BOOK REVIEWS

Ghulam Abbas. *Hotel Moenjodaro and Other Stories*. Translated by Khalid Hasan. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996. 242 pp. Rs. 150.

Here is a set of stories about "the masses." The anonymous crowds who walk the streets, cut and style hair, work at petty trades, keep accounts in offices and marry unsuitable partners. Their lives will find no mention in History, no larger principles of liberty and justice in society will be gleaned from their experiences, yet they, in their workaday manner, confront great tragedies and endure daily humiliations; they are ridiculed, often victimized and forced to learn the bitter lesson that there will never be any justice for them in the world through no fault of their own, except perhaps their ordinariness.... Their lives may plumb the depths of despair, may reach the dizzying heights of happiness. Yet they will remain anonymous, quite unremarkable, even negligible in the march of human society.

The well known Pakistani author Ghulam Abbas writes tenderly and often quite humorously about the lives of "the crowd." Of three offensive visitors who come to a beautiful courtesan only to be kept waiting for her for hours; of a clerk who saves his money all his life for a marble nameplate which becomes, in the end, his tombstone; of a mysterious fancy dresser who dresses in various guises to entertain the neighborhood and in the end is revealed to be everybody and nobody. Then there are those who defy the colonial master in their own unspectacular way: a devoted husband, unflinching in his loyalty to his wife even after he learns that she loves another; a pious blind woman who realizes that her husband regrets having married her—indeed a series of unpredictable characters, so whimsical in their actions, with such variegated lives that the reader puts down the book wondering why on earth these are considered "ordinary" people at all.

But then that is the master storyteller's great achievement, that he gives everyone in the crowd a different name, crafts a wholly distinct life for each of them without ever falling into the trap of trying to essay "Great" moral and social dilemmas. Nor is there any tedious political correctness about the high morals of the poor and the low failings of the rich. Abbas is a masterful illustrator of individuals, coloring and filling out the shapes of those who stand as witnesses to Great Events, without ever making a judgment about the morality of his work.

To the Indian reader, the stories reveal facets of Pakistan all too often obscured by the dominance of officialese between the two countries. Abbas was obviously part of the nascent liberal tradition across the border, the tradition of

Iqbal and Faiz, with their implacable hostility to the forces of militant religion and authoritarian statism. The lead story "Hotel Moenjodaro" is a chilling indictment of the barren fallout of a governmental takeover by religious fundamentalism and its effects on the spirit of scientific inquiry and man's conquest of the universe.

Abbas is surely a product of his times. In a climate where the Pakistani nation was ever in danger of nondemocratic governing options, Abbas opts squarely for progressive scientism as the way forward. Not for him any soul search about the reason why religious fundamentalism develops or whether or not a completely ascetic state can ever command the loyalties of a pious nation. Abbas's simplicity lies in the fact that for him science is good, mullahs are bad and bad things happen when the clergy triumphs over modern governments. While this is certainly the best possible conclusion to reach, the very stark manner in which the story is written gives it the impression of being a morality play in which the forces of good and evil are painted and masked as they stage a caricature *cum* pantomime. But then the author's intention was probably to highlight the two polarities of progress and regress as boldly as possible.

Indeed in "Hotel Moenjodaro" Abbas provides a social scientist's forecast of what happens to governments elected on the shoulders of a misguided mob: the factionalism, the spiraling crime, the declining economy and finally takeover by an alien regime. This story, written towards the end of the Ayub Khan era, encapsulates several issues of the times. The experience of a military takeover in 1958, the fact that in 1962 Pakistan was declared a republic with no mention of Islam, and the fact that the Ayub government took measures to curb the powers of the ulema, such as in the enunciation of the Muslim Family Law Ordinance which banned polygamy and strengthened the hands of women in divorce proceedings, play an important part in Abbas's strong statement against the *maulvīs*.

Abbas's strong convictions about the position of women, often seeking refuge in madness or prostitution to escape the stranglehold of patriarchal injustices, find expression in a number of the stories. There is "The Women's Quarter," which tells of how prostitutes are banned from the city limits, an interesting tale which seems to ask why a certain group are discriminated against for making a living in the only way possible, when all sections of society seem anxious to sell whatever wares they can to earn their livelihoods. There is "The Gentleman of the Old School," which describes the doomed efforts on the part of a reformist man to give a prostitute a better life; "The Red Rose," a story of an insane beauty tortured for her innocence by the entire village; a fable of a servant girl bought and sold like cattle. These stories as well as some others allude to the manner in which women are destined to live out their days as victims of male whims.

