Foreword) and goes like this:

yeh jō ham tum	In the glimmering light
rōz bōltē rahtē haiṅ	of the words
in lafẓōṅ kī	that you and I
maddʰam maddʰam raushniyōṅ mēṅ	use every day—
maiṅ nē apnē	I have tried to see
ās pās kī čīzōṅ kō	the things around us
aur pās sē	yet more closely.
dēkʰnē kī kōshish kī hai!	
(p. 11)	

The poem is typical of Alvi, for its meaning is infinitely more complex than appears on the surface. It also contains the core characterstics of Alvi's poetry. He is more conscious of the world around us than most modern Urdu poets, and though this consciousness is apparently immediate and visceral, it has metaphysical dimensions too. Language is the only epistemological tool available to the poet, and language is at best a deceiver. The dim glimmer of words conceals as much as illumines the phenomena of existence, and the poet can only intuit their meanings. It is his intuition that distinguishes the poet from other

users of language. However, Alvi leaves the business of interpretation to us and chooses for himself the role of mediator. In the cliché-ridden world of the late 1950s—when the poet was supposed to "know" and be sure of everything, and prescribe solutions for all situations—the hesitant voice of Muhammad Alvi, shorn of all certainties and charged with the anxieties and wonders of the very young, came as a cool shock to the power-brokers of the literary world. It soon charmed the new generation, and became a symbol for the poets of the 1960s who were looking for models of departure from the idiom of the Progressives.

Muhammad Alvi has a deliberately understated—one might almost say unsophisticated—style. But it would be a mistake to regard him as simple, and take him at face value. True, in avoiding the oratorial rhetoric of the Progressives, Alvi adopted a casual, relaxed tone, close to the idiom (or at least the attitude) of the children and the young. Behind the apparent chatter, however, it was not difficult to discover a thinking and feeling mind, an imagination well able to look at the world and find its gaps, flaws, cruelties, and disappointments. It is these things that he spoke of essentially. Sometimes he seemed to see the world in primary colors, content with small happinesses. He valued those happinesses, and used them as defensive shields against the harshness of life. Yet he was not the one to settle for easy simplification, or the line of least resistance. He didn't delude himself, or his reader, that life was amenable to grand solutions or totalizing systems.

The "western" view of poetry bequeathed to us by the Urdu literary theorists of the nineteenth century was still firmly in place when Alvi and other poets of the 1950s—among them Balraj Komal (b. 1928), Ameeq Hanfi (1928–1988), Khalilur Rahman Azmi (1927–1978), and many others—broke onto the scene. The Progressive poetics was merely an extension and intensification of the nineteenth-century utilitarian poetics introduced by Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914) and others who believed that literature, and particularly poetry, should be a force for social and moral amelioration. The Progressives added an overt political dimension to literature, and quoted Marx and Caudwell rather than Mill and Carlyle, but both were basically humorless, earnest, unsmiling and pontifical. Alvi, on the other hand, sparkled with irreverent humor; he was irrepressively witty. Apparently quite casual in his approach to language, he avoided "weighty" issues, and seemed very much his own man. Needless to say, he annoyed the mandarins, but became the idol of the younger generation.

There is a gap of very nearly thirty years between Alvi's first book of poems (1963) and *Čautʰā Āsmān* (1992), his latest. He is witty and inwardly serious as ever, except that now his range of subjects has shrunk somewhat; he is more engrossed in the things of everyday life. He is still a master of the short poem, and can still make moments, or birds, or animals come alive with a few words which somehow manage to suggest much more than their lexical content. He seems to enjoy life even less than he did in his youth, but is still able to laugh at himself and life's banalities. With a deftness and lighness of touch that seem to

get better with age, Alvi can draw disparate situations and fill them with significance. Look at these two poems:

lambī saṛak par	Sunlight
dauṛtī hu'ī dʰūp	running
ačānak	on the high road, suddenly
ēk pēṛ sē ṭakrā'ī	crashed
aur ṭukṛē ṭukṛē hō ga'ī	into a tree
("Ḥādiṣa," p. 58)	and shattered
	into pieces
	(Accident)

āṅgan mēṅ čugtē čugtē	In the courtyard, pecking for
čiṛyā nē sōčā ab uṛ jā'ūṅ	food, the little bird thought
lekin čiṛyā sē pahlē	I should fly away now,
billī sōč čukī tʰī	But the cat had already said to himself
bas ab jast lagā'ūṅ!	That's it, let me pounce!
("Ēk Naẓm," p. 59)	(A Poem)

If the first has a magicality that reminds us of Borges, the second has the shady deadliness of Kafka. In the Urdu, the first poem has a mere fifteen words, the second, nineteen.

Almost one half of the poems in the present collection are *ghazals.* The *ghazal*, as we know, is the most traditional and yet the most popular of genres in Urdu poetry. It is the weight of tradition which makes the *ghazal*-writer's task easy as well as difficult. Easy because the genre is a vast mosaic of motifs, themes, and metaphors which a poet can freely draw upon; difficult because the very splendor of the living past makes innovation difficult. Alvi's *ghazals* also are written in the same relaxed, apparently casual tone that characterizes his non-*ghazal* poetry. He uses short metres (they have, in fact, been getting shorter over the years) and writes with a flow of rhyme and rhythm that seems easy to imitate but is in fact quite hard to achieve.

—Shamsur Rahman Faruqi
Editor, Shab-Khūn

An Anthology of Modern Urdu Poetry. Edited and translated by M.H.K. Qureshi. Toronto: Urdu Society of Canada, 1988. 385 pp.

Translating poetry well is a formidable job, even more so when attempted

between languages as culturally and linguistically disparate as Urdu and English. The book under review is not a good translation. It fails because of what it so arduously tries to achieve, i.e., over-fidelity to the original text and a "literalness" which the editor-translator has turned into a veritable value, often at the expense of meaning.

The translator claims, both in his Introduction and Preface (the latter, curiously, in Urdu), that he has made every effort possible "to keep the translations literal" (pp. 8, 12). "We made no attempts to paraphrase or alter the word configurations just to suit the English idiom" (p. 8), he asserts. (The words "just to" dismiss as pointless what should be the primary concern of the translator, viz., sensitivity to the idiom of the target language). The translator elaborates, in his Urdu Preface, that even where the addition or deletion of words or a change in technique could have transformed the translations into apt and fit poems in English, he opted for a commitment to literalness (p. 12). Such a cavalier approach to the idiom and usage of the target language and the "preference" claimed to have been given in the translations to "bringing out the meaning of the text as close to the Urdu poem as possible" (p. 8) have thus resulted in such unusual gems as: "As if stands a storm of human mind" (p. 86); "And such feelings by changing their characteristics / Strike the strings of my mind's nerves" (p. 94); "But it hurts my feelings for not affording a horse-buggy" (p. 100); "On the waves of these town-talk" (p. 102); "The habit, halo rainment [*sic*] are wasted effects" (p. 184); "Don't walk without the pick of an insight on the beaten track" (p. 196); "Now we understand the art of madness' nail" (p. 196); "On crackled staircases / … doves / wriggling in their dark thickening blood" (p. 340); "Our 'ways' of life have gone astray" (p. 382), and so on. These samples, absent any explanation of the significance of the translated images or metaphors in their original linguistic and cultural context, inevitably remain hazy, indeed impenetrable. One is not sure what literary or intellectual purpose, if any, is served by producing them.

Footnotes, marginal comments, or glosses accompanying a verse translation may perhaps be distracting or even off-putting aesthetically, but they would be far preferable to the kind of woolliness that results from a blind pursuit of literalness, as is evident in the above examples. If Urdu poetry is to be translated and read in translation, one had better get used to the inevitability of extensive commentaries and notes. Surely this would make for cumbersome reading—it might even undercut to a degree the enjoyment of the text—but at least the translations would make sense.

The targeted readership of a translation often reveals the preferences and objectives of its translator. If the target is the general reader, the translator would more likely attempt an imaginative "re-creation" of the original—a "trans-creation" in the words of P. Lal, the famous translator of the *Mahābʰārata.* But if, on the other hand, the target is the specialist, the scholar, or the student, the translator would do well to stay closer to the original, and purport to educate and

inform rather than merely to please. The translations in the former category, while not deviating too radically from the source texts, would read like independent poems in the target language, technically seeming closer to interpretations than to straightforward translations, which is the case with Naomi Lazard's translations of Faiz Ahmad Faiz in *The True Subject* or Rina Singh's recently published translations of Gulzar's poems, *Silences*. In such situations, the translators themselves are often poets in their own right in the target language. Translations falling into the latter category would carry an intellectual and academic appeal, which is the case with Kiernan's translations of Faiz or Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russell's of Ghalib.

Who is the audience of the present anthology? Mr. Qureshi wishes it to be Urdu-speaking North Americans and their progeny (p. 11). However, the expectation lacks validity. Urdu-speaking North Americans of Indian or Pakistani origin—those few who might by some miracle be interested in the study of literature—can enjoy Urdu poetry in the original. Why would they hanker after translation? But they may purchase the present anthology for the Urdu originals it includes—and the selection is unquestionably a representative one. However, in view of Mr. Qureshi's overly literal approach to his craft, one would expect the anthology to fare better with the scholar, the student or the specialist. But here again, its many errors of translation—from minor typographical flaws and inaccuracies too numerous to list, to occasional glaring howlers of grammar, syntax, and usage which seriously hamper readability—greatly reduce its usefulness to those with a pedagogical interest in Urdu. It is difficult to imagine this volume being adopted, in its present state, as a text book for an Urdu course at McGill or the University of Toronto, or indeed at any other university in North America. And it would be a great misfortune if an average English-speaking Canadian or American reader permanently disavowed Urdu poetry because of the language of the present translation—stilted and flawed as it is, and quite unlike the North American idiom that the translator claims in the Preface it approximates (p. 12). In fact, the translator's insistence on retaining the idiom of the source language and his refusal to render them in idiomatic English may well deny the average North American reader access to the rich heritage of Urdu poetry.

One of the translator's aims has been to "let the readers feel the poetry as it is meant to be" (p. 8)—an aim worth pursuing; however, a more relevant aim would perhaps have been to let the readers understand it first, and let them enjoy it as it is meant to be enjoyed.

Not all translations in the anthology suffer from the flaws mentioned above; despite literal renderings, some flow quite smoothly and some lines and stanzas have a resonant, lyrical quality to them. Here and there a word astonishes the reader by its sudden, unexpected exactness or appropriateness. Notice, for instance, this translation of the poem "Courier Pigeon," by Ahmad Faraz:

Fine, you censored
The bold black headlines,
Shackled the word,
.....
But try to stop these winds too
Which sweep through
Streets
Markets
Highways
Carrying from City to City
The red of your slaughterhouses
.....
Fools!
If pigeons are ca[g]ed
Winds carry the message. (p. 256)

Or, the last stanza of Munib ur Rahman's poem "A Nameless City":

A city dwells in your heart
A city, nameless and unborn
A city lonely as a tree. (p. 246)

The resonance of the above excerpts may be due to the fact that in themselves some Urdu poems are less complicated in their style, technique, imagery and poetic diction. The idiom of the newer generation of Urdu poets, with a few exceptions, tends to be less dense and their syntax and phraseology less convoluted, complex or modeled on the classics than was that of their predecessors. The newer generation goes for far fewer rhetorical devices, which makes the task of translating them less forbidding. On the whole, though, in the book under review, translations of grace and quality are too few to significantly alter one's impression or assessment of the whole volume.

Not all translations are by Mr. Qureshi alone; Carlo Coppola has participated with him in some, a few have been done by the poets themselves, and Mr. Qureshi's own work has been rendered by Bedar Bakht. However, the blame or credit for the anthology should appropriately rest with Mr. Qureshi.

At the end of the Preface, Mr. Qureshi has this to say: "Since the Canadian government has helped financially towards the publication of this anthology, therefore, on their insistence, contemporary Canadian Urdu poets have also been included in this volume" (p. 13; my translation). The implication of "on their insistence" is, indeed, quite obvious. Mr. Qureshi feels that Canadian Urdu poets are somehow a lower breed of poets, too insignificant to bother about, but for the lure of financial help. At the very least, the Canadian government ought to be congratulated for adopting a more inclusionary policy than the editor-translator

of the present anthology—indeed it should be lauded for its "insistence."

