BOOK REVIEWS

Ghalib Lakhnavi and Abdullah Bilgrami. *The Adventures of Amir Hamza: Lord of the Auspicious Planetary Conjunction*. Translated from the Urdu by Musharraf Ali Farooqi. Introduction by Hamid Dabashi. New York: Random House, The Modern Library, 2007. 948 pp. $45.00. isbn 978-0-679-64354-8.

In Defense of "Idle Tales": Musharraf Ali Farooqi's Translation of *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*

> *The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; His wrath towards you burns like fire; He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire….*[1]

Thus began my introduction to "American Literature" in grade school, with Jonathan Edwards' 1741 sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Vivid in his descriptions of the fires of hell, Edwards was also quite clear that one of the easiest ways to get there was by reading "frivolous stories," idle tales with no didactic purpose. Since then, American writers have never completely escaped from this invective: Fiction, like fish oil, should taste terrible but be good for you. So was born a tradition: severe realism, social criticism, and painful self-reflection. Even fantasy stories carry the drab burden of the moral tale. It is thus little wonder our children prefer television to their ponderous literary heritage.

It is with this perspective that one can truly appreciate the gift of the English version of *The Adventures of Amir Hamza* as translated by Musharraf Farooqi. After dangling for 250 years over the pits of hell, imagine your delight as the

> […] singers of the pleasure garden of ecstasy and the melodists of the assembly of discourse thus create a rollicking rumpus by playing the dulcimer of delightful verbiage and the lute of enchanting story…
>
> (53)

And an enchanting story it is—tales of the rash and heroic Amir Hamza and a host

[1]Edwards, Jonathan. *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1997), p. 17.

of colorful friends, enemies, and supernatural beings as they careen from adventure to adventure; an ever-permutating narrative that keeps the reader in a state of delight and anticipation, sweeping from heroic to humorous and back as swiftly as if flying on Ashqar Devzad, Amir Hamza's winged horse. Readers of every taste and character can choose their own beloved moments in these stories: My personal favorites are the adventures of the delightfully amoral (and absolutely unreflective) Amar Ayyar, loyal companion and inveterate trickster, who infuses Hamza's childhood with misadventures and continues to skew the plot-lines with his pranks. And although some of his tricks are rather nasty, in the world of the *Adventures* heroes can be bad and villains can be good, the historical can mix freely with the supernatural, and (although filled with useful advice!) the tales are anything but didactic. It is, for the English-speaking reader, not just a new book of "world literature," but a completely different experience of reading.

This is because Farooqi's translation is more than the rendering of a text from one language to another—it is the introduction into English of a completely different genre of literature, the Urdu *dāstān*. Although the sources used for the translation were written by Ghalib Lakhnavi (1855) and Abdullah Bilgrami (1871), Farooqi's translator's note explains that these texts were based "in the South Asian oral narrative tradition of *dastan-goi* (*dastan* narration). […] a narrative of composite authorship" (xxvii). In his article "Simurgh-Feather Guide to the Poetics of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza Sahibqiran*," Farooqi underlines that because the *dāstān* is based in oral tradition, its ideals, conventions, and expectations are completely different than those of written prose.[2] Not intended to reflect, critique, or improve reality, the *dāstān* offers instead entry into a parallel universe: It "distorts reality; it has a dynamics which does not follow cause-and-effect; and it displays supernatural elements."[3] The *dāstān* is an un-finalizable narrative, open to endless versions, diversions, and permutations. For the reader accustomed to the Newtonian world of the novel, the *dāstān* is a leap into the quantum universe: a world of ever proliferating possibilities and the pure enjoyment of the "rollicking rumpus" of narrative.

It is perhaps to assist the unsuspecting reader to adjust to this unusual universe that Hamid Dabashi's introduction ties the *dāstān* to a contemporary form of the idle tale, the cinema: "If you have seen Oliver Stone's *Alexander* and […] enjoyed the vicarious ride, you are already halfway home in picking up Musharraf Ali Farooqi's exquisite rendition of *The Adventures of Amir Hamza…*" (ix). Dabashi's good intentions are laudable. However, I must object to the comparison, and not only because Stone's Alexander has so little humor and spirit compared to Amir Hamza; it is rather a matter of genre. The art of film is, of necessity, one of editing, of paring a story down to a series of scenes, with everything between them cut out. An elegant and compelling genre to be sure, film demands the reduction of a complex narrative into carefully structured and sequenced images.

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[2] *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 15(1):117–67.

[3] *Ibid.*, 123.

The Alexander story cut down to highlights only, all fantastic elements excised, a universe becoming smaller, swifter, and simpler.

The *dāstān* is the exact opposite as an art form. It is an expanding universe; it takes the skeleton of a story and makes it larger, infusing it with rich description, excessive detail, fantastic exaggeration. Groves are graced not just with birds but with "thousands of wrens and nightingales" perched in a bewildering variety of trees and shrubs. Gardens sport not just flowers but "a luxuriant growth of tulips, violets, calendula, chrysanthemums, chamomile, jasmines, double jasmines, Tuscan jasmines" and many more. Every step gives a chance to stop and look around within the narrative, to tarry and appreciate its aesthetic possibilities. That which is between the action is no less important than the action itself, and a *dāstān* can follow a minor character off into an adventure, veer off into giving advice, or dally to admire a group of maidens:

> […] in the full bloom of adolescence, dressed in red, parti-colored sheets hemmed with gold lace, which they wore over embroidered skirts. Their foreheads were adorned with *maang-tikas* and spangles, and they sported golden wristlets and armbands studded with garnets, and gold bead necklaces. Tinkling their toe rings, and toe bands, and carrying in their henna-dyed hands hoes fitted with gold and silver handles with small chimes, they began weeding the wild growth from the promenades and plant beds. Sifting straw and gleaning fallen blossoms, the maids delighted the hearts of the onlookers with their enterprise. More tenuous than boughs of the sandalwood tree were their soft and tender wrists, and their slender fingers were the envy of the coral-tree branches.
>
> (17)

It is because *The Adventures of Amir Hamza* is such an extraordinary example of verbal imagination that it is so valuable to the English-speaking world, educated even in childhood to cut out *excess words* and *get straight to the point*—to serve the contracting universe. It is perhaps because of this regrettable tendency that English is losing words as fast as the earth is losing species. In the Hamza *dāstān*, nearly extinct words such as "tercelet," "ossifrage" and "stannel" are resurrected, lovely words that have not been heard since the decline of falconry.