There are some rather original stories as well: "The Compromise" is a subtle account of a couple's decision to carry on with their marriage in spite of the wife's infidelity, and "A Childhood Summer" describes the love between two children through a tender exchange about a toy airplane. Little stories about little

lives and little relationships, with almost nothing to do with epic moments in the lives of communities or nations.

Yet perhaps at some point the extraordinary-lives-of-ordinary people genre tends to pall a bit. The reader cannot help wishing that Abbas had used his ample talents to provide a larger, longer, meatier story, rather than simply providing a series of small vignettes and observations which sometimes read like entries in a diary. Most of the stories finish rather abruptly, leaving the reader thirsting for more. Just as a story is getting interesting or really becoming mysterious, it suddenly ends, a pattern that is repeated several times, leading to a weariness that Abbas's characters certainly do not merit. But then this is a general failing of the short story genre, and it is to Abbas's credit that he occasionally succeeds in imparting a degree of completeness to a story that even long novels fail to do.

Sometimes however, the twist-at-the-end story becomes a bit of a formula, such as "The Bottle" in which a young man trying to cure his father of alcoholism suddenly becomes an addict himself after one swig on a moonlit night. This rather hackneyed anecdote somehow doesn't ring as true as some of the others.

Yet, in spite of Abbas's evident commitment to the subaltern and the marginal, his voice is artistically dispassionate and humorous. His stories seldom provide the satisfaction of revenge well taken or scores well settled in the end, or love finding fulfillment and hard work being rewarded by good fortune. Few of the stories have happy endings; most of them are in fact rather sad, but somehow, are utterly human. Almost as if Abbas were making a mockery of the fact that life has never sewn up ends neatly. Kindnesses go unnoticed, innocent young girls are left to a terrible fate, a blind woman ultimately finds no solace except in prayer.

"The Dutiful Wife" is an intriguing example of Abbas's unblinking eye. A rich, clearly good man steps forward to marry a poor blind woman and all, we think, will be well from then on. Yet the man becomes attracted to another woman and the blind wife is left with nobody else but God to appeal to in a dark solitary room. This is surely Abbas's great gift, that in his stories fairy tales end swiftly, and seemingly hellish situations are rendered quite satisfactory after a bit of compromise. Abbas's Islam is again a rather quiet haven for those buffeted about by life; God is accessible and easy, not a formidable institution demanding ideologically potent obedience.

Hotel Moenjodaro and Other Stories offers little-known insights into the life of a nation all too often associated with mustachioed generals and feverish priests. Lower down the rungs of society exist those whose lives are every bit as tumultuous as the life of their young nation-state, every bit as flawed and every bit as lacking in aesthetic coherence. They are lives full of mistakes, full of loose ends. And this seems to be Abbas's message: that humanity, after all, lies in frailty and failure. So beware of those politicians who promise The Complete Solution To Chaos or authors who provide The Perfect-End Story, for therein lie the beginnings of social dictatorship and the end of all-too-human weaknesses. ❐

—Sagarika Ghose
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Allahs indischer Garten. Ein Lesebuch der Urdu-Literatur (Allah's Indian Garden: An Anthology of Urdu Literature). Translated and edited by Ursula Rothen-Dubs. Frauenfeld: Verlag im Waldgut, 1989. 605 pp. DM 48.

Urdu literature, one of the prominent literatures of South Asia, is still almost unknown to the German-speaking public. Though a first translation from Urdu into German had already been published in the last century (Amānat's *Indar Sabʰā*, translated by Friedrich Rosen, published in 1891 as part of his Ph.D. thesis), this remained a singular event and for a long time to come was not followed up by any other translations. Germany had no colonial interests in the Subcontinent, and German orientalists concentrated on the classical Sanskrit, Vedic and Pali, or the Persian, heritage to the neglect of contemporary languages and literatures. Ninety-six valuable Urdu manuscripts had been acquired by the Preussische Staatsbibliothek (Prussian State Library) in Berlin from the eminent Austrian orientalist Alois Sprenger in 1858, but except for the above-mentioned translation of Amānat's *Indar Sabʰā*, no other piece of Urdu literature was translated into German until the second half of the twentieth century, when the study of modern South Asian languages and literatures began to develop in view of an awakening interest in the newly independent countries of India and Pakistan.