—Faruq Hassan
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The Colour of Nothingness: Modern Urdu Short Stories. Edited, translated and with an introduction by Muhammad Umar Memon. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1991. xxx, 193 pp. Rs. 65. Paperback.

This collection of sixteen short stories is a welcome and accessible introduction to the modern Urdu short story for comparatists studying and teaching world literature. Accompanied by a list of original sources and a comprehensive introduction by M.U. Memon, the collection is not solely destined for readers with limited or no knowledge of the Urdu literary system. In fact, the decision to present the stories in English translation was primarily directed to the South Asian readers whose diverse native languages have sometimes prevented them from having access to each other's literary production. Thus, it is through English, having the "status of a shared language among these people" (p. xxviii), that these short stories can reach the widest possible audience of South Asian readers.

The introduction outlines the development of the short story in Urdu from its earliest manifestation in the work of Munshi Premchand at the turn of the century to the most contemporary. As a non-indigenous literary form, the short story in Urdu has gradually abandoned its initial preoccupation with verisimilitude, social commitment, and activism. The term *modern* cited in the title does not refer to any particular phase or period of the evolution of the genre, but rather to its turning away from the precepts of "realism." As Memon points out in his Introduction, because the form was introduced into Urdu from Western literary sources, it has sometimes blended and juxtaposed various elements of the short story in Russian, French, and English. This is not to say that the Urdu short story has, since its inception, mimicked its Western counterparts. On the contrary, it has attempted to find among the existing ones the form most appropriate to the aesthetic needs of its creators. The present collection bears witness to the multiplicity of artistic forms which inform the works of the writers of the Urdu short story.

Although the stories presented in this volume defy easy categorization, they share one historical frame of reference in that they all belong to the period of post-independence. Interestingly, however, none of the stories is reduced in focus to the overt political and religious issues that ostensibly dominated the period of independence and partition. Stories like Ali Imam Naqvi's "The Vultures of the Parsi Cemetery," Sharwan Kumar Verma's "Deep as the Ocean," Hasan

Manzar's "Emancipation," and Iqbal Majeed's "Parasite" do reflect the ethnic and religious diversities of the Indian subcontinent, but these authors' depictions of such diversities do not become trapped into easy divisions along religion, politics, and national identity. The focus upon the psychological motivations of the characters and their inner struggles allow the reader insight into a complex life which defies the attempt to equate the boundaries of fiction with those of language and nation.

A few of the stories move completely beyond the realm of the mimetic and, combining elements of fantasy and reality, explore the depths of the human psyche. Intizar Husain's "A Stranded Railroad Car," Qurratulain Hyder's "Confessions of St. Flora of Georgia," Surendra Prakash's "Jippizan," and Muhammad Umar Memon's "The Worm and the Sunflower" are among the stories that thwart patterns of linear narration and impose on the reader an aesthetic logic of their own. If these stories, along with Enver Sajjad's "The Bird," do sometimes invite allegorical readings, they are by no means limited in potential for interpretation. It is the very possibility of multiple interpretations and their open-endedness that draw the reader further into the fabric of the stories.

The rich texture of "Sukhe Sawan" by Zamiruddin Ahmad and its mesmerizing depiction of the life of the senses leave a vivid imprint upon the mind of the reader. Equally gripping in the "The Rose" is Abdullah Hussein's portrayal of one woman's thwarted desires, their fulfillment and ultimate disappointment. In a similar vein, Balraj Komal's "The Man Who Jumped Wells" explores a man's obsessive need to go beyond the recognized limits of his own physical prowess only to come up against the ultimate psychological challenge.

Naiyer Masud's "The Colour of Nothingness" opens our eyes to yet other realms of the human imagination. The vivid recollection of an encounter in the past gives way to an inner monologue that blends together the imaginative past and present. Like most of the stories in this volume, "The Colour of Nothingness" deliberately blurs the boundaries between social reality and the life of the imagination. It is from this amalgam that there emerge the outlines of a new poetics of the modern Urdu short story.

The Colour of Nothingness offers rich possibilities for comparison across various national literatures of the East. For instance, the development of the Urdu short story follows a trajectory similar to that of modern Persian prose forms. The preoccupation with social activism and the need to depict life as it is experienced by the masses also marks the first stages of the evolution of the Persian short story. There are additional interesting parallels between the way in which Urdu writers have shifted their attention away from representational forms and the work of their Iranian counterparts. The adoption of modern Western literary forms into older literary traditions like Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish may well have led to similar results. Anthologies like *The Colour of Nothingness* are crucial for a better understanding of the evolution of such

emergent literary forms. In addition to fostering more comprehensive scholarship on the genre of the short story, Memon's collection is an indispensable introduction to the riches of modern Urdu literature.

—Nasrin Rahimieh
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Alys Faiz. *Over My Shoulder*. Lahore: Frontier Press, 1993.

Alys faiz's latest work is a book of memoirs, poems and stories culled from an eventful life as a British expatriate living in Pakistan, married to one of the most acclaimed Urdu poets of the twentieth century. On one level, the work is a valuable historical document, commenting incisively on the political and social events that Mrs. Faiz witnessed, not only in Pakistan and India but also in the Middle East, the Soviet Union, and Southeast Asia. On another level, however, the book is an intensely personal self-portrait of a woman who saw and suffered much, and had the courage to record candidly the poignant, everyday details of her turbulent life.

The book is presented in four sections, the first of which is itself presented in four sections. The first and most autobiographical, "Nor Cloud the Eager Flame of Love," covers the years from Alys Faiz's departure for pre-Independence India in 1938, her marriage there to Faiz Ahmed Faiz in 1941, the 1947 Partition, the birth of their two daughters, and the couple's first visits to Moscow, London, and Beirut. This section also contains Mrs. Faiz's understated, moving account of the long years of emotional and economic hardship when she worked for the *Pakistan Times* to support the family during Faiz's imprisonment on political charges.

The second section, "Foreign Correspondent in Beirut," describes the period from 1979 to 1982 when Alys and Faiz lived in "self-exile" in war-torn Lebanon and wrote for *Lotus*, the Afro-Asian Writers' Association journal. This section also contains Mrs. Faiz's impressions of visits to Mongolia, Kazakhastan, Vietnam, and Kampuchea. The third section, "Look Back Gently," is a series of brief recollections in short-story form, ranging from Mrs. Faiz's childhood in England to her life after Faiz's death in 1984, touching on such diverse topics as pets, favorite trees, beloved books, and strawberries. The last section consists of poems on a variety of topics, many with political themes, but all demonstrating Mrs. Faiz's graceful, eloquent style, influenced by her long immersion in Urdu literature and culture.

Mrs. Faiz herself is a woman of many dimensions, and her complexity is evoked by the impressionistic organization of the book. Surprisingly, *Over My Shoulder* contains little introspection, and not much about Mrs. Faiz's family and

friends; rather, she consistently looks outward, relishing life's simple pleasures, and tracing common threads through the far-flung tapestry of her life. She writes with lyrical beauty, a lively sense of humor, and passionate idealism, of her childhood, her assimilation into Pakistani society, of learning step by step how to live in a new culture, and of traveling to places few English writers have described.

Mrs. Faiz's politics are never in the forefront, but rather serve as an undercurrent in many of the pieces in the book. From the time she left England as a young woman committed to participating in India's struggle for independence, to her reporting on the Pol Pot death camps in Kampuchea, Mrs. Faiz has been an outspoken opponent of injustice and oppression, and a feminist. Her life in Pakistan, and her travels to many of the world's troubled spots further deepened Mrs. Faiz's idealism, and the result is a book that between its lines contains a powerful indictment of the legacy of colonialism in Asia and the Middle East.

—Afroz Taj
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Altaf Fatima. *The One Who Did Not Ask.* Translated by Rukhsana Ahmad. Oxford: Heinemann, 1993. 344 pp.

Acknowledging the challenging company into which it places this domestic novel by Altaf Fatima,[1] I group *The One Who Did Not Ask* with Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* as celebratory texts embodying modern Indo-Muslim culture's myth of origin. Let me be more extravagant yet, and compare these three novels with Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* and perhaps even with *Anna Karenina* (not that I claim to be the first to remark on the debt owed by Urdu novels to Russian literature[2]), if we forego the war bits and concentrate on Tolstoy's epic novels as domestic social drama celebrating the transitional moment in a great civilization. Such novels as these seem to me to comprise the master narrative of Partition (or, more specifically, of

[1]Let me say at the outset that I have not read *Dastak na Dō* in Urdu, and that this review is based solely on a reading of Rukhsana Ahmad's English translation.

[2]Progressive criticism has celebrated this general theme, most recently, to my knowledge, in Prof. Qamar Rais's presentation to the Second World Urdu Conference in Montreal, May 1992.

how the world changed in the 1940s), the narrative we still seem to find most compelling in modern Urdu prose writing. No doubt future generations of writers will emerge to provide us new meta-narratives; but the cultural upheaval of Partition, even more than the political, continues to haunt and inspire the generation of *muhājirs* who still—for better or worse—dominate Urdu letters. The fact that this celebration bears a nostalgic tinge of melancholy, and that these authors are diasporans or Pakistanis rather than Indians, is neither terribly surprising nor irrelevant. Betrayal and displacement permeate this grand narrative.

Altaf Fatima's novel is complex, contains the voices of numerous narrators, and offers a generally compassionate, while complicated, view of how people in families and society become who they are as adults. Like Attia Hosain's masterpiece, this story is gynocentric (notwithstanding the title, which refers to a male character). Although feeling sympathy for some of the characters is far from easy, the constraints under which they live, and how very much is at stake for them, help one to understand why Gaythi's mother is so unrelenting in her treatment of her errant daughter; or how it is that rage can turn a vulnerable adolescent like Gaythi's sister, Saulat, into a hardhearted, even mean, woman.[3]

Neither meek nor lovely, nor academically inclined like Laila in *Sunlight on a Broken Column,* the focal character, Gaythi, nonetheless shares a symbolic orphanhood with Laila, cast off emotionally as she is from her aristocratic family and their expectations of girls. Gaythi is referred to frequently by the novel's shifting narrators as "interesting," offering us something besides beauty or goodness as an anchor for reading a *sharīf* female character. In a world that is all about appearances and keeping them up, Gaythi cannot or will not "play the game". She constantly allows her compassion and sense of justice to contravene expected behavior. It gets her into trouble, of course, and this emotional "exile" presages the larger notion of *hijrat* brought about by Partition and the division of families. In the larger context of that disorienting *hijrat* one begins to anticipate Gaythi's capitulation with a sense of impending doom.

The "one who did not ask" is Safdar Yaseen Liu Chu, a Chinese peddler and shoemaker, Gaythi's early champion and the novel's primary exile. In her Introduction, translator Rukhsana Ahmad discusses how his character provides this novel with its exploration of cultural "otherness." In her estimation the novel suggests that while there ought to be strong links between Indian and Chinese culture—the two great Asian civilizations—neither appears sufficiently willing to acquiesce to foreignness (lest cultural distinctness be lost?), and once again the commonalities of the human struggle are held in thrall by the forces of class and gender. Despite being a Muslim, Chu's Chineseness and class position guarantee his exclusion from the inner circle of Gaythi's family/society. Contrary to the

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[3]Indeed, the character of Saulat reminds one of Bimia in Anita Desai's masterpiece, *Clear Light of Day.*

reader's expectations—even hopes—Gaythi is eventually domesticated and Liu Chu rejected, relegated to the narrative margins. Ahmad argues that this depiction of human failure "raises the novel from the stature of an ordinary love story to a serious and challenging examination of the nature of prejudice" (p. x).