Reading *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*, I often found myself imagining how it would sound spoken aloud in Urdu by a master *dāstān-gō*. Remarkably, Farooqi is able to create some of the sonorous playfulness of the language in his translation, which is so essential to an art form that relies on verbal creativity to inflame the imagination of its audience. A *dāstān* is a co-creative process, one in which the reader's mind is always inspired, envisioning in response to the language of the narrative. In this way, the *dāstān* can belong to you alone—I can have my own Amir Hamza, Aasman Peri, and Mehr-Nigar, and you can have yours. The reader—not the passive spectator of a film, but the active reader—is renewed and transformed by participating in the *dāstān,* "rid of all feelings of powerlessness

and helplessness" as he or she experiences the narrative in an ever-present tense.[4] Although resolutely un-realistic, *dāstān* narrative seems to have a real and compelling effect, perhaps because of the unique and as yet unresearched way that a good story interacts with the human brain.

Speaking of a good story, one of the most remarkable features of narrative is the way it can leap languages and cultures, rooting itself in a new environment and growing in very unexpected directions. Dabashi's introduction to the *Adventures* gives a fascinating rendition of the flow of Hamza tales in their "Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and ultimately worldly disposition" (xiv), brushing historical sources and then diverging into a multiplicity of traditions. However, I could not help wondering at Dabashi's emphasis on the origins of the *dāstān* in the Persian tradition, "the magnificent tree on which these adventurous romances are but divergent branches" (xv). Of course, there is no question that romance epics in Urdu, Turkic, and many other cultures share Persian origins stretching back to the *Shahnameh* or even earlier. However, I would not describe what happens to a narrative in a new setting as a mere divergence—a narrative is not a branch but an acorn, one that is fed by native soil and water, growing roots, branches and leaves that lead a unique and original existence.

This explains why Farooqi, in his translator's preface, emphasizes the *dāstān* as a work of Urdu literary heritage with a "thousand-year history in the South-Asian subcontinent" (xxiv). Elsewhere, Farooqi discusses in detail the assimilation and expansion of the *dāstān* in the Urdu context, merged with local epic traditions, infused with local content, recreated with new archetypes, new humor, and an enhanced sense of enchantment. This is how, when the *dāstān* was written down, "a single volume of narrative of possibly Persian origin filled up forty-six massive volumes" in Urdu.[5] For an American reader, most likely unfamiliar with South Asian literature, it is important to understand *The Adventures* as a work of the Urdu imagination and to appreciate it as such. Thankfully, Farooqi's excellent "Notes" and "List of Characters, Historic Figures, Deities, and Mythical Beings" provide background information to the curious reader, and help to bridge any gaps of knowledge that might obscure the story. I found I personally preferred to read the notes first, then become immersed in the story without interruption, but each will have their own preference.

Returning to Jonathan Edwards and the pits of hell, I have to admit that he is not the only one to condemn the idle tale; the Emperor Babur referred to the Hamza *dāstān* as "one long far-fetched lie, opposed to sense and nature,"[6] and Farooqi describes himself during childhood breaking into an iron chest to get to the storybooks his parents had locked away. Nonetheless, I am convinced that there is an innate human need for freewheeling, imaginative narrative unfettered by moral obligations, which explains why children pursue such stories so relent-

[4] *Ibid.*, 124.
[5] *Ibid.*, 126.
[6] *Ibid.*, 123.

lessly. If I were to take an example from my own childhood, I would pick not a grandiose movie such as *Alexander,* but the old TV show *Batman and Robin*. This weekly series was thick with impossible plots, colorful villains, ridiculous rescues, and a talking car (perhaps the American equivalent of the flying horse). Most importantly, at the end of each episode, with Robin suspended over a vat of boiling oil, the narrative closed with the promise that the story would continue, "same Bat-time, same Bat-channel!" *Batman* fulfilled a need for narrative in children who were not told stories aloud, a need for a universe expanding with enchantment, humor, and hope, not contracting with fear and loss. The world—of children and adults—is, in fact, in desperate need of "the florid news writers, the sweet-lipped historians, revivers of old tales and renewers of past legends" (3) and we can only thank Musharraf Farooqi for transporting them to us with *The Adventures of Amir Hamza.* ❑

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Aamir R. Mufti. *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 325 pp. $19.95 pbk. isbn 13-978-0-691-05732-3.

In his richly detailed and rigorous book, Aamir Mufti offers a provocative critique of the place accorded to the Muslim in modern India. Although Mufti's study is comparative and considers major works of German and English literature, the impact of the book should largely be felt in the field of Urdu studies. Mufti provides a new analytical frame for understanding the problems that faced Urdu writers in the development of Indian nationalism and in the wake of Partition. It identifies in their works a vibrant and creative response to the question of national belonging.

Mufti's book is a study of how the minority figures in the crises of modern secularism. Mufti contends that the problem of Muslim identity in India must be understood through the larger question of the minority in liberal culture. Hence "the Muslim" is tied to the figure of "the Jew" in the historical development of discourses of citizenship, nationalism, and secularism in modern Europe. Conceived as simultaneously too particular and too cosmopolitan, "the Jew" was rejected as improper to both Enlightenment and nationalist visions of society. The "Jewish Question," to adopt Marx's term, spiraled out to become characteristic of liberal culture and society across the globe in the form of what Mufti calls "the question of minority existence." Within this problematic, Mufti not only finds similarities in majority discourses but also in the forms of minority critique. In German, British, Urdu, and Anglophone Indian literature, Mufti identifies iterations of a minor critique of national belonging that resists narratives of assimilation and separatism. These writers envision what Mufti calls a "vernacular modernity," wherein a

secular social space is shared with others. Their position contrasts with "auratic criticism," an alternative response that attempts to locate and resurrect a singular and therefore exclusionary religious tradition. As Mufti contends, narratives of tradition necessarily fail to grasp the more inclusive social experiences of the past in which belonging was not contingent on a modern form of identity.