After the Second World War, a number of Urdu short stories were translated into German and published in anthologies of Indian and Pakistani literature respectively. Some eminent Urdu writers like Premchand, Iqbal and Ghalib were presented to the German reading public in selections from their works. Annemarie Schimmel contributed largely in the field of Sufi literature, classical poetry and the writings of Ibqal, and Munir D. Ahmad in the field of the contemporary short story and poetry. Ursula Rothen, the editor of the anthology under review, published a very spirited and enjoyable translation of Muḥammad Hādī Rusvā's novel *Umrā'ō Jān Adā* as *Die Kurtisane von Lakhnau* (Zurich 1971), to which she appended a short survey of the history of Urdu literature and of Rusvā's life. It goes to the credit of this lover of Urdu literature to have presented the first representative selection from Urdu poetry and prose in the form of her anthology *Allahs indischer Garten.*

Ursula Rothen studied Urdu with Ralph Russell in London and was clearly inspired by his love for the language and its literature. While teaching Urdu at

Bern University, she seems to have been able to share this fascination with her students. The volume she presented to the public in 1989 is the fruit of her lively interaction with her students during the introductory course on Urdu literature which she offered at Bern in 1982–83. Much of the animated spirit which must have obtained in Ursula Rothen's classes has been preserved in the book and appeals to the reader of her presentation.

The selection covers texts from the Dakhinī period to contemporary times, opening with a *ghazal* by Valī and ending with verses by Faiz Ahmed Faiz. The pieces are presented in roughly chronological order and are grouped under the headings: "Klassische Dichtung des 18. Jahrhunderts" (Classical Poetry of the Eighteenth Century), "Frühe Prosa" (Early Prose), "Lakhnau 1780–1856," "Delhi im 19. Jahrhundert" (Delhi in the Nineteenth Century), "Rückbesinnung und Neuorientierung" (Retrospection and Reorientation), and, finally, "Das 20. Jahrhundert" (The Twentieth Century). The anthology is truly representative in so far as it presents all the great names of Urdu literature along with a sizable number of authors who are virtually unknown outside the Subcontinent. The way in which the selection is presented and the texts are rendered into German leaves no doubt in the mind that the compiler has chosen works which are both representative of Urdu literature and also happen to be her favorites. Without a keen inner attachment it would have been impossible to produce a volume such as the present one.

Love lyrics (mainly *ghazals*), still regarded as the main domain of Urdu poetry, get their due share in the anthology throughout all the chapters. Satire and social criticism as well as revolutionary and patriotic poetry complete the picture. Prose is represented by short stories, extracts from novels and essays. Short excerpts of critical writing and comments by contemporaries are interspersed between the texts, and the editor has appropriately named them *Zwischenblatter* (pages in between). These pages provide the reader with background information and/or evaluations of the respective text. Sometimes they present some additional verses that shed light on the general atmosphere of Urdu poetry or of a given period. In some cases, critical comments are contrasted directly with the literary text, as with Shauq's *Das Gift der Liebe* (The Poison of Love; *Zahr-e 'Ishq*), which is accompanied by ʿAbd ul-Mājid Daryābādī's very ambivalent and highly critical evaluation. The reader is thus compelled to draw his or her own conclusions.

Through her selection of works of literature from all important genres and periods, Ursula Rothen has been able both to present a picture of the major trends and schools of Urdu literature and to provide an insight into various facets of life in the Subcontinent. Though the title of the book may create the impression of an "Islamic" literature, Hindu and Sikh writers form an eminent part of the corpus corresponding to the role they played in creative writing in Urdu. In view of this, one may be tempted to ask whether the title is not somewhat misleading. Though Urdu has become a language of Muslims in South Asia today, it was not always purely a Muslim language (a fact the editor herself refers to in her

epilogue).

The prose translations presented in the reader successfully combine a vivid and fluent German style with the flavor of the source language—a flavor which is preserved by introducing numerous typical Urdu expressions and tropes into German without overburdening the target language.