Perhaps so, though the unlikeliness of Gaythi and Safdar as heroine and hero make this story anything but ordinary. Nor is their "love" at all ordinary. In fact, describing their relationship as love almost threatens to trivialize the bold departure represented by Fatima's novel. Surely, the sympathy that exists between these two characters may be described as a kind of love; but it is not at all the usual, constantly thwarted sort of love springing up in these Indo-Muslim domestic dramas (as, for example, between Gaythi's siblings and first cousins on the periphery of this novel; or between Asad and Zahra in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*). What makes this story so compelling is that it eschews such foci of emotional interaction and leads us to puzzle over the cruel classism so inextricably woven into the elegant refined culture that is nonetheless idealized here. In fact, I would suggest that it is class, far more than cultural otherness, which dooms Liu Chu to his continued loneliness and separation. Altaf Fatima's novel yet stands apart, for while I am not convinced that this novel challenges class prejudice enough, the author's treatment of class is far more complex than one has come to see in other literature bearing the Progressive stamp. So, too, is her engagement with the "selfish god of individualism" worshipped in Urdu literary Modernism and problematized here. But as Ahmad points out, the family and its social values win out in the end. Ultimately, the individual is vanquished and Indo-Muslim culture's glorious past, though challenged, prevails.

The ending is a bit disappointing, not so much because Gaythi is successfully domesticated (the parallels between her character and that of Natasha in *War and Peace* are interesting, though they really cannot be drawn out here), but because the final scene involving Gaythi and Liu Chu is strikingly reminiscent of Bombay films. The author, who so boldly drew Liu Chu from the margins of this family-centered drama and engaged us with his maturity and humanity, seems to kick him back out to the periphery in a most unsatisfactory fashion.

As intriguing and complex as this novel is, note must also be made of Rukhsana Ahmad's translation. It is remarkable for the ways in which it does not intrude between reader and story. The narrative flows compellingly for the most part, and one is nearly as impressed with the ambitiousness of the task of translation as with Altaf Fatima's original version (I do not know how it has read for those familiar with *Dastak na Dō* in Urdu). *The One Who Did Not Ask* makes an evident contribution to the growing body of South Asian literature in translation for which there is such great demand. One hopes it will inspire the generosity and dedication of other translators. Heinemann's new series seems to offer them a place to go with manuscripts, and the translators' guild in Britain promises greater recognition and compensation than the standard evaluation schemes of the North American academy. I anticipate using this novel as a

teaching text, and recommend it to others.

—Carla Petievich
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Intizar Husain: *Leaves and Other Stories.* Translated by Alok Bhalla and Vishwamitter Adil. New Delhi: Indus, 1993.

Intizar husain's new stories draw upon the varieties of narrative tradition in the subcontinent—Jataka tales, Puranic and Ṣūfī legends, *quiṣṣas* and *dāstāns,* and folklore. The collection is both a disparate appeal, and broadly, a synthesis.

At a fundamental level the stories tell about storytelling itself in South Asia. In addition to passing along traditional stories to newer and indeed older generations of listeners, these stories keep with an ancient practice of regenerating traditional narratives for present purposes. They form a part of and underscore the importance of the living tradition. They understand the literary past to be relevant not merely insofar as it has determined belief, but as it is and has been available to the ongoing working-out of peoples' concerns at particular times and places. Husain's cultural syncretism in this book suggests that narrative traditions belong to communities existing alongside one another, not in imagined apartness. In a sense then the collection of stories is somewhat ecclesiastic, attempting to forge a new (contemporary) community in or of readers and listeners, an open community of difference without absolutization.

His efforts to use narrative traditions toward culture-linking center in teaching stories: parables and parable-like tales whose characters are in some important way archetypal before they are individual. However, none of the traditional didactic stories, in Husain's telling, give clear moral imperatives. Indeed most of Husain's characters are plagued with doubt, indecision or dread before and after their experiences. To the extent that we believe didactic stories ought to be didactic, Husain's versions leave us fumbling and at losses. We ask whether he is in some way obligated to resolve the problems he raises—and is capable of resolving, at least provisionally, because he is working in the didactic form. As most of the tales deal with existential conditions, with characters in explicit and raw searches for foundational meaning or foundational failures of meaning, Husain's withholding of resolution may seem like forfeiture, capitulation to thick and hardly tractable angst.

In fact these stories suggest more complicated readings. What at first appears as loss on second reading is, perhaps, hope, even promise—and on third reading is a confidence in the story's ambiguity. The resilience of these stories' existential and moral difficulties must be counted, I believe, as one of their achievements. It is no small feat to get a reader to swallow a bitter pill and, still uncertain as to its

effects, feel better simply for having taken it.

Many of the stories deal with a single person's conflict between renouncing and participating in a suffering world. Is renunciation possible? What are the consequences of renunciation? In these stories renunciation is accompanied by concomitant temptation, usually carnal—the one precisely as strong as the other. Consequenceless renunciation is impossible, Husain suggests; renunciation redirects but does not solve the problems that invite it. Husain's view in fact follows the Buddha's own teaching of co-dependent arising: nothing comes to be, or remains, purely of itself, but only in combination with other things. Thus in "Tortoise," the *bʰikshū* Vidyasagar holds fast to his own discipline as he sees his fellow seekers lured by temptation. As long as they stray, it is easy for him to enjoin them to live strictly according to the Buddha's law, not to open their minds, hearts or mouths to anything else. Vidyasagar relates to them the story of the wild geese and the tortoise: two wild geese befriend a tortoise, and invite him to their Himalayan home. The geese arrange to transport the tortoise by a stick, which the tortoise would cling to between his teeth. They warn the tortoise not to say a word during the journey. Flying over a town, children spot the geese and tortoise in the sky and begin to scream and shout. The tortoise gets angry and reprimands the children—and when he opens his mouth to speak, falls to the ground and dies. When all of Vidyasagar's companions succumb to their irrepressible desires, Vidyasagar begins to wander alone through the forests, and to notice everything with great alertness. He becomes absorbed in and exceedingly knowledgeable about the natural world. He comes to appreciate beauty. Coming upon a lone *imlī* tree he is overwhelmed by its color, its height and gracefulness. He is led to memories of other *imlī* trees, and finally an ancient memory of a woman he once held beneath one, and loved. His body trembles with delight. He is torn: should he shun the *imlī* tree, repress memories which are the unwitting fruit of his very best attentions—or seek refuge in his own experience according to the Buddha's own injunction, "Stop asking for guidance from others and ... follow the light of your own lamp"? He searches more intently than ever. Do people each have their own *bōdʰī* tree in their own forest—some of which are *imlī* trees? Or should we search for peace under the fixed cautions and warnings of a given law? In his faith, Vidyasagar accidentally discovers himself to have been just like the tortoise. Reprimanding his fellows for not clinging to the Buddha's truth, he himself has fallen from it. Or has he? When we leave him the world around him is "in flames." Husain offers Vidyasagar as an example and a warning: we can find our peace in returning to, not renouncing the world, and our own deep knowledge—but are we adequate to the challenge of not clinging to either? Are we adequate to our own freedom—the burden of *letting* the world be open before us?

If "Tortoise," "Leaves" and "Complete Knowledge" point to the impossibility of complete knowledge—and indeed the cynicism and violence of believing in it—and urge us back to the world by problematizing escape and

renunciation, back to openness as self-trust, they also dwell on the problem of change—its inevitability, and the inevitability of the suffering it brings. In "The Brahmin Goat," a Brahmin prepares to offer a goat to the Devi in return for a son. The goat tells him that he and the goat have been bound by karma to slit each other's throats from lifetime to lifetime to obtain sons. At first the Brahmin does not believe the goat, and resolves to proceed with the sacrifice. The goat warns him that if he sheds blood he will soon die as a matter of fate and of reaping what he sows. Before he kills the goat, he agrees to recite the eighth chapter of the *Gīta* and to sprinkle water over the goat's body to release the goat from *samsāra.* The goat achieves liberation. A son is born to the Brahmin, but the Brahmin soon dies. He goes through a series of miserable reincarnations as various animals, and at last resolves to be born as a goat so that he might perhaps be sacrificed with *Gīta* recitation and water sprinkling, and achieve liberation. He is reborn a goat, but is bought by a circus juggler who tortures and humiliates him and refuses to kill him. At a certain point he is even humiliated for the entertainment of his own (human) son. Unable to live and unable to die he is overcome with despair and wails loudly—which only earns him vicious kicks from the juggler. When we leave him he is standing on his hind legs on his performance stool, his eyes shut and head bowed, "as if ... paying homage to the spectators who had come to watch the fun." Perhaps then redemption does not come through sacrifice, which begets sacrifice (and anyway, finding someone to recite the *Gīta* may be more difficult than anticipated)—but through calm self-possession in whatever current predicament. Husain points to a recalcitrant difficulty in self-awareness—in both our honest despair and honest will to overcome, we are never innocent. Even the purest heart and purest resolve is not conditionless, not a power over the world. Purity of heart is told in the ability to wait. And waiting without judgment or expectation—who are the ignorant spectators but people to honor?

The stories in the collection are in many respects moral confrontations rather than moral imperatives. They twist and coil moral symbols—repentance, ignorance, fate, freedom-from (renunciation), freedom-to (liberative action)—but refuse to be reduced to symbolic play. Likewise they do not offer particularly dimensional characters, thus requiring the reader to work to personalize them. Husain does not, with these stories, guarantee success. At times he weaves narratives into narratives to the point of distraction, diffusing the simple power of the tales themselves. Some of the stories require more than they give back. Even this, though, is a difficult judgment to make because most of the stories affirm a sense of ultimate symmetry—what is understood in the beginning and in the end depends on the effort the reader makes. A refined reciprocity—not just as a teaching strategy but as an ethic in itself—leaves these stories, each in their own way, precisely unfinished. This, for Husain, is a condition of possibility, a reason to continue.

Bhalla and Adil are to be commended for their contribution to these stories.

Many effectively combine swiftness of plot with density of allusion, and so read almost as if they are spinning: the circles of reference (and frequently of physical journey) go higher and higher, further, deeper. Bhalla and Adil show good judgment in rendering these stories in short, simple sentences. These force the reader to go slowly, and ground and moderate what might have been erratic tales. In effect Bhalla and Adil have brilliantly transformed potential narrative unsteadinesses into sentential spikiness, with the result that Husain successfully takes broad leaps in little steps.

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Madḥ va Qadḥ-e Dakan. Edited by Omar Khalidi and Mu'inuddin Aqeel. Water Town, MA: Hyderabad Historical Society, 1993. 128 pp. Rs. 66.

As the urdu title indicates, this short book is an anthology of words spoken or written in praise or dispraise of Deccan, i.e., the former state of Hyderabad. The editors feel that ordinary histories rely too much on chronicles and particularly fail to make use of what is available in literary texts. In order to correct this lapse on the part of the historians of Deccan, they have gone through a wide assortment of books, and also gathered some oral material, to present "some glimpses of the history and culture of Deccan in literature and poetry." These are excerpts from Persian and Urdu poems as well as a wide assortment of amusing incidents and exchanges concerning the various kings and Nizams of Deccan and their nobility. (In other words, the protagonists still remain the same: the rulers and the upper classes.) The editors have arranged these excerpts chronologically, beginning with the end of the Bahmani kingdom and ending with the annexation of Hyderabad by independent India. Some of the poets they mention are: Ḥāfiẓ, Jāmī, Ni'mat Khān-e 'Ālī, Shafiq Aurangābādī (Persian) and Hidāyat, Żakā, Amīr Mīnā'ī, Ẓafar 'Alī Khān, Makhdūm, Vaḥīda Nasīm (Urdu). There are also some most interesting anonymous verses.

This is definitely a useful and valuable anthology. There are fascinating topical verses, in both Persian and Urdu, and highly entertaining anecdotes about various rulers and their courtiers and officers. I am sure their inclusion in any relevant history book will make it much more readable, but it is unlikely that they would necessarily make it better history. The claims that the editors make for the material in their brief Introduction are a bit too lofty, in my opinion. What is interesting (telling for our times?) is that they express concern about hurting people's feelings by including material that might disparage Deccan and its Muslim upper classes. This concern is surprising, since they themselves seriously believe that the first Nizam (Niẓāmu 'l-Mulk) established his inde-

pendent state "so that at least in his territories Muslims of India might find a refuge!" (p. 35) (Not surprisingly, they immediately refer to a historian, I.H. Qureshi, in support of this belief. Mr. Qureshi, of course, seriously believed that Pakistan was created to provide refuge to the Muslims of India!) But, to the editors' great credit, they don't exclude the negative matter they discover. I do feel, however, that a bit more modesty was called for in the Introduction. Topical poems, such as *shahr-āshōb* and satires, etc., do not carry any higher quotient of truth and reality. And anecdotes about courtiers do not reveal the wide, heterogeneous world outside the court. And yet, it *is* good advice to ask political historians to pay attention to what is tucked away in poetry collections and literary chronicles. Any number of telling details found there can enhance the depth of their study, though not substantially alter it. This may be a good point to give some examples.