Mufti begins by pointing to an essential conflict in how the figure of the Jew appears in two historical formations crucial to the development of the modern West: the Enlightenment and nationalism. Against the universal citizen-subject of the Enlightenment, the Jew appears to be particular, bound to traditions and Law. In the face of nineteenth-century nationalism, the Jew appears to be insufficiently rooted, transnational, and cosmopolitan. The first chapter begins by contrasting two key Enlightenment texts of Jewish emancipation: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's philo-semitic play *Nathan the Wise* (1779) and Moses Mendelssohn's philosophical treatise *Jerusalem* (1783). Mufti argues that Mendelssohn's text offers an immanent critique, from the position of the minority, of the limitations of the Enlightenment citizen-subject proposed by Lessing's "major" text. Lessing's text requires that citizens be unmarked, so a Jew must no longer be a Jew in public. Against Lessing, Mendelssohn claims that Judaism, as the most rational of religions, is essential to the Enlightenment project. Mendelssohn rejects the place of revelation in Judaism, finding instead only social practices in accord with reason. Through its emphasis on action, Judaism prevents the Enlightenment from falling into either myth or excessive abstraction. If Lessing requires the assimilation of the minority to the majority, Mendelssohn demands that the majority come to terms with the minority, but only insofar as the minority is in accordance with the universal. That debate is placed alongside an examination of the role of the Jew in two of the most seminal texts of nationalism: Johann Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (1807–8) and Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819). While Fichte's account is predicated on the singularity of the German people, Scott's shows English identity to be based in the union of distinct Norman and Saxon cultural elements. Yet Mufti shows how both accounts exclude Jews from the nation as excessively cosmopolitan. Through a reading of Heinrich Heine's *The Rabbi of Bacherach* (1840), Mufti argues that both the German sense of national belonging and the Europe of nations are exclusionary narrative fictions.

The second chapter traces the growth of the problematic of minority from the situation of Jews in Europe to the question of Muslim citizenship in India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mufti begins with George Eliot's late novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), showing how she resolves the Jewish Question by normalizing the Jews as a separate nation outside of Europe through a return to Palestine—a vision, as Edward Said has argued, that presupposes an imperial geography. Mufti marks this as the first suggestion of partition according to majority and minority communities. He then shows how the figure of the minority is transposed onto the post-Mutiny Indian Muslim in two works of late imperial English fiction. Kipling's early story "On the City Wall" (1888) finds in communal conflict cause to question India's capacity to produce citizens. Mufti argues that Kipling's text implicitly uses the majority-minority figure proper to political repre-

sentation even as it explicitly rejects the possibility of Indian nationhood. The chapter ends with a discussion of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), which famously focuses almost exclusively on Indian Muslims. For Mufti, the novel is concerned with the fate of the Muslim as minority under secular nationalism.

In the second section of the book, "Displacements: On the Verge of India," Mufti turns to Urdu literature, beginning with a chapter on Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad. Mufti asserts that the true subject of Nehru's *Discovery of India* is not India but rather the emergence of the exemplary consciousness of the secular nationalist, who represents the highest level of development in a colonial society and hence its best representative. Against this narrative, Mufti counterposes the writing of Abul Kalam Azad, in particular his letters collected as *Ghubar-e Khatir* (Dust of Memories), which he wrote while imprisoned in Ramnagar Fort along with Nehru and other Indian Congress leaders following the Quit India Resolution of 1942. Nehru's narrative requires a universal citizenship, yet in his account the Muslim is marred by backwardness and is thus somewhat less than the abstract citizen. Finding the Muslim mostly but not entirely indigenous, Nehru employs the European language of minority rights and state protection, citing the League of Nations and implicitly equating Muslims with the victimized stateless refugees of Europe. If in Europe state protection signaled a move from the confinement of the ghetto to the emancipation of citizenship, to Indian Muslims it signaled the reverse, a loss of the elite position and nationalist aspirations of the North Indian *ashraf*. The emergence of a Muslim identity among the *ashraf* in the later nineteenth century, Mufti points out, was never envisioned in minority terms. Nothing makes that clearer than the fact that the Hindi nationalist movement, which aimed to invent a vernacular language purged of Persian elements, positioned itself against a perceived Urdu-language hegemony. In Azad's *Ghubar-e Khatir*, Mufti finds a critique of both the minoritization of Indian Muslims and the Urdu language as well as the implicitly majoritarian solution offered by Indian nationalism. While Nehru argued against the differentiation of Hindu and Muslim culture in favor of a singular, territorialized Indian identity, Azad acknowledged the separateness of Muslim culture while taking the ethical step of opening it to its Indian environment. Drawing on his pre- and post-Partition speeches, Mufti finds that Azad argued against the two-nation theory because it relied on a politics of fear that would categorize Indian Muslims as vulnerable and weak instead of populous and strong. Reading Azad's formulations as emerging, like the two-nation theory, from within *ashraf* culture, Mufti argues that Azad called for an ethics of political coexistence and a secular suspension of disbelief in the nationalist claim to represent all of society. The chapter concludes with a reading of Azad's tale of learning to live with the sparrows nesting in his room in the Ramnagar Fort as an allegory of an ethical practice of coexistence in the same social space.

In the following chapter on Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Mufti argues that the short-story writer disrupts the logic of secular nationalism through an immanent critique of its operational terms, in particular the figure of nation as mother. Against unwavering filial devotion to Mother India, Manto's stories find in the domesticity of prostitutes alternative forms of attachment. For nationalists, devotion to a virtu-

ous maternal figure was an unquestioned sign of national belonging, but one that implicitly splits those that love her into Hindu sons and Muslim others. In Manto's fiction, however, the brothel is the site of relationships that hold open the possibility of doubt and betrayal, and call into question the role of gender in bourgeois nationalism.