Ursula Rothen doesn't attempt verse renderings of the poetry she translates; instead, she presents prose transcreations. In some cases, as in Mīr Ḥasan's *Siḥr al-Bayān* and Shauq's *Zahr-e 'Ishq*, the German prose versions succeed in creating an impression of the elegant flow of the language and the overall atmosphere of the Urdu original, at the same time being both good and readable in German. Where *ghazals* are concerned, the loss seems to be more severe. Much has been written and is going to be written about the translation of poetry. Classical forms of poetry with their strict rules of meter and rhyme offer formidable problems. The procedure Ursula Rothen has chosen is one of the closest possible verbal approximation between the original and the translation, preserving much of the imagery of the original, but sacrificing the poetic form. A different approach is adopted by Annemarie Schimmel whose translations from Ghalib, Iqbal and others are all in verse form, maintaining a firm rhythmic structure and rhyme (*qāfiya* and often also *radīf*). Her German renderings are very concise, sometimes almost literal and yet moving and evocative. However, there are times when they come to border on the awkward in their use of unfamiliar German expressions coined by the translator. The different attitudes of the two translators are illustrated by their respective translations of a *ghazal* by Ātish (*op. cit.,* pp. 73–4; for Annemarie Schimmel's translation see *Pakistanische Literatur: Übersetzungen aus den Sprachen Pakistans,* ed. by Munir D. Ahmed and Annemarie Schimmel, Mayen 1986, p. 29). Schimmel's version makes for smooth reading—at the cost of remarkable liberties taken with the original text. As a result, Ātish's verses turn into something completely new, containing a good deal of Annemarie Schimmel's poetic genius. For a general reader of poetry, this transcreation may be more rewarding than Ursula Rothen's version, but a person interested in the original and its imagination is better informed by her translation. Both ways offer a kind of compromise, and this is probably what we may expect from translations of classical poetry. In an anthology like the one under review, though, versified translations might have been more appropriate, the more so when compared with the high standard of the prose translations.

The corpus of literary texts is followed by a "Nachwort" (Epilogue), which provides background information on the rise of Urdu in India under Muslim rule and on the history of Urdu literature, short biographical notes on the authors, a glossary of technical terms and other expressions occurring in the texts, and an extensive bibliography. This additional information is as exact and exhaustive as the rest of the book is enjoyable.

Ursula Rothen's "Nachwort" is remarkable for its easy flowing, conversational style and the lively picture it presents of the literature and its historical

preconditions. Under the heading "Liebesdichtung in Urdu: der mystische Urgrund" (Love Lyrics in Urdu: The Mystic Foundation; pp. 509–36), she introduces the reader to the conventions and the imagery of *ghazal* poetry. This chapter is a must for every German reader of Urdu poetry who may wish to acquire a correct understanding and appreciation of its basic concepts.

In a short passage on pp. 545–6, Ursula Rothen briefly describes the present status of Urdu in Pakistan and India. She stresses the high prestige enjoyed by Urdu in Pakistan, without, however, mentioning the conflicts created by a policy of imposing Urdu on the people to the detriment of regional languages such as, for instance, Sindhi. And is the prestige of Urdu as the proclaimed state language of Pakistan not surpassed by the prestige of the still all-powerful English so dear to the élites?

One more remark in this context: Should we really call Urdu an "islamische Sprache" ("Islamic" language)? Is it not rather the language of parts of the Muslim population of the Subcontinent? Language as such, to my mind, does not bear a religious character though it may contain the terminology of a certain religion. The epilogue ends with a reference to the younger generation of Urdu writers whose works have not been included in the anthology. Ursula Rothen concludes that a separate anthology should be devoted to their writing. May her wish come true! And may the next collection match her own in the quality of selection, translation and the very precise and extensive additional information provided. ❐

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Ismat Chughtai. *The Crooked Line*. Translated from the Urdu by Tahira Naqvi. Oxford: Heinemann, 1995. 335 pp. $11.95

Ismat chughtai (1915–91), the *enfante terrible* of Urdu fiction, began writing at a time when the country was in great ferment. The Progressive Writers' Movement, the national struggle for independence and the emergence of the first generation of Muslim women from their veiled existence—all these held great prospects for the writer. Urdu fictional literature was also shedding its obsession with medieval romance and nostalgia and was slowly acquiring the texture of realism through the pioneering works of Premchand. Ismat Chughtai had a special place among her illustrious contemporaries in fiction, namely, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chandar and Sa'adat Hasan Manto, inasmuch as she brought into the ambit of Urdu fiction the complex and forbidden terrains of feminine sensibility and treated them with panache and insight.