(1) "In September 1948, before the Indian army attacked Hyderabad, the following *maqṭa'* of a famous *ghazal* of His Exalted Highness became rather controversial for a while:

> *salāṭīn-e salaf sab hō-ga'ē nażr-e ajal Uṣmāṅ*
> *musalmānōṅ kā tērī salṭanat sē hai nishāṅ bāqī*
> [All the kings of the past have been taken by death.
> Some trace of the Muslims still remains from your sultanate.]

[At that time] some people began to recite the last line as follows:

> *musalmānōṅ sē tērī salṭanat kā hai nishāṅ bāqī*
> [Some trace of your sultanate still remains, thanks to the Muslims.]"

This witticism does encapsulate a great deal of the confusion and ambivalence that many Muslims of Hyderabad must have felt at the time concerning their Nizam. Now consider the immediately following anecdote:

(2) "Those who actually saw the fall of Hyderabad [in 1948] say that during the Indian army attack, young Raẓākārs rushed at the Indian tanks with nothing but spears and swords in their hands and were killed. This was reported to Sayyid Qāsim Riẓvī [the commander of the Raẓākārs and the leader of the Hyderabadi opposition to the annexation]. People asked him to stop the Raẓākārs, but Qāsim Riẓvī [extolled] the urge to martyrdom of these brave volunteers and quoted Iqbāl:

> *bē-khaṭar kūd paṛā ātish-e namrūd mēṅ 'ishq*
> *'aql hai maḥv-e tamāshā'ē lab-e bām ab*^{h}*ī*

[Passion, fearlessly, jumped into the fire of Nimrod,
while Reason still remains watching from the terrace.]"

Sadly, the editors fail to tell us what the leaders of the Raẓākārs themselves did during and after the Indian army action. (Incidentally, a few lines later, the name of the poet should be Iftikhār ʻĀrif, not ʻĀrif Iftikhār.)

To my mind, the greatest value of this book lies not in its contribution to some imagined, more accurate history of Deccan, but in something else. Fānī, a twentieth-century Urdu poet from Budaun (U.P.), spent many years in Hyderabad—as did numerous other literati from North India. In the *maqṭaʻ* of one of his *ghazals,* he said (I'm quoting from memory):

Fānī yeh ʻuqda āj kʰulā … dakan kē bīč
hindūstāṅ mēṅ rahtē haiṅ, hindūstāṅ sē dūr
Fānī, this paradox became clear to me in Deccan:
I live in Hindustan, but far from Hindustan.

The regional, cultural rivalry between Deccan and Hindustan (i.e., North India, mainly U.P.) has a long history. Urdu culture has always been burdened with highly normative notions of correct speech and public behavior. (There is, of course, a larger, similar opposition fairly often invoked between North India and South India.) What this little book offers is some valuable—and little known—evidence that should interest anyone curious about the history and nature of this particular regional rivalry, this construction of *mulkī* or *dakinī* identity and its opposite, the *hindūstānī* or *ghair-mulkī* self.

The print of the book is lovely to look at but, unfortunately, there are plenty of mistakes. In my copy, the text on p. 15 is repeated on p. 16. Persian verses should have been more carefully checked. The Urdu verses of Jaʻfar Zaṭallī are garbled on p. 33. On p. 81, it should be *"merē Yūsuf kē gʰar ā'ī Zulēkhā ban-kē dīvānī."* But the major complaint that must be made is that the editors have not indicated their sources; in fact, they have made a point of not disclosing them. Mr. Khalidi is a respected librarian and has published at least two valuable bibliographies. It is most surprising that he decided to go along with his co-editor and didn't include any bibliographical information in this book. How do he and his friend expect historians to correct their own lapses—by simply quoting from this book?

The book may be obtained in the U.S. by writing to Hyderabad Historical Society, 56 Duff Street, Water Town MA 02172-3016.

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Muzaffar Iqbal. *Abdullah Hussein: The Chronicler of Sad Generations.* Islamabad: Leo Books, 1993. 136 pp. Rs. 180. Paperback.

The title suggests that this is a biography of the Urdu writer Abdullah Hussein. In fact, while giving the reader a "Capsule Biography" in chapter two and a "Chronology" of Abdullah Hussein's life in the last four pages, this short book is a revision of *Abdullah Hussein: From Sad Generations to a Lonely Tiger*, published in 1985 by the University of Wisconsin's South Asian Studies Center, and it is primarily a work of literary criticism of the works of Abdullah Hussein.

The first chapter describes the context and the history of Abdullah Hussein's work. After the brief biography of chapter two, the rest of the book deals chronologically with Abdullah Hussein's work. Chapter three is devoted to his first novel *Udās Naslēṅ.* Chapter four deals with his short stories and novelette, chapter five with *Udās Naslēṅ,* chapter six with the short novel *Qaid,* and chapter seven with influences on the writer and the writer's *weltanschauung*.

In the first two pages Muzaffar Iqbal states twice that Abdullah Hussein's work, at least prior to 1981, was written in a "remarkably original syntax" and "an inimitable style". After that, unfortunately, the author hardly ever mentions style and syntax again. He concentrates his critical perception primarily on characterization, secondarily on theme, and tertiarily, on narrative technique. What Iqbal has to say in each of those areas, however, is worth the reading.

In his discussion of *Udās Naslēṅ* he writes:

> So far the efforts of male writers to create a *real* female character have resulted in the still-born creatures with only the apparent features of a complete woman. The male writers see only a small portion of the female world. The Urdu writers have written about the psychology of women, the sociology of women, her physical domain, household, body, fashion, acquired habits, her social interactions, etc. and at the very best, about her maternal nature. But the Lawrencian aspect of the female existence, the domain where she really stands face to face with man, has yet to be written.
>
> One female writer who could have written about this aspect with artistic depth, Qurratulain Hyder, became trapped in the narrow confines of her own personal past and her fictional world remains limited to the bourgeois world of post-1857 India and to a class which has vanished since the Partition of the Indian sub-continent. (pp. 49–50)

In his discussion of *Bāgʰ* Muzaffar Iqbal identifies four themes that run through the book—viz., respiratory disease, the tiger, freedom, and love—and he offers a sound explanation of the individual importance of each of the themes and of the interactions among them. Also noteworthy is his perception of various levels of the theme of exile in the short story "Jilāvaṭan" (The Exile).

In the context of that same story, Hussein's shortest one, narrative technique is discussed cogently.

> There is little action but the story moves forward as a totality: the narrator's understanding of the exiled heard clerk changes with the telling of the story. The unsaid about the head clerk and the said about the backdrop tightens the plot. The head clerk only utters eight broken sentences, the longest has thirty-two words. This economy of words, the bold strokes of its background, and a detached tone are characteristic features of this story. (p. 71)

An intriguing idea is raised, in fact by Abdullah Hussein himself, in the first few pages of the chapter on influences and world-view.

Abdullah Hussein was trained as a chemical engineer, and Muzaffar Iqbal quotes a statement in which Abdullah Hussein compares the unknowns that accompany creative activity to the fact that chemists do not know the exact number of compounds formed in the synthesis of cement. Iqbal, then, insightfully carries the metaphor further and compares the crises that many of Hussein's major characters face in the high temperatures (1400° c) needed to synthesize cement. Many of them succumb to the pressure. Some come out forever changed.

Two literary influences are dealt with at some length in chapter seven, namely that of Qurratulain Hyder and of Ernest Hemingway. In the dispute between Hyder and Hussein about the latter's excessive borrowing from the former, Muzaffar Iqbal concludes that indeed Hussein did "borrow" directly from her and that "one can assume that Ms. Hyder's influence was either unconscious or a youthful Hussein succumbed to the temptation of following a popular writer" (p. 121).

Finally, while the book is written primarily from a laudatory point of view, Iqbal occasionally does find fault with Hussein's work. At the end of the "Influences" subsection of chapter seven he writes:

> Hussein has … remained under a self-trance; he has not outgrown his own earlier works. There are certain images and situations that recur time and again in his fiction. I have repeatedly pointed towards the image of a *Khaksar* [*Khāksār*] selling glasses, a naked young girl initiating the young protagonists in the sexual life, the image of a sacrificial lamb and many others. This reliance on used images and language structures is perhaps a sign of fatigue. (p. 127)

In a more generally positive vein, however, he writes:

> The world Abdullah Hussein has created is open to everyone who likes

to live in a world inhabited by nostalgic exiles, fallen angels, one-armed heroes, depressive and lonely expatriates, and by men who like to hunt tigers and by women as fragrant and beautiful as jasmines. (p. 8)

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Iqbal—A Selection of the Urdu Verse: Text and Translation. Translated by D.J. Matthews. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; 1993. x, 289 pp. £ 12.

One must admire the industry and the literary discrimination of D.J. Matthews, a scholar whom all of us know and respect as co-editor of *An Anthology of Classical Urdu Love Lyrics: Text and Translations* (London: 1972). The expectations that were aroused in me on seeing his new book, an advanced students' handbook and anthology of Iqbal, were high and pleasant, based on my previous views about Matthews's work. If I am now disappointed, these high expectations are largely to blame. But then, such expectations were not unreasonable. In the 1972 anthology, all the poems were scanned accurately and their metres described correctly. In the present book, I find a scansion that should have gone – – ⏑ / ⏑ – – ⏑ / ⏑ – – – ⏑ / ⏑ – – described as – – ⏑ – / – – ⏑ ⏑ / – – ⏑ ⏑ /– – (p. 149). Even if we presume that the fourth syllable of the first foot (as described by Matthews) is shown as long due to a typographical error, there is nothing—not even our good opinion of Matthews—that can make us believe that any foot in an Urdu metre could end with two short syllables. The foot division is not just wrong: it couldn't have been made by anyone who has a knowledge of Urdu prosody.

On page 150 we find a scansion that should correctly be– – ⏑ / – ⏑ – – / – – ⏑ / – ⏑ – – described as – – ⏑ – / ⏑ – – / – – ⏑ – / – – . The author forgets that his configuration takes the metre away from Muẓāriʿ and makes it into a false Rajaz. The same error is repeated on page 151. (In both cases, however, the metre is correctly identified as Muẓāriʿ.) On page 152, a configuration that should be – – ⏑ / ⏑ – – ⏑ / ⏑ – – has been shown as – – ⏑ / ⏑ – – ⏑ – / – – . The metre of poems 19 and 26 is Munṣariḥ; both times it has been identified as Rajaz (pp. 173 and 184). And so on.

At this point I hear the voice of my conscience suggesting that I'm perhaps picking nits. Should I not examine the larger issues? For example, what image of Iqbal does this book convey? Does he come across as the great poet and great thinker that we are informed (Introduction, p. 3) he was? What are the issues, then, that his poetry addresses? With what ideas does it engage? What are the literary strategies that he adopts? Where does he stand in the Urdu poetic

tradition? What new ground, if any, did he break in Urdu poetry? These and many such questions that should have merited David Matthews's attention are not even raised. All that we have are somewhat hasty and certainly over-broad generalizations, like "The Persian influence [on Iqbal] was so great that not infrequently an Urdu verse may be rendered into Persian merely by substituting the third person singular form of the verb 'to be' *hai* by *ast*, which conveniently scan in the same manner" (p. vii). While one may disregard the fact that *ast* and *hai* do not always scan the same way, one still wonders if such a narrow situation obtains "not infrequently" even in the poetry of Ghalib, which is more Persianized than that of Iqbal. One also wonders whether Persian is not to Iqbal's Urdu what Arabic was to Hafiz's Persian. Hafiz, as we well know, has a predilection for inserting Arabic phrases, *miṣra's,* and even full *she'rs,* into his Persian *ghazals*. Rumi does the same in his *Maṣnavī*. So by throwing an occasional—and to be sure, not major—bit of Persian into his Urdu, was Iqbal consciously paying homage to the Persian language, or was he merely acting out a role suggested by his great predecessors? Iqbal has a lot of Arabic too, particularly Qur'ānic references, in his Persian, and also in his Urdu. The reason for this could be his love of Islam and its Prophet, or his admiration of Arabic, or his erudition, or all of these. Discussions of such non-central matters should not, in my view, find place in brief, simplifying introductions of the kind attempted here.