The highlight of the Manto chapter is a marvelous reading of his story "Kali Shalwar" (Black Trousers). It is the tale of a prostitute, Sultana, who has recently moved to the state-sanctioned neighborhood for prostitutes in Delhi. There, in the capital of the future nation, Sultana is unable to sell her wares. Confused by modern technology, she feels out of place in such a uniform environment where all the houses look the same. Mufti calls attention to Sultana's reflections on the nearby railway tracks, which remind her of the veins in her own body, and the coupling trains, which remind her of a brothel. Mufti argues that Manto's story is an ironic critique of nationalism, in which the prostitute Sultana serves as a counter-allegory of the nation. He follows Partha Chatterjee in arguing that while the figure of Mother India first served to mobilize the nationalist subject, under post-Independence secular nationalism the image becomes nothing more than a means of manipulating the masses. In the strongest interpretation, the secular nationalist transforms the mother into a prostitute. Late in the story, Manto introduces the flâneur Shankar, who becomes Sultana's lover, but not her customer. As Muharram approaches, the penniless Sultana assembles all she needs to wear save for black trousers, and she looks enviously on those of her neighbor Mukhtar. Sultana's appeals for help from her pimp, Khuda Baksh, fall on deaf ears, and she finally asks Shankar for help, though not as payment for services. He agrees but asks for her cheap silver earrings in return. On the morning of the first day of Muharram, Shankar arrives, looking ruffled, and delivers a package containing black trousers identical to Mukhtar's. A little later there is a knock on the door and Mukhtar shows up wearing Sultana's earrings. The story ends with them both lying and claiming that they had purchased their final accoutrements that morning. Mufti argues that even in Shankar's betrayal of the two prostitutes there is no lack of love. He comes to represent the possibility of an indigenous and vernacular modernity and the position of the Urdu writer: ambivalent to the culture of nationalism, betraying to its operational terms, and yet capable of a different form of love for the nation. In Manto's fiction, Mufti concludes, the brothel is a counter-allegory to the bourgeois domesticity of the secular nationalist—a space in which, the character Shankar declares, even great pundits and maulvis would become "sharif" (decent/respectable) without the erasure of difference.

In chapter five, Mufti turns his attention to the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. While many scholars read Faiz as transforming the beloved of the Urdu ghazal into a symbol of the revolution to come, Mufti argues that the real concern of Faiz's poetry is the meaning and legacy of Partition, and that the political aspects of Faiz's poetry can only be understood through its concern with the social. Mufti accounts for the appeal that Faiz's poetry has across the Subcontinent by finding that it exposes memories of forms of collective selfhood that are not contained by the identities offered by either nation-state. In so doing, Faiz brings a general con-

cern of Indian modernity into the minority literary arena of Urdu. Mufti proposes that the true subject of Faiz's poetry is the "I" of Urdu writing, and that the poet reveals the truth of the modern self to be its division and incompleteness. Faiz does not unite subject and object but rather upholds identity as the grounds for the contemplation of peace. As an example, Mufti provides a beautiful reading of Faiz's poem "Yad" (Memory), known popularly as "Dasht-e Tanhai" (Wasteland of Solitude). In the poem, the object, the beloved, appears to the lyrical subject to be both near and far, desiring and desired, both part of and separate from the subject's self, which is itself divided, yearning to be whole, and yet realizing that its division grounds its own existence. In Mufti's reading of Faiz, the lyrical "I" of Urdu is in a state of exile and refuses to accept the incomplete normalization offered by the nation-state of being "at home." Through his reading of these three authors, Mufti argues for a uniquely ambivalent position for Urdu in the spectrum of Indian literatures in the late colonial and post-colonial period, as its writers resist the resolutions offered by Partition into Indian minority or Pakistani nationhood.

Mufti's account of the dilemma faced by Urdu writers is profoundly at odds with its canonical representation in literary criticism. For twentieth-century Urdu literature, the most significant critical classification has been the division between "progressive" (*taraqqi pasand*) literature and "modernism." Progressive critics champion their writers as socially committed while dismissing modernist writers as regressive, individualistic, and decadent. Mufti's argument elides this distinction, arguing that the Progressive Writers' Movement extended Nehruvian secular nationalism rather than transcending it. Despite the movement's affiliations with the Popular Front movement, he writes, the colonial context prevented writers from producing socialist realism. Progressive writers instead adopted "national realism," in which they chronicled "the (national) passage from primitivism to modernity" (183–84). Mufti's claim, though well-supported, ignores the particular form of transcendence that progressivism came to embody for many of its more dedicated advocates. It also discounts its popular conception as Communist and, thus, international. In Aijaz Ahmad's account of the Urdu literary community, for example, the Progressive Writers' Association "became the hegemonic ideological force" after its founding in 1936, and it "defined the broad social agenda and cultural consensus among the generality of Urdu writers for a whole generation" (1996, 216). Progressivism allowed Urdu writers to maintain a sense of community, Ahmad argues, a "secularist belief in the composite culture of Hindus and Muslims in India" that was able to last until the 1965 India-Pakistan War (*ibid.*, 200). This structure of feeling was based neither in nationalism nor in what Mufti would call a revivalist "auratic criticism," but rather in the transcendence of communalism made possible by progressivism's internationalism. In Ahmad's account, the decline of the Left itself signaled the division of the Urdu literary community along nationalist lines. Progressivism can be seen as a response to minoritization, in the hope for a transcendence of minority status through assimilation in the global Left. Faiz was the focus of much of this hope. So while Mufti's assertion that his popularity stems from his invocations of a larger collective selfhood is both appealing

and convincing, it ignores the strength of Faiz as an icon of a now crippled Leftist aesthetic and political movement.

Even as Mufti leaves aside the doctrinal commitment to a certain kind of social engagement that came to characterize progressive criticism, he provides an alternative method by which Urdu writers' concern with society can be assessed. Mufti identifies resistances to the fixities of national and religious identity in modern Urdu literature that expose those normalizations as partial, incomplete, and unable to adequately contain social experience. At the same time, Mufti's approach emphasizes both the interrelation of the self and the social and their deviance from the concepts of "the individual" and "society." This should be welcomed, for since the decline of the Progressive Movement, many writers and critics have both celebrated and exaggerated the social irrelevance of Urdu literature. Through Mufti's approach, both the alleged individualism of modernism and the social concern of progressivism are revealed as insufficient to grasp the literary productions that the terms describe.