Tēṛʰī Lakīr, whose English translation, *The Crooked Line*, is under review

here, is the work of a stupendous, expansive imagination able to mix—as Eliot has it in *The Waste Land*— "memories and desires," history and psychology. It is coupled with vivid and colorful description, character portrayal with a minimum of brush strokes, and tongue-in-cheek humor that sometimes borders on the black and the macabre. In other words, all the staple ingredients of good fiction are here. The narrative largely draws upon the author's own life, but it also transcends and mythologizes it, in a way not dissimilar from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. As Tahira Naqvi points out in her Introduction to the novel, "most of her [Chughtai's] work is openly autobiographical in nature, sometimes to such an extent that it is difficult to know where autobiography ends and fiction begins" (p. xiii). The novel deals with the growth and development of Shamshad, alias Shamman, who has got rebellion in her blood and who tries to come to grips with some elemental human passions on her own terms. Making her entry into the world as the unwelcome tenth child of her parents, she is treated with utter indifference by her extended family who regard her as a positive threat to their accepted notions of decency and respectability. Shamman is drawn to the earth, the dirt and the ugly, as though by an ineluctable force:

> "She wished she could take all of the world's mud and collect it under her tongue, mix it with her spittle and then let the viscous curds glide down her throat. […] [S]he hurled fistfuls of sand in the air, rolled on the ground and rubbed her cheeks on the cool mud … she was consumed with a desire to pierce her way into the bowels of the earth." (p. 7)

Written largely in the omniscient third-person, *The Crooked Line* mixes autobiography and fantasy in such a way that some of Shamman's experiences in her childhood acquire the dimensions of epiphany, and throughout the novel they serve as leitmotifs constantly reminding us that appearances are deceptive, that social morals are a matter of convenience rather than individual integrity, and that sexual urge is the most primal and pressing urge of human beings, driving them to all kinds of subterfuge. Shamman's childhood impressions are derived mainly through her senses and instincts. All her affections are centered on Unna, her wet nurse "whose soft, warm bosom provided the comfort she had experienced in her mother's womb" (p. 3). When Shamman is still an infant she involuntarily becomes a witness to the urgent and wild romp on the haystack by Unna and her lover. She resents it and her clamor brings the whole house crashing down, leading to the dismissal of Unnah right away. Another experience relates to the occasion when she and Noori come upon the prurient and voyeuristic Mullahji whose repressed sexual drive leads him to strange, morbid acts.

After Unnah, Manju, Shamman's elder sister, becomes a mother-surrogate for her and provides her emotional sustenance. But Shamman's intense hunger

for love and affection is thwarted again when Manju gets married and Shamman witnesses with an increasing sense of betrayal how Manju gives precedence to her husband in everything. This distresses her so much that for a long time afterwards she instinctively recoils from any profession of love, lest she be betrayed. Though Shamman is still blissfully unaware of the compulsions of gender imposed by society, and insists that she must act like and even outwit the boys, the gender awareness waylays her, slowly but inevitably, from unexpected quarters. The rag doll with which she and Noori play has turned threadbare and Bari Apa adorns it with clothes and threads. But the girls feel something is missing and they stuff the doll's vest with tiny cotton balls. They "felt such shame, they couldn't even look at her" (p. 39). The breasts turn the doll into "a woman alive and real" (*ibid.*). But their excitement is short lived. As Bari Apa discovers their "sacrilege," she tears off the doll's breasts and vest and stitches up the shirt at the waist. Shamman learns an essential lesson in repression, and all her interest in lifeless dolls vanishes, making way for the advent of the second phase in her growing up.