The reference to the alleged Persian influence on Iqbal has been brought in, I suspect, merely in order to justify including in this volume "a short appendix outlining the grammar of Iqbal's Persian" (p. vii). Before we go on to examine the worth and value of the appendix in question, we might stop and ask ourselves where the signpost "Iqbal's Persian" is supposed to lead us. Are we to understand that there are many kinds of Persian, and Iqbal's is one of them? Or does this mean that Iqbal's Persian was different from that of, say, Hafiz or Ghalib? Or should we believe that Iqbal's Persian was "archaic" (or maybe "modern") and had a different grammar? Later on (p. 195) we are informed that "Iqbal's Persian is not the modern language of Iran, but reflects that of the classical poets of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. […] Substantially, however, classical and modern Persian do not differ greatly from each other. […] Iqbal's verse would generally be perfectly comprehensible to the present-day Iranian." If so, why insert an appendix outlining the grammar of "Iqbal's Persian"?

Now a brief look at the grammar itself. On page 196 we are introduced to the *iẓafat*, the functions of which have been limited to merely two: to indicate the possessive or the adjectival. So what about the descriptive sense, like *shahr-e dehlī* (the city of Delhi), or the inverted-descriptive, like *ābjū* (*jū-e āb*, stream of water), or the genetic like Bū 'Alī-e Sīnā (Bū 'Alī, son of Sīnā), or the qualitative like *ahl-e dil* (he/she/they who have a heart), and so on? On page 197 we are told, "Persian verbs have two stems: *Present* and *Past*" (!). The author goes on to say that *khar* is the *Present* (!!) stem of the verb *kharīdan* (to buy) and that the infinitive is formed

by adding *an* to the past stem (!!!). At this point, I am rendered speechless, for I have lost all the myriad Persian infinitives that I'd always been taught to regard as *maṣdar* (occurring from the beginning, that from which things start; hence, the original forms) which are the source of other, finite forms.

Rather than losing myself in marginal issues, let me return to the main questions. Does this book present any kind of image of Iqbal as a great poet? One of the ways to attempt such a presentation would have been to choose poems which the critical opinion of the culture in which they were produced has consistently regarded as great. Seen from this point of view, the inclusion of long poems that are largely sentimental ("Shikva"), sententious ("Vālida Marḥūma kī Yād mēṅ") or more or less wish-fulfilling rather than visionary and history-based ("Ṭulū'-e Islām") seems to be misleading, or wasteful, or both. For the very same space could have been used for including much greater poems like "Żauq-o-Shauq," "Shām aur Shā'ir," the grand *qaṣīda*-like poem in imitation of Sanā'ī (*samā saktā nahīṅ pahnā-e fiṭrat mēṅ merā saudā*), extracts from "Miḥrāb Gul Afghān kē Afkār," and many of the short, dramatic poems like "Jibrīl-o-Iblīs" that would be the pride and glory of any poet.

It is hard to see why a selection like the present one—short as it is—would choose to deal with poems of a local, passing interest. I grant that even the weaker poems of Iqbal are often better than the best of nearly all his contemporaries, but I truly don't see why Prof. Matthews should stuff the student's gullet with second-rate, stale stuff from a poet who is perfectly able to supply some of the finest poetry produced in India in this century.

These reservations notwithstanding, I am glad to affirm that the translations of the poetry generally succeed in their objective: each is "a parallel English translation, which has been made as literal as possible, without, however, forcing the English syntax" (p. 8). The book "is intended for those who have a reading knowledge of Urdu and who would like to become better acquainted with the works of Iqbal" (p. vii). I would say that the translations generally do even better: they read like good English texts in their own right. Here is a sample from the poem "Khiẓr-e Rāh" (p. 59, opening lines) :

> One night on the bank of the river I was lost in my vision. In the recess of my heart I concealed a world of anxiety.
> The night grew ever more silent; the wind was gentle; the river flowed softly. My eyes wondered if this was a river or a picture of water.
> As a little baby sleeps in its cradle, somewhere, in the depths, the wave was restless, drunk in dreams.
> The birds in their nests were captives to the magic of the night. The dim stars were prisoners of the spell of the moonlight.

> Then suddenly I see Khizr, the messenger who measures the world, in whose old age the colour of youth is bright as the dawn.
> He is saying to me: 'Oh seeker of the secrets of eternity, if the eye of your heart is opened, the destiny of creation will be unveiled.'

This reads very well, and the sense of the poem is more or less preserved. But I still have my differences with it: some, which relate to choosing a more or less literal word or phrase from the English to represent the Urdu word or phrase, I'll disregard. For they fall in the area of legitimate choices: for example, should *jahāṅ paimā* be "he who measures the world" (Matthews, and quite correct and literal) or "he who travels the world"? Instead, I want to point out what I consider serious mistranslations in the above-quoted text.

In the first line, we have *maḥv-e naẓar*, which means "gazing" or "looking intently." I would be very loath to render it "lost in … vision." In verse 3, line 2, the Urdu text is *mauj-e muẕṯar*. That is, there is an *iẓāfat* connection between *mauj* and *muẕṯar*. Matthews doesn't read the *iẓāfat*, and translates, "The wave was restless, drunk in dreams." Actually, he should have said, "The restless wave was [no longer restless but] lost in sleep." (By the way, I would here prefer "sleep" to Matthews's "dreams"). In verse 5, Matthews translates *paik* as "messenger." Here it could be much better translated as "runner."

The calligraphy of the Urdu text is pleasing, and has been beautifully transported here from the Lahore edition of 1973. However, that edition, venerable though it is, suffers from some serious typographical and orthographic-stylistic errors. Since Matthews's target reader is the student who has some, though not much, Urdu, I'd have been very happy to see the text entirely debugged. Here are some examples.

Iqbal had an archaic way of writing *mujʰ-kō* (treating it as one word) as *mujkō*. Similarly, he wrote *tujʰ-kō* as *tujkō*. This is entirely incorrect, but he seems to have persisted with it in all the editions of his poetry that were published under his supervision. I see no reason for us to perpetuate this anachronism. Or if out of respect to Iqbal we do so, we should make this clear. In the present instance, the unexplained occurrence of *mujkō* or *tujkō* (pp. 12–13 and passim) is sure to cause misunderstanding about its correctness. Similarly, the calligrapher of the source edition has an inordinate love for using *dō-čashmī hē,* where current Urdu orthography unequivocally prefers the *hā-e havvaz*. Here again, if it wasn't possible for Matthews to effect corrections, he should have stated the correct position in the notes. On page 98, verse 8, line 1, the source edition makes a ludicrous error in printing *gil* as *gul*. The error has been preserved by Matthews; even his translation assumes that the true text is *gul*, and he translates accordingly, not realizing that *gul* doesn't make very good sense in the context. Furthermore, the entire second line of the verse in which *gil* occurs, is missing

from Matthews's text, making the verse incomprehensible anyway. On page 104, last line, the source edition has *tajdīdah* instead of *tajdīd*. The error is preserved in Matthews.

Ghalib and Iqbal are the two Urdu poets whose names are vaguely familiar to the modern Western reader. I fear that this book will not do as much as we could wish toward deepening that familiarity.

—Shamsur Rahman Faruqi
Editor, Shab-Khūn

Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russell. *Three Mughal Poets: Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991. vii, 290 pp.

The welcome reissue of this classic work of criticism after twenty-five years gives us a chance to reevaluate the received opinions pertinent to classical Urdu literature, in effect, to see how the stature of this literature has changed. Strong forces have been at work: the contemporary poetry of Faiz and others has captured many new readers, and they in turn have hunted within the canon for other authors of equal force. By necessity they would eventually turn to the eighteenth-century classics, where they will come upon the book under review here. It differs from its original publication only in the removal of the Foreword by Annemarie Schimmel, and some minor changes in the authors' Preface; the remaining body of the text is reprinted unchanged. It contains an introductory chapter establishing the eighteenth-century background, followed by five chapters, one on the satirist Sauda, another on the *Enchantment* of Mir Hasan, and three chapters devoted to the love poetry of Mir.

As so often with the publication of material from the Subcontinent, there is some defensiveness, a long-nurtured feeling that somehow an insult will come from the West—the beloved poetry, or art, or music will be ill-considered by supercilious Europeans. And we find this defensive voice still in the Preface, even though the quarter century between the two editions has brought changes in the West's awareness of Urdu literature. A vital force in that change is none other than the journal in which this review appears, for it has drawn readers from beyond those specializing in Indic cultures. Of equal importance are two publications of the early seventies from Columbia University Press, one a study of Iqbal's poetry, and the other a superb anthology of Urdu verse, *The Golden Tradition* by Ahmed Ali. Especially this latter publication sets Urdu literature before new discriminating readers. Hence it is surely not the same world at all as 1968, when Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russell first published *Three Mughal Poets.*

No Westerner will have any trouble understanding Sauda's satire; he is as

bold as Swift, as bawdy as Aristophanes, and as nimbly sociable as Gilbert and Sullivan. Sauda is presented at first in short anecdotal couplets and then pieces of greater length. About a quack doctor he wrote at the end of a longer piece:

> The moral is, make this a golden rule:
> Don't go for treatment to this bloody fool. (p. 51)

When his Shi'ite patron, the Governor of Avadh, goes hunting and kills a lion, Sauda records:

> See. Ibn i Muljam comes to earth again
> And so the Lion of God once more is slain. (p. 38)

Confronted then by his insulted master, Sauda holds fast against Shi'ite anger: "Well, it was a fair comparison. The lion *was* Gods, not yours or mine."

Exchanges like this are passed on and eagerly heard; the profane insult is clever enough to transcend the irritation of grey old clerics or pious rulers. But especially, don't cross Sauda; his verbal barbs cut deep:

> Sikander craves this boon of the Almighty:
> Rouse Zahik up to lift his spouse's nightie.
> And then when she brings forth his monkey-lad
> He'll dance it through the streets of Faizabad and
> earn his living by an honest trade. (p. 41)

A gluttonous acquaintance fares no better:

> He only has to hear a saucepan rattle,
> And like a soldier digging in for battle,
> He'll take up his position by the door.
> Nothing can shift him then …

In addition to these brief rhymed satires, Islam and Russell give two examples of Sauda's lengthier ripostes. Having earlier lamented the decline in civil order, in the strength of the army, and in personal honesty, coupled with self indulgence, he goes on the attack. The crimes are slackness ("See the perverted justice of this age! The wolves roam free: the shepherds are in chains."), indifference ("But perhaps you have thought of becoming a poet, for are not poets said to enjoy freedom from all care? You will find it not so. No one is such a prey to worry as he. He cannot even concentrate on his Id prayer, for he is trying all the time to compose an ode to his patron."), and cowardice ("If war comes they creep out of their fortresses just long enough to draw up an army which, you may depend on it, will turn and run from every battle.").

This is our Sauda, a social critic who converts human foibles into biting humor, using lines so lively that they are repeated over and over throughout the city.

And so was the verse of Mir Hasan, though he was famous for his *maṣnavis.* Much of his work has never been published, but one *maṣnavi,* made of over two thousand couplets, will assure him a reputation among the greatest of Urdu poets. This is the *Siḥr ul Bayān,* "The Enchanted Story," completed in 1785, two years before his death. It is a stock tale of a prince separated from his father the king, tricked by magic. He finds love but in that coupling there arise problems, and a handmaid to the princess goes to solve a second work of magic; there enters a *jinn;* love between the handmaid and the *jinn* develops. Eventually the two couples are married, and the prince is returned to his aging father, the king. So, it is not the story itself, but the beauty of its recitation that holds all in thrall. The king, whose power is made doubly clear by his name, Malik Shah, is presented with a son in his declining days; his joy is only equaled by his son's magnificence, and that will soon be equaled by the radiance of the princess, his beloved. It is a splendid world, bounteous with beauty, honesty, love, and piety. Then, outside elements, introduced by a powerful *jinn* and *parī,* turn the plot toward doom, and then away, missing catastrophe by a hair. But it is the perfect world of prince and princess, young and glistening in beauty; of noble kings of unlimited power and wealth; a *jinn* who can be helpful, and a *parī* who has a forgiving side, too. But the beauty of the princess, and her lover, which is not described with prudish words, is essential. Just as ancient Greeks would sit around a fire, hearing Homer's stories with rapture, so do all hear this courtly *maṣnavi* of Mir Hasan, and know the mastery of this sophisticated storyteller.