Well-crafted, beautifully written, and precisely argued with careful attention to language, translation, and nuance, Aamir Mufti's *Enlightenment in the Colony* is a substantial and timely contribution not only to the postcolonial critique of modernity but to the study of Urdu literature. Its impact should be felt throughout the field of Urdu studies for years to come. ❑

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Although literatures from foreign lands and cultures are normally introduced through translations, in the case of literature from the Indian subcontinent and the Urdu language, this process was bypassed. Many Western readers across the world have learned about the culture represented by the Urdu language first through the works of authors who write in the English language. Most of these writers grew up on the partitioned Subcontinent. Some of them cannot even read the Urdu language with any great facility. Their fiction writings are, therefore, not informed by the vast body of Urdu literature, past and present.

As for the representation of South Asian literature in world literature, this creates a unique imbalance. In the presence of original English language fiction from India and Pakistan, it becomes more difficult to persuade publishers, especially in the U.K. and U.S. where a very limited niche exists for translated works, to bring out translations of Urdu literature. The problem is further compounded by the scarcity of individuals who can translate directly from Urdu into other languages. The availability of an Urdu work in English translation is therefore the first requisite step for its translation into foreign languages.

These conditions have contributed to the near eclipse in world literature of the entire narrative of generations of Urdu writers. The publication by Oxford University Press of a two-volume anthology of Urdu literature encompassing poetry, prose and fiction is an important event. The anthology's editor, Mehr Afshan Farooqi, carefully frames the movements and groups that flourished in twentieth-century Urdu literature and presents the works of a wide range of writers. Being a writer, academic and historian herself, Farooqi brings a unique awareness to this project. Her introduction explores little-discussed subjects such as the influence of Russian writers (e.g., Chekhov) on Urdu shorter fiction and the reasons for such influence: "[B]ecause Russian fiction was perceived to be more 'eastern,' with an element of spiritualism with its realism tinged with a sort of introspective subjectivity" (2:xxviii).

Farooqi also documents the contributions of a number of female authors who have been a part of the literary landscape of Urdu from its earliest times, and whose writings discussed issues that fall under the broad category of feminist literature. That these women writers often provided the leadership of the literary movements attests to their strident role in the Urdu literary tradition.

Reading this fascinating history of Urdu fiction in the twentieth century, it becomes evident that, from the earliest times, literature was an intrinsic part of Indo-Islamic cultural life and it was only in the twentieth century, when it lost its place in daily life, that a need was felt to give it a purpose and saddle it with ideologies. It is equally significant that neither the Marxist Progressive Writers' Movement nor the proponents of *Jadidiyat* (Modernism) made any important contribution to the ultimate modern genre—the novel. The best works of the proponents of these movements have no relation to their respective movements per se. They abandoned a traditional prose genre like the *dāstān* in favor of the

novel and short story and discarded the ghazal and *maśnavī* verse genres in favor of the *naẕm*. They also tried to achieve with those genres functional objectives such as social change, which was foreign to the way literature was historically conceptualized in India—as part of the lived reality and an end in itself. An exception should obviously be made here for Naẕīr Aḥmad's earlier experimentation with the "useful" novel which, incidentally, underlines the need of destroying the classics—or a part of cultural history—for the new, useful literary consciousness to emerge.

It is obvious that the new genre choices, and the purposes literature was supposed to serve through them, demanded as well a different kind of language. This triple-faceted conflict must have made the creation of literature very difficult if not altogether impossible. It is no accident that the members of these movements eventually became disillusioned and disenchanted with their ideological notions. While their disillusionment is often spoken of, the underlying reasons for the phenomenon and how its dynamics affected the literature produced during these periods have not been looked at in any great detail. It is not an accident that the 2006 publication of Urdu's greatest novel, *Ka'ī Čānd tẖē Sar-e Āsmān* by Shamsu'r-Raḥmān Fārūqī consummately demonstrated that innovation in language and genre are impossible unless a contemporary consciousness melds with a deep understanding and grasp of a language's classical narrative devices and genres.

The editor mentions Aamir Mufti's theory that

> Urdu writers take recourse to the short story as a preferred genre because the short story being a 'minor epic form,' focuses on a fragment of social life rather than its totality, letting the whole enter 'only as the thoughts and feelings of the hero,' thereby presenting completeness in entirely subjective terms.
>
> (2:xxv)

The profusion of shorter fiction in twentieth-century Urdu literature is a fact, but we had a precursor to the short story genre in our classical literature too. The *ḥikāyat*, in the verse tradition of Sa'adi and the prose of the authors of *Kalaila va Dimna*, was an indigenous nonfiction literary genre that served the purpose of education and instruction. Although didactic in nature, it did provide a model for a short narrative with a beginning, a middle and an end. Instead of finding reasons for the profusion of shorter fiction in the limited view of the short story genre presented in Mufti's theory, perhaps we ought to look for them elsewhere. Perhaps it was caused by the loss of the powerful narrative devices used in our longer literary genres, such as the *maśnavī* and the *dāstān*. Urdu writers of the nineteenth century working in these classical genres were able to command larger and more populated literary canvasses with great mastery.

An editor is often merely a cosmetic presence in many contemporary anthologies of literature, with little or no involvement in the translation process itself. In this anthology, however, a majority of the pieces included have been

translated either by the editor herself or with co-translators. Her deep involvement has shaped the anthology's elegant and fluid language. The biographical sketches provided at the beginning of each translated piece are a valuable resource since little is documented about Urdu writers and poets and it is useful to find this information gathered in one place. The glossary of Urdu terms at the end of each volume is another useful addition for many Western readers. The anthology is also a showcase for the many contemporary translators of Urdu fiction, with biographical notes provided on the contributors' page. However, it would seem appropriate if, in subsequent editions, the publisher also credits them on the contents page.