School life for Shamman becomes a saga of emotionally charged relationships formed and broken with a sense of inevitability. Amorous longings pervade the girls' boarding school. Love letters are written in all earnestness even if the girls are living in close proximity. If Shamman falls deeply in love with her teacher, Miss Charan, Rasul Fatima, Shamman's roommate, becomes hopelessly infatuated with her. Though Shamman's heart yearns for human touch, she withdraws from those, like Rasul Fatima, who fawn on her. She repulses her furtive and exploratory sexual overtures at night with peremptory harshness as she deals later with Ejaz, her aunt's son. Miss Charan leaves the school and Shamman, having failed her exams, is sent to a different school. Here she falls head over heels for Najma who, in her turn, is involved in a passionate relationship with Sadat. However, it is Bilquis who makes Shamman realize that it is normal for girls to fall in love only with boys because they "can marry them and live with them for ever." This knowledge paves the way for her nebulous romance with Rashid, Bilquis' brother. Bilquis herself has countless stories to tell about her own and her sister's admirers. All these events and relationships contribute to forming Shamman's self and personality and demonstrate the fact that how, deprived of a normal relationship with boys in the hypocritical and cloistered environment of home and school, these girls first turn to each other for the satisfaction of their as yet imperfectly perceived and inarticulate but nevertheless strong sexual desires. Naturally, then, when they get a peep into the boys' or men's world, they face great difficulty in coming to terms with it. The novel—more specifically the first half of it—is certainly a *tour de force* in its forthright acknowledgment of female sexuality and its compelling account of these girls' sensibilities under stress.

Shamman enters a mission college despite the opposition of her England-returned brother and a glorious world opens up before her. "For the first time

Shamman realized how big and expansive the world was" (p. 103). Ably assisted by Prema, she gradually blossoms forth from a diffident school girl into an energetic and enterprising young woman who can stand her ground. Books like *Jane Eyre* by Emily Brontë, *Tess* by Thomas Hardy, *Castaway* by Tagore, as well as the poems of Shelley, Keats and Byron, widen her mental horizon as they must have done for Chughtai herself. Her infatuation with Raja Saheb, Prema's father, which ends in disaster and total physical collapse for her, is a brief interlude after which Shamman reemerges, phoenix-like, to take firm hold of her destiny. Along with Shamman's personal odyssey at college, Ismat Chughtai presents different strands of the Progressive Writers' Movement. Being a member of the Movement does not prevent her from taking a critical look at the activities of the self-proclaimed Progressives. Through Iftikhar, Anand and Satil, Chughtai shows the ineffectuality and limitations of the Movement, and the contradiction between the Progressives' ideals and practices. Iftikhar, with whom Alma and Shamman are in love, seems very impressive in his commitments and crusade against social conventions, but he eventually turns out to be a parasite making his living by sponging off women. Anand, who patronizes prostitutes, contemplates writing a book about the plight of the down-trodden though he does not know a thing about that life. The hollow band of Progressives seem to be mere parodies of their professed ideals. As a disenchanted Iftikhar says:

> There's nothing left, everything is vile in this world. We start something with such excitement, but soon selfishness, separatism and avarice come in the way and erase everything. We don't really know how to do anything except engage in hollow talk and applaud noisily. (p. 173)

Whatever the inherent weakness of the progressive movement, Shamman's association with its members becomes a liberating experience in several ways besides enabling her to take on effete social conventions and shibboleths.

As Shamman leaves college and is obliged to take up job as the headmistress of a community school, her idealism begins to dissipate as it comes in contact with reality. Chughtai's own experience as an Inspectress of Schools helps her to create some of the most hilarious and pathetic scenes depicting the sham that goes on in the name of uplifting the down-trodden Muslim community. Through sheer grit Shamman holds on to her job in an atmosphere of intrigue, utter boredom and ennui. Iftikhar continues to make forays into her emotional life till the shocking visit of his traditional *burqa*-clad wife (a mother of three children) which jolts her to a new realization of the depth of human duplicity. Out of vengeance Shamman takes recourse to atrocious flirting with the comrades surrounding her. Here one finds a gradual falling-off of Chughtai's art. At this point the narrative branches off into different directions to enfold the larger implications of the national movement for independence, the Bengal famine and the Second World War. The personal odyssey of Shamman has not been prop-

erly integrated with these momentous events. This results in the narrative losing focus towards the end of the novel. Similarly, Shamman's encounter with Taylor, the Irishman, her paranoia about all white-skinned people, leading to endless harangue with Taylor, and later her marriage with him and its consequent complications—all these lack the immediacy and urgency of felt experience which is the hallmark of Chughtai's art in the first half of the novel. However, Chughtai's humor and comic descriptions carry the reader through without any impression of dullness. Two such extracts, chosen at random, may be reproduced here. The first one pertains to her description of a typical progressive of the forties :