There is almost a mathematical structure to this piece. Starting in the royal court, the focus shifts down to the prince, and then down again to the *parī,* then to the dual redeeming relationship of a princess and handmaid, then back up to the more powerful *jinn,* then up to the prince, and finally all is restored in the magnificence of the king's vast court.

And just as the English translations of Sauda are superb (in all but meter: the *mutaqārib* does not lend itself will to English), so too does the prose retelling of Mir Hasan's *Enchanting Story* sparkle. And it is these felicitous translations that insure this book's success as much as the original tale. This same skill is repeated in the *ghazals* of Mir.

The final third of the book deals with the love poetry of Mir, and the position of Mir within his age. The *ghazal* is the most refined form of Islamic poetic expression, and the Urdu poets have it well under control, though they feel that their expression in this form cannot be equal of the Persian. That is a futile point to debate, and probably more unlikely than it is possible. But the *ghazal* remains the most difficult of all Islamic verse for the Westerner to grasp, whether Urdu, Arabic or Persian. Truly, it demands something of the Western reader that is difficult to describe, for the Westerner must understand the Islamic

separation of sexes. This ritualistic segregation of men from women heightens sexual tension and in part is responsible for the intense pleasure the *ghazal* brings, a poetic agreement that love is the handmaid of disaster. The female is simplified beyond all measure; she is, in these *ghazals,* only a sexual thing, isolating, teasing, using her only form of power, her sexual presence. She is thus primarily a physical reality, almost entirely lacking intellectual resources, and is unable to provide aid or insight into the struggles of the male.

So hear Mir:

> To enter love's dominion is to throw your life away
> For love makes no allowances, and beauty does
> not spare. (p. 99)

And Mir again:

> I caught a glimpse of you with hair disheveled
> And my distracted heart was yours for life. (p. 109)

It is clear that love's object is immoral:

> In everything he does a man need skill.
> Even the art of sinning must be learned. (p. 159)

But there is a frequent feeling of debasement, as if the male, in his admiration, were reducing himself to peonage:

> Each day she passes by, too proud even to glance my way:
> I in humility bow low to greet her every day. (p. 166)

Eventually we see this is more than just the love of a woman, but also the love of his fellow man, the love of an idealized life, but perhaps especially the love of God. It is from these unions that the tremendous pressure is released, and from it we understand how these continuing couplets, differing only minutely, can have their relentless power. They involve man's two greatest enigmas, the insecurity of his sexual role, and the dilemma of his religion.

—John A.C. Greppin
Cleveland State University

Ralph Russell. *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992. 285 pp. $59.95 cloth; $29.95 paperback.

How rare it is today for an academic to make a clearly articulated personal statement about his or her subject and argue it earnestly in a fashion that precludes the need for "literary theory" and the obfuscating jargon in which it is normally conveyed. This is exactly what Ralph Russell has done, and in writing *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature*, he has not only again made clear his commitment to the social and political ideals in which he so passionately believes, but he has also attempted to perform a very special service to his audience. This is to convey in English to "those young people of South Asian background who use English as their effective first language" (p. 2) ideas about Urdu literature that he has been developing for more than two decades, in order to help them understand their literary heritage. The result is "a select personal history of Urdu literature" (p.1). Scholars approaching this book should carefully heed the subtitle, since the work cannot (nor does it intend to) take the place of larger and more detailed histories of Urdu literature such as those of Matthews, Shackle, and Husain, of Muhammad Sadiq, or of Ali Jawad Zaidi.

About half of the book consists of articles published previously but revised for this volume. The remainder is newly written material, plus an introductory essay by Marion Molteno entitled "Approaching Urdu Poetry." In this, Ms. Molteno provides some basic technical information about Urdu poetry for those not familiar with it, and speaks of the accommodations that one educated in English literature must make to begin to understand and appreciate Urdu literature. Russell makes it very clear that the book is not intended to be comprehensive. It is divided chronologically into three major sections: "Classical Poetry"; "Literature in Reaction to British Rule"; and "Literature and the People." These large parts are in turn subdivided in ways that serve the author's aim of presenting the social and political setting of Urdu literature over the more or less two centuries that the book covers, giving some idea of the major forms and most important writers, and of approaching their writings as living literature rather than "museum pieces" (p. 3). Naturally the coverage is uneven, although Russell has tried to provide connecting links between large topics or periods. The numerous quotations are given in Urdu script and English translation.

To a Persianist, probably the most interesting chapter in the book is the long one called "Understanding the Urdu *Ghazal*." Russell's view of the *ghazal*, articulated earlier in articles and in his *Three Mughal Poets* [reviewed elsewhere in the this issue —*Ed.*] is that the *ghazal* must be understood as medieval poetry on the subject of illicit love. Not to recognize the *ghazal* as stemming from a medieval social setting will prevent the reader from coming to terms with it, and to view it as other than the poetry of illicit love is to miss the whole point of it. By and large, Russell understands the *ghazal* as an expression of the poet's experience in life, and he generalizes the identity of the lover and the beloved in

humanistic terms, respectively, as the striver for an ideal, and the ideal itself. While he allows for multiple levels of interpretation, particularly in the case of mystical *ghazals,* these are de-emphasized and his approach does not distinguish between the poet's voice and the person of the poem. Thus his overall understanding of the Urdu *ghazal* is in terms of twentieth-century realism.

This characterization of the *ghazal* is, to my mind, all wrong. It is wrong because it ignores or misinterprets the source of the Urdu *ghazal,* because it misrepresents the role of convention and invention in the shared literary culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and because it declares the *ghazal* to be, in essence, a realistic love poem. The formal and rhetorical model for the Urdu *ghazal* was the Persian *ghazal*, and there can be no question about this. The great Urdu *ghazal* writers that Russell discusses, from Mīr to Ghālib, were educated in the Persian literary tradition and they all wrote in Persian as well as in Urdu. They were entirely familiar with the Persian *ghazal* and its conventions, and such poets as Sa'dī, Amīr Khusrau, Ḥāfiẓ, Jāmī, and Bēdil were alluded to or followed by them all. The shared literary culture which formed them, and within which they wrote, simply would not allow for an understanding of the *ghazal* such as that which Russell presents.

The conventions of representing emotion and the inner feelings of the individual in the pre-modern Persian literary tradition were, in essence, not different from those seen in Persian paintings up to the high Safavid period, and in any other artistic or social form in which an individual might represent his or her inner feelings. Personal emotion was considered to be a very private matter and strict limits were set by the culture for the expression of it. Persian lyric poetry screens the direct expression of emotion through a dense filter of conventions, and the result, familiar to all readers of Persian *ghazals,* is the abstraction and generalization of individual emotion in a way that disguises the person behind the persona. It is this process of abstraction that makes it impossible to consider the *ghazal* a social document, as Russell does. Furthermore, it is a disservice to his intended audience to present the Urdu *ghazal* in this manner. It is admirable that the author seeks to find ways to make this medieval literature more accessible to modern readers unfamiliar with its conventions, but to make it into a poem only about illicit love, and to give the lover and beloved of the poetry direct analogs in real life is a serious misrepresentation of the literary and social values and conventions underlying this poetry. I believe that other ways can be found to present the medieval *ghazal* to a modern audience that do not emphasize *altérité,* but rather that try to link the past with the present in a broader way so as to show continuity rather than disjunction.

The major portion of the book is devoted to the period from 1857 to the present. There is a disproportionately long, but very interesting, chapter on the satirical verse of Akbar Ilāhabādī, followed by shorter chapters on the modern novel, on Iqbal, Prem Chand, the Progressive Writers' Movement, and finally,

on Faiz Ahmad Faiz. This last will probably raise no eyebrows among readers of Urdu poetry. Russell treats Faiz rather roughly, leaving the impression that he considers the poet somewhat of a fraud. This criticism seems to be motivated more by political factors than by literary ones, but then in the author's view, the two can hardly be separated.

I said above that by writing this book, Russell has attempted to perform a special service to the community of individuals of South Asian background who are more comfortable using English than Urdu. As a long-time student of Persian literature and observer of Persians, I find this idea very interesting. As with the South Asian community that Russell works with in England, there is in America and elsewhere a rapidly increasing number of young Persians, many of whom can scarcely remember Iran or who have never been there, and who are more comfortable with English than with Persian. A great many of these young people want very much to read, and to learn about, their classical literature. Having taught a number of them, I have some idea of the difficulties they face in grappling with the language, literary conventions, and intellectual climate of medieval Persian. Maybe the time has come for a scholar of Persian literature to do what Russell has done and write a book directed especially to this segment of the Persian community outside Iran.

Ralph Russell knows Urdu literature well, takes it very seriously, and has great respect for it. He also writes about it (except for the *ghazal*) in a manner that makes it accessible to the non-specialist. Because of this, *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature* should have a wide appeal among those for whom it was written. It is a timely idea, and if it helps to bring English-using South Asians into closer contact with their literary past, it will serve a most useful purpose. It is regrettable that the presentation of the major poetic form of the past is so misleading.

—William L. Hanaway
University of Pennsylvania

Shaukat Siddiqi. *God's Own Land: A Novel of Pakistan.* Translated from the Urdu by David J. Matthews. Kent, England: Paul Norbury Publications/unesco Collection of Representative Works, 1991. 245 pp.

The novel's english title, *God's Own Land: A Novel of Pakistan*, suggests its identity as a national allegory, a term popularized by Fredric Jameson in his 1986 essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." Jameson's essay theorized that all third-world literatures are necessarily allegories of the collectivity and of nation-formation, which make them uninteresting to the first-world readers who prefer literary renderings of the private as opposed to the public experience. In a well-known critique of this theory, Aijaz Ahmad

exposes Jameson's own first-world biases and attempts to trace a sophisticated genealogy of third-world literature, the Urdu novel in particular—Ahmad's *In Theory* (1992) provides a sophisticated critique of a series of similar positions about representing the non-Western experience.

Although I agree with Aijaz Ahmad's arguments, I have also come to believe that national allegories as defined by Jameson do exist. The novel under review is one of them. Besides, I am convinced that even a mediocre socialist-realist novel—a non-allegorical genre—could be easily converted into a national allegory by marketing it as such. By providing a suggestive title (*God's Own Land*) and a blunt subtitle (*A Novel of Pakistan*), the translator and UNESCO have framed *Khudā kī Bastī* as an allegory bout Pakistan's nation-formation, forcing an allegorical reading from readers who have no access to the original.

Set in the years immediately following the creation of Pakistan, Siddiqi's novel portrays a series of characters, mostly underclass, deprived, and possessing only a vague understanding of the new nationhood. Among the two main strands of this incohate narrative, the story of Nausha's family has some formal clarity and interest, mainly on account of its domestic focus.

The novel begins in greed and murder and ends in revenge, and a vague suggestion about the indefatigable nature of idealism is made at the end. None of the characters or situations in the novel is deeply felt or realistic, even though the translator claims that Siddiqi "portrayed life as it really was." The domestic strand of the narrative is centered around Nausha. First we see the boy while he is initiated into theft by Niyaz, the junk-dealer who is to emerge as the villain, Mr. Greed of this allegory. The boy's widowed mother and his sister Sultana roll *bīṛīs* at home to make a living. Niyaz lusts after Sultana who is often described as "fresh" and "lovely".