It is no doubt a reflection on my own limited knowledge that I was introduced to Pandit Badrinath Sudarshan, Ghiyas Ahmed Gaddi, Iqbal Majeed, Rajinder Manchanda Bani, Kumar Pashi and Safiya Akhtar for the first time through this anthology. But it is also true that these respected writers are not familiar names for many readers in my generation and by presenting them in translation in this anthology Farooqi has done all of us a great favor.

It is a given that no anthology can ever be fully representative, and making a selection with the considerations of limited space is not an easy task. According to the editor, she has made her selection from "a list of writers who lived and worked during the period 1905–2005" (2:xi). The publisher seems to have added another criterion as noted on the dust jacket: "While the focus of selection is on literary excellence, translatability, and relevance, an effort has been made to avoid writings easily available in translation...." The publisher's added criterion is problematic because it does not describe the authors omitted for the specified reason, and in the absence of such clarifications the exact parameters of the anthology cannot be determined. However, remaining within the guidelines set by the editor and publisher, I keenly felt the absence of some of the masters of our language who are not widely translated: Azeem Beg Chughtai (fiction), Syed Ismail Meeruthi (prose), Syed Rafique Husain (fiction), Ikramullah (fiction), Muhammad Khalid Akhtar (fiction), Afzal Ahmad Syed (poetry), Sarwat Husain (poetry) and Ibn-e Insha (humor). These are writers whose uniqueness and influence cannot be ignored in any history of Urdu literature.

The first volume of the anthology begins with a number of poets who composed during the twentieth century. The translation of modern poetry is in some ways simpler than the translation of classical ghazal poetry, which, with its many layers of *maʿnī āfrīnī*, does not allow a single interpretation to be set for any *sheʿr*.

As mentioned earlier, a new kind of language was needed for the purposes literature was called upon to serve by the modernists. We witness that influence creeping in not only in the *naẓms* of Iqbal, but also in the abstract poetry of modern poets such as Faiz. Both of these poets were well versed in the classical ghazal conventions, yet most of their poetry is devoid of the layers of *maʿnī āfrīnī* that permeated the works of poets of an earlier generation.

As a devotee of humor and satire, I was pleased to see it receive a dedicated section in this anthology. Humor is often relegated to a secondary place in literature and any signs of light-heartedness are frowned upon as a mark of moral

turpitude. But some of the finest writing among contemporary Urdu authors is produced by its humorists. I have always felt that while the rich ghazal tradition illustrates the lyrical qualities of the Urdu language, the construction of its humorous idioms and adages provides a window into its particular suitability to the creation of works of humor and satire. Translations could play a vital role in exploring this further because the process of translation can itself help identify and distinguish this quality of the language.

One of the important reasons this anthology of Urdu works should be widely read and studied is because it clearly demonstrates that despite a two-hundred-year-long effort to impose a religious Muslim identity on the Urdu language—first initiated by the British colonial regime and then continued by short-sighted and self-serving interests in both the Hindu and Muslim political leadership—Urdu poetry and prose, with its continuous embrace of the Indo-Islamic heritage and the cosmopolitan mix of its writers and their secular and individualistic outlook, has constantly rejected that direction.

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Carla Petievich. *When Men Speak as Women: Vocal Masquerade in Indo-Muslim Poetry*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007. 365 pp. Rs. 695. ISBN 0-19-567738-2.

This is a fascinating book for any lover of poetry. Carla Petievich has been researching and writing on the feminine/female voice in Indo-Muslim poetry for quite some time and this book may be seen as the fine fruit of her research over several years. Here she explores one of the most interesting conventions in the poetry of the Subcontinent, namely, male poets taking on the persona of the female and expressing the deepest longings, urges, feelings and sentiments of women, in an idiom that is both secular and devotional. As illustrations of her project, Petievich chooses the genre of *kafi* from early Punjabi, early Urdu ghazals from the Deccan, and *rekhti* ghazals from nineteenth-century Lucknow.

In the general introduction to the volume she explains the concept of "Indo-Muslim" and laments the fact that purists in Urdu literature dismissed certain kinds of poetry for lacking the Muslim elements. She then explores questions of canonicity, literary conventions, gender, and so on, to provide a useful context in which the samples of poetry she showcases can be studied. Such unconventional literary genres have always been either erased from, or pushed to the margins of, canonized literature, and it is in the fitness of things that they should be recovered in postcolonial times. In fact, the three bodies of poetry featured in the volume are, according to Petievich, representative "casualties of cultural history" and her project is, "partially and unabashedly one of recuperation" (3). That is certainly a laudable aim and the volume demonstrates her painstaking efforts at recovering and reclaiming a segment of our literary and cultural life that was all but lost to many.

The image of a woman separated from her lover is a perennial theme in literature and it is part of the literary conventions found in almost all the language-literatures of India. Carla Petievich traces it back to Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* (twelfth century) and then links it up with the bhakti conventions of love, particularly, the *nirgun* poetry of Kabir and Nanak. She also explores lineages of the Indo-Persian conventions selecting out the concepts of *virahini, jogi*, etc.

The first section of the collection presents a sampling of Punjabi *kafis*. Such poems cover a wide variety of themes, though most of the items featured here—twelve by Bulleh Shah and thirteen by Shah "Madho Lal" Husain—are expressions of love in separation, modeled on the story of the legendary heroine, Hir, who loved her father's cowherd, Ranjha. The speaking voice is always Hir, the woman, as in the following *kafi* by Shah Husain:

> Without my Beloved the nights have lengthened.
> Ranjha's a *jogi*, I a *jogini*, they always call me mad,
> with shrivelled flesh, chest just a ribcage,
> no more than skin and bones—
> Without my love the long nights waste me.
> Ignorant, what do I know of love? I'm
> tugged and pulled by
> Separation's tent ropes.
> Without my love the nights stretch longer.
> Says Husain, the Lord's *faqir*:
> "I'm tied to your apron strings."
>
> (121)

One striking quality of this poetry is that it is couched in a secular idiom and is against all kinds of sectarian distinctions. In this sense it is truly representative of the Indo-Muslim culture. One of the most popular *kafis* of Bulleh Shah, the foremost practitioner of the genre, is "Hindu Nahin na Mussalman" which runs as follows:

> I'm neither Hindu nor Mussalman:
> no such pride here in love's spinning circle!
> Neither Sunni am I, nor yet Shi'a
> I've taken the path of perfect *entente*;
> […]
> I'm neither a sinner nor very holy
> and I couldn't care less about taking sides.
> Bulleh Shah, the ones who are thinking
> have let go of names like Hindu and Turk!
>
> (24)

Dakani ghazal is represented in the second section by the well-known Deccan poets, such as Muhammad Quli Qutub Shah, Abdullah Qutub Shah, Mulla Vajhi, Mulla Ghavasi, Nusrati, Hasan Shauqi, Ali Adil Shah and Hashmi Bijapuri.