> Every man whose hair was awry, whose eyes flashed, whose clothes were a trifle unusual and somewhat shabby, who sported a briefcase containing some passionate verses and burning stories, spirited articles and fine photographs, a few simple memories and charming letters, was a progressive. He became thoughtful suddenly in the course of conversation, he talked to women very freely and somewhat carelessly and roughly, mentioned love the first chance he had, allowed his hands to wander over female clothing without knowing what he was doing, looked at these garments as if seeing them for the first time. […] In addition, he stressed the physical allure and bodily attributes of every notable girl he talked about, he already had a passion for her, he knew about her old and new lovers, her sound and unsound children. (p. 235)

The partition of India becomes a remote possibility in the narrative chronology and the second extract pertains to the creation of Pakistan:

> The Muslim girls neither cared for the goats nor were they interested too much in spinning. They were to have Pakistan. Along with the Taj Mahal, Moti Masjid and Lal Qila, the entire hallowed world, under the silvery moon's shadow, happily engulfed in fasting and prayer, would slowly slide towards paradise. Their allotted portion was about to be handed to them. A copper 'P' was already selling at every pan shop. Now all they had to do was wait silently. (p. 234)

Special mention must be made of Chughtai's use of the Urdu language. It is of everyday speech—spontaneous, pert, idiomatic and racy, with a liberal sprinkling of colloquialisms and specifically feminine expressions (*bēgamatī zubān*). Words often occur in unexpected combinations. Similes and metaphors have a freshness and startling quality about them. Tahira Naqvi who earlier translated Manto's stories, Chughtai's novels and short stories, has admirably brought out the warmth and immediacy of the original in her translation of the novel. Tahira Naqvi has a style which is lucid, engaging and intensely communicative, and her brief but perceptive Introduction to the novel offers the reader the right kind of

perspectives from which the novel can be studied fruitfully. However, I would like to point out the following : first, the transliteration of Indian words, forms of address, etc.—like *ken*, *nak*, *dant* (p. 29), Bare bhaya (p. 41), Sadika (p. 38) *seewayan* (p. 30)—could have been improved upon to approximate the sound of the originals. Tahira Naqvi could have retained Ghalib's line in the original with the translation in parenthesis or vice versa, thus preserving the cultural nuance. Thirdly, rather than italicizing some oft-recurring words throughout the novel (*dupatta*, *kurta*, *sherwani*, etc.), the translator or the publishers could have followed a simpler method—just italicize the word when it occurs for the first time. This would have also made for a better visual impact of the text. However, these are perhaps mere quibbles. All in all, the fact that *The Crooked Line* is a minor Indian classic in Urdu comes through in Tahira Naqvi's translation. And that is, certainly, a great achievement. ❐

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Akhtar-Ul-Iman. *Query of the Road: Selected Poems of Akhtar-Ul-Iman*. Edited by Baidar Bakht. Translated by Baidar Bakht, Leslie Lavigne and Kathleen Grant Jaeger. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1996. 684 pp. Rs. 395.

It is through sheer coincidence that the *Indian Review of Books'* letter asking me to review Akhtar-Ul-Iman's collection of poems in English translation, *Query of the Road,* and the news of the poet's death reached me on the same day. I was greatly moved. The greatest living poet of Urdu was dead. He'd been on dialysis for the past four years but that did not deter his creativity.

In moments of deep personal crisis, such as the lack of money and means, he appeared unperturbed and self-effacing, and even in the face of recurrent intimations of death, he continued to write poems redolent of the poet's singular courage and power of endurance. His poetry gave solace and joy to many and his death will be mourned by most of his readers. But I cannot think of a more appropriate way to pay tribute to a writer than to discuss his work, to discover its depth and to bring it to the attention of the public. The book under review may be regarded as a modest effort in this direction.

Akhtar-Ul-Iman began writing at a time when the poets belonging to the Progressive Writers' Association occupied center stage in Urdu poetry. Social commitment was the dominant credo while art was given short shrift. Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Makhdoom Mohiuddin, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Ali Sardar Jafri, Kaifi Azmi, etc., were dazzling the firmament. However, another contemporaneous group of poets, known as the *Ḥalqa-e Arbāb-e Żauq*, served as counterpoint to the