The moment Niyaz learns about how life-insurance can yield rich rewards, he begins a scheme which would earn him wealth and status in the new society. He marries Nausha's mother, starts work on poisoning her with the help of a quack who came over from India during Partition. As planned, Niyaz claims a huge amount from the insurance company and he establishes himself in a villa. Through bribery and scheming, he is able to amass more wealth through government contracts; he characterizes well the new class of swindlers who begin to gnaw at the roots of the young nation. In the meanwhile, he also skillfully turns his step-daughter Sultana into his mistress. Nausha himself has run away from home early on, but he shows up toward the end of the novel to avenge his mother's blood; he stabs Niyaz to death, consequently exposing his sister to yet another series of calamities, but alas, the idealist Ali Ahmad marries her and adopts Niyaz's child.

The second narrative strand of this novel appears to be an attempt to capture the sense of futility and collective anxieties about the public experience of the new nation; this part is centered around idealists like Ali Ahmad, Safdar Bashir, Dr. Zaidi, and of course, Salman, a middle-class youth who turns down the

lower-class Sultana when she pleads desperately for his love and protection while Niyaz is invading her home. Salman opts for a life of idealism and joins the founders of the secular Skylark Society to uplift the conditions of the poor. The new order of things in Pakistan eventually destroys the Skylarks and breaks Salman's determination, leading him to a compromise that brings him nothing but a loveless marriage, persecution, corruption and exposure to Western decadence. The two narratives develop in a parallel structure, but neither brings out the conflicts involved in a clash of the private and the public.

Had he seen this translation of Siddiqi's *Khudā kī Bastī,* Aijaz Ahmad would have been able to add one more level to his critique of Jameson's theory: the ability of first-world cultural institutions to provide a frame of reference that could nudge a flawed non-Western novel into becoming a national allegory. In an allegorical reading of this novel, it is possible to interpret the shapelessness and superficiality of the narrative as expressions of the chaotic process of nation-building. If it weren't for David J. Matthew's terminally flawed translation, *God's Own Land: A Novel of Pakistan* would have passed as a bona fide allegory of a nation's growing pains. The truth is that the translator has no feel for the language of fiction. He may be following the orthodox approach of "literal-translation" which might be all right for translating an esoteric religious tract, not for a work of fiction. Besides, an English translation of a novel marketed in this manner certainly deserves a much more serious introductory essay than a glib Preface which has nothing substantial to say about the novel or the novelist other than the claim that its television adaptation is "a well deserved tribute to one of the finest modern Urdu writers."

—Thomas Palakeel
Bradley University

Urdu and Muslim South Asia: Studies in Honour of Ralph Russell. Edited by Christopher Shackle. London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 1989. [Indian edition: Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991. 205 pp. Rs. 190.]

This is a festschrift to honor Ralph Russell, one of the most eminent scholars of Urdu language and literature in the Western world. From the glowing tributes several of his students pay him, Russell would appear to have taught literature in Britain with a missionary zeal. For Urdu, to him, was a point of entry into a whole civilization of South Asia, a civilization no longer "out there" but which had come home to Britain itself with the substantial presence of South Asians in the old Isles.

The volume covers diverse themes, not all of them related to Urdu or to

Muslim South Asia, much less to Urdu *and* Muslim South Asia, the editor's brave attempt to bind them in a common thread in his Introduction notwithstanding.

Professor Shackle opens his Introduction with the statement that the apparent exaggeration of claims on behalf of Urdu by its speakers apart, few, however, "would seriously dispute its significance as the major cultural language for the last two centuries of the Muslims of South Asia …" Despite Shackle's certitude, this is one of the most fiercely contestable statements he has made in the volume, at least amongst the speakers of the language in India. But then Shackle is really addressing his audience in Pakistan where the language, "… developed by the Muslims as the medium in which to reformulate their identity as a colonial minority," finally achieved national status. India, where even by Shackle's criterion, more Muslims (and therefore more Urdu-speakers) live than in Pakistan, does not really count for much. There are in addition other non-Muslim speakers of the language whose existence in any case is excluded by Shackle's definition. The identification of Urdu with Muslims is repeated several times in the Introduction ("Since Urdu only emerged as the premier cultural language of the Muslims of South Asia … towards the end of the eighteenth century …"; p. 3); the consequential counterposition of the Muslim and, in particular, the Hindu cultural identities is really evocative of a rather dated historical perspective. Indeed, Shackle transfers this perspective even to some other contributions. Thus the Introduction transforms "the cultural divide between the two communities," at best a sidelight in the articles of Rupert Snell on Raskhan and D.J. Matthews on the *Kulliyāt* of Quli Qutb Shah, into their main focus (pp. 3–4). To be fair to the contributors, very few of them would stand by the editor's assumptions. In its origin Urdu was the lingua franca of the urban literati, just as English is today in South Asia; Urdu was no more the language of Muslims than English is of the Christians in the subcontinent.

The lead article in the anthology is, appropriately, Victor Kiernan's "Persian Poetry and Its Cosmopolitan Audience." Kiernan is a wide-ranging intellectual with an old Marxist worldview; he is also the translator of the poetry of such giants as Iqbal and Faiz into English. It is thus fair to expect a stimulating analysis of the meaning of *ghazal* (his main theme) in Persian and Urdu literatures. He does indeed make frequent incursions into Europe, Turkey, Arabia and China and these lend comparative depth to his analysis. But in the end it is the old Marxist worldview, which must ground every manifestation of life's experience in a "material" (not necessarily economic) basis, that comes in the way of a satisfying exploration.

Ghazal (lit. "talking to a woman") is by its nature poetry of love. In the hands of the Arab and Persian Sufi poets where the *ghazal* had originated, its mystic content was expressed in the language of love, of romance. The everlasting longing of the Sufi soul for union with god found utterance in the longing of the lover for the beloved; the ecstasy of union expressed itself in a similar orgasmic

ecstasy of lovers after a life of waiting and pining; Kiernan's explanation of such poetry:

> Romantic love between man and woman has been an instinct of every human community from the most primitive to the most refined… . But everywhere it has been checked and hemmed-in by encroaching regulations and bans, very often following on class division. In many regions, and in Asia at large by contrast with Europe, it came to be particularly outlawed, and could hardly survive except in disguise. One cloak was supplied by the Sufi concept of the divine Lover. (p. 14)
>
> There could be no full release, for the less hardened among the dominant classes, from the morass of oppression and corruption in which they lived and moved and had their earthly being. Mystic poetry offered a substitute, escape from consciousness of the unpleasant realities, social as well as personal, that must have haunted them. (p. 15)
>
> Sufi poetry was in essence the wail of an ossified society, a self-imprisoned civilization. The old order could only go on moldering, all the worse attributes of the Asiatic state worsening as it grew more decrepit, until Western intrusion brought about a painful and costly new start. (*Ibid.*)

This is pure murder—of some of the most subtle and moving poetry in any literature. This is no more than an illustration of Marx's crude dictum on religion: "a mere reflex of the real world," an escape from the "real" life. Quite apart from the fact that romance, love, and sexual pleasure were frowned upon with far greater fury by the medieval and early modern Christian Church in Europe than by Islam (or Hinduism) in this part of the world, the very assumption that life, or the world, is divided into two halves—the "real," i.e., material, and the cultural or religious or poetic that is "unreal" or a mere "cloak" or "escape" from that real world—is highly problematic, to put it mildly. It is not easy to understand how a religious devotee's experience of his devotion is less real, or a mere escape, than the experience of making a living, for example; or a Sufi's ecstasy in what he experiences as his union with God any the less real, or a "cloak," a surrogate sexual pleasure because he has been deprived of such pleasure in "real life." It is because Kiernan, following Marx, makes this rather crude division that he disposes of all the subtlety of Sufi poetry, with ill-concealed disdain, as somewhat unbecoming of man who would rather dare to stand up and face the grim realities of life. (Incidentally, Professor Irfan Habib too, in a recent statement, found this poetry "vulgar" owing to its sexual allusions. One is hard put to identify the source of his outburst—is it his "Marxism" or puritanism?)

In the process Kiernan misses the point that creators of the *ghazal* did in fact

stand up to the "realities" of life and protest. For the most striking feature of the *ghazal* is the celebration of *gham* (quite untranslatable, but close to the delight of sorrow or pain). To the fanatic ulema, the theologians, who *argued* out their support for conquest, suppression, and extermination by the rulers, the Sufis and the *ghazal*-poets counterposed the "reasons of the heart"—love, compassion, devotion. Against the inhuman "sanity" of the world of conquerors and their ideologues, the poets celebrated the humane "insanity" of the lover. Against the craving for "success" by the mighty and the dominant, the poet courted "failure." The eternal longing of the lover for his beloved, implying eternal failure to unite with the beloved, became a value in itself, an end. The beloved could be anyone, anything: God, woman, a cause, humanity, always immensely beautiful and sensual. The unending longing for the "beloved" and the counting of failure were thus constantly counterposed to the search for success at the other end. This demarcation itself was a form of protest, a strong protest. It was not an escape from life, but an encounter head-on, from the opposite end. The ridicule to which the orthodoxy of the ulema, religious rituals, the might of the powerful and, not least, some of the basic tenets of Islam itself are reduced in Persian and Urdu *ghazal* literature makes it essentially a poetry of protest even at the hands of those poets who are not known for protesting.

Historian Peter Hardy's "The Mughals and Money" is an interesting exercise in that he extends the meaning of "exchange" from its narrowly economic context to a wide range of "exchange" relationships emanating from a hierarchical social order. "Rulers and hierarchs are seen as exchanging freedom from physical labor for legitimacy, craftsmen and merchants an assured supply of skills for an assured supply of raw materials and an assured market for the finished goods" (p. 19), and so on.

However, having outlined this vast perspective, Hardy decides to narrow down his focus to the attitude of medieval India's "opinion leaders" towards money. Despite a somewhat sketchy treatment of this interesting theme—quite obviously due to limitations of space—Hardy throws up ideas that could be usefully followed up at some length and could perhaps be linked up with other aspects of economic and social history of medieval India, some of which he has himself mentioned in the opening paragraphs. His conclusion could perhaps be summed up in his own words:

> Members of the Persian-knowing elites of Mughal India regard money as a respectable social phenomenon. But it is one respectable phenomenon among several. Money is certainly not seen as expressing the highest values that man should attain and can attain in his membership of human society … . (pp. 22–23)

Interesting, if not a surprising conclusion, which, if Hardy were a Marxist, could be plausibly reduced to a further extension: money, and therefore profit,

not having attained the central place in men's thinking at the élite levels, any chance of capitalism emerging from that economy was rather remote.

Thoughtful as Hardy's article is, its place in the anthology is slightly less than clear.

Rupert Snell's "Raskhan the Neophyte: Hindu Perspectives on a Muslim Vaishnava" is a well-researched and interesting article which sets out with the rather limited objective of identifying the Muslim Pathan devotee of Krishna. In the process Snell abbreviates and fairly interprets two Vaishnavite texts in which Raskhan is mentioned, deriving meanings from them in the context of Hindu perceptions of the Muslims, some charitable, others not quite.

"The *Kulliyāt* of Muhammad Qulī Qutb Shāh: Problems and Prospects" by D.J. Matthews is a purely technical, though competent, discussion of the problems of identifying and editing the text of the *Kulliyāt* (complete collection of verses).

Simon Digby's "An Eighteenth Century Narrative of a Journey from Bengal to England: Munshī Ismā'īl's *New History*" is a readable anecdotal account. It is difficult to see what else it is. It has nothing to do with Muslims except that the author of the travelogue was a Muslim. Digby does seek to establish its linkage with South Asian Muslims by making the somewhat dubious assertion that the Munshi was able to travel all the way to England because he was Muslim, for the Hindus were deterred by their caste rules from crossing the "Black Water" (p. 51). Rather than taking the caste injunction as evidence of the ground reality, a historian, one thought, was expected to compare the injunction with the ground reality. Digby also constructs queer phrases in English such as "geographical knowledge of Europe" (p. 49) when he means "Europeans' knowledge of geography," and "Their Persian correspondence was directed and overlooked by …" (p. 54) meaning "Their Persian correspondence was directed and overseen by … ."