Dakani ghazal is different from both Punjabi *kafi* and *rekhti* insofar as it developed in or around the court, and it is highly self-conscious, as the ghazal genre is. However, unlike the ghazal, it is not solemn or sad or obsessed with the beloved's indifference and heartlessness. On the contrary, Dakani ghazal celebrates love's joys and is filled with a kind of exuberance and lightheartedness which exposed it to charges of levity and a lack of seriousness from mainstream Urdu critics. Thus it was consigned to the margins in Urdu literary historiography. Of the eight poets featured in this section, three were kings, and kingship has a pivotal place even in the poetry of others. Among the kings, Quli Qutub Shah certainly occupies the pride of place as the progenitor and first *sahib-i-diwan* of Urdu poetry. The following extract from one of his ghazals demonstrates Dakani ghazal's predilection for the use of Indic vocabulary and its liberal ethos:

Tire darsan kī hūñ maiñ sāīñ mātī
mujhe lā dō piyā chhātī sūñ chhātī
Pyāre hat dhar sanbhālo munj kūñ
Kih til til dūtī tuj mātī ḍarātī

Beloved, I'm mad for the sight of you:
sweetheart, come lay your breast
on mine.
Sweetheart, take my hand (and me)
under your protection
and may it, at every moment,
strike fear in those others mad for you.

(155)

The third section of the book presents *rekhti*, the prime genre that unabashedly flaunts male perception of female desires and longings. *Rekhti* is conventionally associated with effeminacy and the decadent phase of Muslim power in India, a view that needs to be examined closely. Rangin, the inventor of the genre, asserted that he wrote *rekhti* to honor the women of ill-repute with whom he spent a considerable part of his life. The mannerisms, diction and turns of phrase used by courtesans left such an indelible impression on him that he felt impelled to immortalize them in his poetry. Levity and irreverence characterize *rekhti* verses, usually dealing with female gossips and the tense relationship between housewives and their in-laws, along with

> "the perils of coping with drunkard husbands; catty allusions to henpecked husbands and domineering wives; salacious references to wantonness; innuendo in the guise of comments on cooking vegetables; and in-house winking at entertaining men who should not have access to the *zenana* (women's quarters)."
>
> (273)

As an illustration one can look at the following verses:

When that home wrecker comes to stay
I can't tell you what trouble I have holding my tongue!
How my heart turns to a burnt kabob
at the things I endure
when he comes home drunk.
Ma'am, what should I do?
That matter never transpired yet—
the bridegroom maintains *purdah* from his bride!
[…]
These damned ladyfingers are so awful!
no matter how you cook them
they stay slimy.

(*ibid.*)

The introductions to the individual sections provide helpful contexts for reading verses in that particular tradition with a certain amount of insight and understanding.

The selection of verses is both judicious and representative of the individual traditions. The design of the volume—with the original on the facing page and the roman transliteration following the translation—make the text extremely reader-friendly.

The poetry of humor, banter and wordplay does not lend itself easily to translation. Petievich refers to the challenges of translation in the section on *rekhti*. It goes to her credit that she has met the challenges valiantly and produced a version, fairly readable and fluent in English, even though alternative versions are possible. The annotations are well-researched and will wet the appetite of those interested in the field. All in all, the volume is a welcome addition to the corpus of Indo-Muslim poetry in English and will find its niche in departments of literature, culture studies, and women's studies. ❑

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Afroz Taj. *The Court of Indar and the Rebirth of North Indian Drama*. New Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind), 2007. 536 pp. Rs. 300. $24.95. ISBN 81-7160-133-2.

Poetry has dominated Urdu literature for much of its history. Fictional literature—novels and short stories—though of later origin than poetry, caught up with it in the latter half of the twentieth century. But drama has, by and large,

remained a neglected and rather unrealized genre in Urdu. Apart from adaptations from other languages—indigenous as well as foreign—Urdu can hardly boast of significant plays in the original in the same way as, say, Marathi or Bangla. The promise shown by the Parsi theater could not be fulfilled. The popularity commanded by the genre somehow dissipated later and could not be exploited by Urdu playwrights. Afroz Taj's *The Court of Indar and the Rebirth of North Indian Drama* recreates the prehistory of Hindustani drama. Amanat Lakhnavi's *Indar Sabha*, a musical comedy with dialogue in verse, first performed in 1854, is generally considered to be the first Urdu play. Hugely popular, it not only spawned imitations in other Indian languages, it even inspired the successful German operetta *Im Reiche des Indra* by Paul Lincke. To my knowledge, no other sustained study of the play has appeared in English thus far, except for Kathryn Hansen's somewhat detailed treatment of it in the context of Indian folk theater in her book *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India* (1992).

The volume under review is divided into two parts—the first provides a critical study of *Indar Sabha* by placing it in the wider historical, cultural and literary contexts, and the second contains the English translation of the original play along with elaborate notes and commentaries. In his introduction, Taj lays out his thesis regarding the cultural and literary antecedents of the play and the way it should be approached. In subsequent chapters he offers his critique of the earlier readings of the play and revisits some long-held assumptions about it.

It is common knowledge that *Indar Sabha* was modeled on the court of Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh (r. 1847–1856), the poet-emperor who is known to have composed at least three poetic romances. In the first chapter, "Awadh on the Eve of Annexation," Taj offers a glimpse of the splendor and cultural richness of the state of Awadh before it was taken over by the British. While talking about the decadence that was pervasive in Lucknow society, Taj comments perceptively:

> […] as one of the chief characteristics of decadent cultures is the need for diversion from unpleasant realities, the arts in Lucknow were called upon to provide an escape to the rulers and citizens. The performing arts were dominated by music, singing and dance, while the poets wrote about love, especially in its more physical forms, or about the exploits of fantastic and legendary characters. And what could be more escapist than to be carried away by flying fairies to a never-never land of perpetual music and dance? (18)

The second chapter, "Folk Theater and Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's Enacted *Masnavis*," begins with the writer's assertion that *Indar Sabha* bridges the gap between the folk and court theaters of mid-nineteenth century Lucknow "drawing something from both traditions, and becoming something completely new" (21). He describes how the Hindu and Muslim spectacles of Ramlila, Raslila and *marsiya* were widely prevalent in Awadh and how Wajid Ali Shah himself staged dance dramas regularly, transforming this simple folk dance, through successive innovations, into an elaborate theatrical presentation.

Chapter 3, "The Broken Tradition: Sanskrit Drama and its Medieval Successors," highlights salient features of Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra* and its relevance for Indian drama from *Shakuntala* and *Vikramurvashi* to the most current ones, while chapter 4, "The Urdu Antecedents: Ghazal, Masnavi, and Dastan," deals with *Indar Sabha*'s complex lineages from the past through these genres. The next chapter presents some relevant biographical details about Amanat Lakhnavi.

Taj also undertakes a sustained comparison of *Indar Sabha* with Italian opera. His discussion of the music and performance, which are the hallmarks of the play, as reminiscent of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, is brilliant. In the "Portrait Gallery" of Lucknow he traces two busts—Dante Alighieri and Ludovico Ariosto, two of Italy's great epic poets whose works have inspired many operas—and he considers it "an apt coincidence that these busts found a home in a kingdom which so much resembled the Italy they knew and inspired" (83).

The structure, characters and sources of the plot are thoroughly discussed in chapters 7 and 8. Sanskrit drama was an important source for *Indar Sabha* along with premodern Persianate works like *Dastan-e Amir Hamzah*, *Masnavi Sihr-ul-Bayan* and *Gulzar-e Naseem*. In addition, a more immediate inspiration for Amanat was the widespread Shīʿa practice of *majlis* during the Muharram Festival. The Shīʿa nawabs of the Kingdom of Awadh were nursed on the dramatic spectacle of the highly emotive and pathos-laden poetry of the *majlis*, and thus bore none of orthodox Islam's abhorrence of theatrical acts. The nawabs were in fact ardent patrons of spectacles of music, song and dance. Taj's view that it was "precisely the Shīʿa Muharram practices that paved the way for the general acceptance of a dramatic tradition founded by Muslims and in which Muslims could actively participate" (126) is corroborated by contemporary accounts of Lucknow. Along with those sources, Taj also demonstrates how the legacy of *Indar Sabha* permeates Urdu/Hindi films in a significant way, most visibly in films such as *Mughal-e Azam* (1960), *Bobby* (1973), and so on.

However, apart from these chapters that explore the sources of the text and situate the play in its relevant contexts, Taj's seminal contribution lies in the next two chapters that provide ample evidence of his radical reading of the text. For example, in chapter 9, "Text as Textile: Weaving a Multicultural Discourse," Taj draws on the insights of French theorist Roland Barthes, who regarded a text as a tissue of quotations from diverse sources, to demonstrate how Amanat used the text of *Indar Sabha* as a metaphor for his society, encompassing multiple languages, religious allusions, song genres, poetic genres, etc. Taj argues that the play, with its admirable juxtaposition of characters, forms and themes from Persianate and Indic sources, becomes representative of the incipient composite nation that was imagining itself under the colonialist dispensation. This argument gains salience from the fact that the play was written at a time when the presence of the British in Awadh was becoming oppressive, and annexation loomed large on the horizon. Annexation did take place finally in 1856, just one year before the Mutiny, an event which some historians view as the first war of Indian independence.

In a similar way, Taj's analysis of the color symbolism used by Amanat in the play with studied self-consciousness, is truly astute.

> The symbolic and semantic use of color informs the notion of text as textile, but the text also plays with other notions of color: language registers, lexical shadings, musical ragas, genres of poetry and song, and the essential moods (*rasa*) of classical Indian aesthetic theory. To me this suggests a conscious strategy on Amanat's part to inscribe symbolically a discourse of multiculturalism using both visual and semantic vocabulary of color.
>
> (130)

Taj is alive to the concept of color as varna in a caste/racial sense, but he is right in pointing out that Amanat's notion of Indian society was based on variety rather than hierarchy, on difference rather than disparity. Taj also speculates on the absence of white in Amanat's color scheme of fairies and links it to the writer's awareness of British colonialism and his subtle opposition to it. Further, through a brilliant analysis of the dominant metaphors and images used by Amanat in his play, Taj shows how they evoke the conscious construction of a multicultural and internally coherent society. The culture of Awadh symbolized the best in Indo-Muslim encounter, and Wajid Ali Shah's Court truly represented that culture. In his last chapter ("Writing National Identity: Revolutionary Discourse in *Indar Sabha*"), Taj demonstrates, quoting extensively from the play, how quite a few verses in *Indar Sabha* can be read as reflections of Amanat's anti-colonialism and as incipient attempts at forging a nationalist discourse. Though not in any obvious or direct way, the hybrid text of *Indar Sabha* can be read as a discourse of resistance to British colonial rule.

It is obvious that a poetic romance and musical medley such as *Indar Sabha* would present the stiffest challenges, both linguistic and cultural, to the resourcefulness of a translator in English. Taj refers to these challenges, namely, allusions, puns, wordplay, foreshadowing, veiled political discourse, and so on. It goes to his credit that he meets them upfront and has been able to produce a rendering that is not only accessible and readable, it also captures, as he claims, "the delight, playfulness, humor, and drama that make Amanat's *Indar Sabha* a classic for all time" (194). Scholars will find Taj's annotations particularly rewarding and these might even impel them toward new areas for exploration and research. The only weakness here is the lack of an index, which renders this text a bit less reader friendly than it deserves. ❑

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