"Emperor of India: Landhaur bin Sadān in the *Hamza* Cycle" by Frances W. Pritchett examines the Urdu version of the *dāstān* (prose romance) tradition of Persian literature. For her study Pritchett takes up perhaps the best known work in this tradition in the Persian language, the *Qiṣṣa-e Ḥamza* and looks at its "most popular Urdu version" Abdullah Bilgrami's *Dāstān-e Ḥamza,* first published in Lucknow in 1871.

What is fascinating about the Urdu *dāstān,* is that in its transition from Persian to Urdu the story acquires such thoroughly Indian characteristics as would have been unthinkable in the original version, a point strikingly brought out by Pritchett. In Persian, Landhaur is the son of the king Sarandib, vaguely identified with Sri Lanka. Landhaur is also a rather marginal character. But in the Urdu version he becomes the "Emperor of India" and occupies center stage. The name Landhaur also gets identified, in several nineteenth-century Urdu dictionaries, with the mythical Karna of the *Mahābʰārata.* Several of the incidents in the Urdu *dāstān* are its own creations.

> Landhaur's career as an Indian dastan hero is thus a spectacular one. He grows from being one vague king among many—as he was born in Iran—into a figure of unique vividness, power, nobility, and intimacy with Hamzah. Landhaur rides an Indian elephant, commands an Indian army, and has an Indian history. If Hamza is one half of a South Asian Muslim's heritage, Landhaur is the other. (p. 72)

Christopher Shackle's fascinating paper, "Urdu as a Sideline: The Poetry of Khwāja Ghulām Farīd," compares the nineteenth-century Sufi poet's compositions in Urdu and his mother-tongue Siraiki. Quite persuasively Shackle dismisses his Urdu poetry as considerably inferior in literary quality to the other, the Khwaja's boasts notwithstanding. Shackle's mastery of both the Urdu and Siraiki languages is established by his excellent translation of verses, though just for once I would have preferred *vaḥshat* being rendered as passion rather than insanity (p. 85). But beyond the words, metaphors and similes employed by Khwaja Farid, the basic tenets of both the Sufi life-experience and the *ghazal* form come through so very strikingly in his verses: love, devotion, liberal humanism and defiance of religious orthodoxy. To cite just a couple of verses:

> To me the Kaaba now an idol-temple seems
> And this is my cry of faith a Christian church's bell
> (p. 82)

> These idols' tresses hold my heart, so I
> Shun faith as others do impiety (*kufr*)
> (p. 85)

It is only the Sufi-*ghazal* form that could suspect an idol-temple beneath the holy of holies of Islam, the Kaaba itself (compare also Ghalib); and the Kafir, the one most virulently despised by the ulema, acquires the meaning of the longed-for sweetheart in the *ghazal* (compare Ghalib again).

Barbara D. Metcalf's "Maulāna Ashraf Alī Thānavī and Urdu Literature" and Gail Minault's "*'Ismat:* Rāshid ul Khairī's Novels and Urdu Literary Journalism for Women" are both interesting explorations in Muslim men's attempts to introduce mild social reform for their women through the promotion of elementary education and literacy among them. Minault brings out particularly poignantly both the sensitivity of such men to women as individuals and their readiness to draw back in horror when the endeavors initiated by them seem to cross the threshold they had set. Both the studies are situated in the fast-changing scenario of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Francis Robinson in his "*An-Nizāmiyya:* A Group of Lucknow Intellectuals in the Early Twentieth Century" forcefully traces the attempt by an eminent family of Lucknow intellectuals, located in Farangi Mahal, to reestablish Islamic

solidarity at élite levels within their community by running schools and establishing a journal, *An-Nizāmiyya.* Robinson situates this attempt in the rapidly changing context of the period, but, alas, this context remains a somewhat distant shadow, for space does not permit him to deal with the surrounding circumstances in any detail.

Christian W. Troll translates an essay on "Sarmad the Martyr" by Maulāna Abul Kalām Āzād to make just one important point—that the Maulana's commitment to composite nationalism derived from his Sufic inclinations and that this commitment preceded his involvement with parties and their politics. Troll makes the point well; his translation also retains the flavor of the Maulana's distinctive idiom.

Muhammad Umar Memon analyzes one novel in "Shi'ite Consciousness in a Recent Urdu Novel: Intizār Husain's *Bastī*." The story is placed in post-1971 Pakistan when anger moved the country's youth following its disintegration. But the novel's hero, young Zakir, suffers instead of rebelling, remains detached rather than raising his hands in indignation. Husain had been criticized by other reviewers for turning his hero into a "coward." Memon contextualizes the "cowardice" and particularly the suffering of Zakir in his Shiite consciousness and very powerfully brings out the force of suffering as a "mode of resistance, of denial, of disapproval" (p. 149). Memon's is excellent literary criticism and superb contextualization; the entire anthology is worth the while for this one essay.

Khalid Hasan Qadiri gives details of the art of the chronogram as practiced by his father, Maulana Hamid Hasan Qadiri.

Each letter in the Arabic script carries a numerical value and therefore a certain combination of letters in a phrase or a verse would add up to a given total which is used to indicate the year of the occurrence of an event. This is the chronogram. Historically the art was useful for ensuring the precise chronological location of events; today it is an archaic art, charming like an old relic whose charm is not to be valued in terms of utility. Qadiri goes into various technicalities of such compositions; he knows the craft well.

C.M. Naim prepares a purely "introductory" kind of note for familiarizing the unfamiliar with what a "mushaira" is and how it is conducted. His paper is titled "Poet-Audience Interaction at Urdu Musha'iras."

Regula Bruckhardt Qureshi too introduces the musical element of the Urdu *ghazal* as it is sung; she clearly has the Western audience in view.

Finally, Marion Molteno recalls and compliments Ralph Russell's vision and effort on behalf of Urdu in Britain in " 'This New Work': Ralph Russell and Urdu in Britain." The volume concludes with a select bibliography of Russell's works.

The essays in the anthology run to fairly uniform length; clearly, the editor was able to enforce his instructions to the contributors on this score fairly rigorously. Which, I think, is a mixed blessing, for some of the papers did require a bit more elbow room to make their points effectively. At any rate, and

irrespective of that, barring a couple of papers, I am not sure whether the anthology as a whole advances our understanding of either Urdu or the Muslim South Asia in any significant way.

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We Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry. Translated, edited, and with an introduction by Rukhsana Ahmad. London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1991. 193 pp.

Published first in pakistan as *Beyond Belief* (Lahore: ASR Publications, 1990), this volume is a welcome addition to the meager offerings heretofore available to the feminist reader of Urdu poetry. In an informative and accessible introduction, the editor-translator boldly asserts her belief that "the most innovative, the most radical and the most interesting poetry of our time is being produced by women" (p. 6) in a literary tradition that is male-dominated and devoted to the past (p. 1). These may prove to be fighting words, as even the token acceptance granted feminist criticism in the academy during the past decade has yet to become manifest in the world of Urdu letters. Here, publishers, critics and patrons still tend overwhelmingly to be male. Readers will judge for themselves whether they agree with Rukhsana Ahmad's assertions, but all should be glad for the opportunity she has afforded us by bringing together for the first time these fifty-one poems by seven modern female poets.

This volume suggests an alternative literary canon, comprising poets whose work represents "brave departures from that [male-dominated] literary tradition [devoted to the past]" (p. 1). The reader will not be surprised to find represented here such famous writers as Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz (indeed their selections constitute about half the volume, and the title itself is taken from one of Naheed's acclaimed poems). Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz are undoubtedly the two best-known female names in modern Urdu poetry, and even a casual dabbler on the scene will probably have been exposed to both, repeatedly. Their fame in no way compromises their credentials for inclusion in this volume, for both have consistently written woman-centered poetry over some thirty years. Furthermore, both are responsible for establishing an authentic female voice—a voice of feminine desire—within Urdu poetry while casting their nets of concern far beyond the prescribed concerns of gender-segregated "female" realms to include, e.g., contemporary Pakistani electoral, legal and linguistic politics. Indeed, the editor poses anti-sexist values and social content explicitly as

criteria for feminist writing in Urdu, in her explanation of why such a beloved poet as Parveen Shakir is absent from *We Sinful Women;* she writes that "the acceptance of sexist values and the absence of a social context makes [Shakir's] writing distinctively un-feminist" (pp. 6–7). This explanation underlines another major contribution of the volume, one that is long overdue in Urdu literature: the exercise of a critical distinction between feminist writing and any work by a female writer.

At the center of this collection are three poems by Sara Shagufta which constitute a call to arms grounded in articulate rage. Their focus on mothers, daughters, and the isolation of being a woman identify the logical base from which to launch feminist struggle. Tragically, the call came too late for the poet herself, who committed suicide at an early age, "deeply pained by the indifference of a chauvinistic poet husband who was surrounded by 'critics/friends' ready to deride her work" (p. 5). A complement to Shagufta can be found in Ishrat Aafreen, whose first volume of poetry heralded the arrival of a young, vigorously intellectual, perhaps neo-traditional poet. Aafreen, *who hasn't published since her marriage,* writes such direct and piercing lines as:

mērā qad	I grew
mērē bāp sē ūńčā niklā	Taller than my father
aur mērī māṅ jīt ga'ī	And my mother won.

("Dedication" [Intisāb], p. 141)

Ahmad points out that the best-accepted female poets tend to be those who conform both to socio-political norms of gender identity and the literary tradition. As someone who puts little faith in the coincidence of whose voices tend to be heard, I offer an inverse illustration: I had never before read anything by Saeeda Gazdar whose long poem "Twelfth of February, 1983" expresses fiery protest against the police violence encountered by women in Lahore who took to the streets on that date in opposition to Laws of Evidence curtailing women's status as citizens. Zehra Negah, on the other hand, writes poetry far less overtly political or expressive of protest, and perhaps less challenging to the status quo. The editor notes that the poems seen here "illustrate the pathos of her resignation" to the forces working against feminist writing, and that they "stay well within the bounds of 'protest' expected and permitted in women's writing from the subcontinent" (p. 26). Zehra Negah is a much-loved and highly respected poet in Pakistan. Rukhsana Ahmad's point is well taken.

The translations themselves are very competent, and where one might find herself imagining slightly different choices occasionally, they would only join a continuum of legitimate possibilities, rather than claiming to be corrective in any way. Translation is always a matter of choice, and subjective, and we can but applaud the translator who takes the risk of displaying her choices so unguardedly. One endorses, in passing, her decision to put the Urdu original on

the page facing her translation, a welcome convention gaining increased popularity in recent years.

Some of the selections—especially of Naheed and Riaz—have appeared in translation before. While one always hopes to increase the volume of Urdu poetry in English translation, Ahmad here makes yet another contribution with her own selection: by putting her own translations up against those of, say, Bedar Bakht (translator of a volume of Kishwar Naheed's work entitled *The Price of Looking Back* [Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1987]). Rukhsana Ahmad affords us the opportunity to engage in a dialogue concerning the nature and implication of translation itself, a subject that is necessarily comparative.

A central concern of both *We Sinful Women* and this review is that of access and exposure, of canon formation. Who owns Urdu poetry? Whose tradition is it? Who selects and represents it to the outside? Who translates it? What gets translated?

During an interview, Rukhsana Ahmad spoke of this project as having helped to bring her back to her own roots, to a tradition she was losing but is glad to reclaim. The catalyst to undertaking this project was a query from a young British Asian feminist who spoke some Urdu but did not read or write. Her appeal was simple: was there anything in this literature with which she could identify? Were there women poets in Urdu? Is there any tradition of feminism in Pakistan? The fact that she did not know speaks volumes about who and what represent Urdu literature to the non-Urdu world.

By seeking out and presenting the poems in *We Sinful Women,* and by framing them as she does with her introductory remarks, Rukhsana Ahmad has taken us a giant step further than those who ruefully shake their heads, agree that the tradition—nay the society itself—is male-dominated, and carry on editing and publishing anthologies which neither offer increased representation to women poets, nor indicate that male poets are tackling the problem on their own. It is no exaggeration to say that *We Sinful Women* represents the first serious attempt to seriously challenge the modern canon (anyone rushing to point out exceptions proving me wrong will do me the favor of exposing me to more poetry I am keen to read). Hopefully this book will soon appear on course syllabi wherever modern Urdu literature is taught, though those of us across the Atlantic still await a North American edition.

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