Progressives' by asserting the pristine values of poetry and art and by refusing to subordinate poetry to social propaganda. N.M. Rashed and Meeraji were the prominent members of this group. Though Akhtar-Ul-Iman belonged to neither group, he was closer to the latter in temperament and literary engagements. The events and circumstances of his life appear to have largely shaped his aesthetic vision. He alludes to those events and circumstances in the Foreword of his collection *Sar-o-Sāmāṅ* (1983) and which is also included in the present selection (pp. 1–13). For instance:

> Is poetry intended to satisfy man's aesthetic needs, or to point out the ugliness of life? Should it mourn everdeclining moral standards, or weep for the death of man's innocence? (p. 1)

Akhtar-Ul-Iman goes on to ask a series of questions which offer essential clues to his poetic preoccupations, some of which are the disintegration of human values, the autonomy of the individual hemmed in by compromises in almost every sphere of life, and modern man's angst and alienation. His well-known poems, like "Tārīk Sayyāra" (pp. 154–69), "Ēk Laṛkā" (pp. 234–43), "Yādēṅ" (pp. 244–57), and "Mufāhimat" (pp. 356–61) aspire to a philosophical quest for the object of human life and its existential reality. Though a note of melancholy pervades most of the poems, it is informed by a profound humanism. For instance, in the poem "Ēk Laṛkā," the innocent boy who grew up to be an adult witnessing the depth of human duplicity and deception, and who thought that all his youthful idealism now lay buried under the dead weight of the compulsions of the quotidian, finds to his surprise that in some corner of his mind that little boy—a symbol of universal human conscience—still survives:

> That depressed neurotic soul
> You keep enquiring for is long dead
> I have wrapped him in the shroud of selfdeception
> And thrown him in the grave of his hopes.
> I tell that boy the flame is quenched
> That was bent on burning all the trash of the world.
> The boy smiles and says softly—
> That's a lie, a fib, a cheat
> Look! I'm alive. (p. 242)

Akhtar-Ul-Iman also contributed significantly to the making of a new poetic idiom. In his *naẓms* he moved away from the stylized diction and trite symbolism of the ghazal and forged a language peculiarly suited to the expression of an Indian sensibility. The imaginative use of Sanskrit and Hindi words in the poems adds to the variety and richness of the experiences described. He uses a conversational style and the poems, most notably "Dasna Iṣṭēshan kā Musāfir" (pp.

470–83), develop a unique narratology of their own. In some poems, for instance "'Ahd-e Vafā" (pp. 206–7), "Āṣār-e Qadīma" (pp. 400–3) and "Taḥlīl" (pp. 508–11), the diction is so bare that it approaches that of prose. But on closer analysis one finds that despite the deceptively simple style there is here considerable semantic depth which is made possible by the juxtaposition of words and metaphors in curious combinations.

The 127 poems selected for inclusion in the volume are fairly representative of Akhtar-Ul-Iman's work. These poems trace his growth and development as a poet, from his first collection *Girdāb* (1943) to the last collection *Zamīn Zamīn* (1990) and beyond. The Urdu original on the right side helps the reader to compare both the versions. The first thing that strikes one about the translations is that they are quite close to the original. The translators, Baidar Bakht, Leslie Lavigne and Kathleen Grant Jaeger, have endeavored to remain faithful to the original. But as we all know, translation of poetry always leaves a residual meaning-area uncharted. At several points in *Query of the Road* one feels this inadequacy. To be more specific, on page 270 the translation of the line "*qaṭra qaṭra karēṅ jama' tō daryā ban jā'ē*" as "If I had hoarded waterdrops, I'd have an ocean" seems limiting, and in the next line the translation of "*ṣaḥrā*" as "mountain" is certainly inaccurate. Besides, the translations of "*farēb-khurda kushī*" as "fool of happiness" (pp. 18–9), "*lauṭ ā'ī du'ā*" as "let prayers rise" (pp. 136–7), "*bēčī lāj bʰī apnē hunar kī*" as "We've sold the honour of our knowledge' (pp. 246–7) and "*jaisē maiṅ kashmakash-e zīst mēṅ shāmil hī nahīṅ*" as "As if I don't count" (pp. 278–9) are not only awfully inadequate, but they also lead to distortions, particularly in the last instance. On page 502, the translators have omitted the line "*pōlīs gōlī čalā rahī haī*" in their translation.

Each translated poem is followed by a commentary which helps the reader, in some cases with the necessary background and in other cases with a meaningful perspective to approach the poems and assess them in depth. Sadly, the quality of the commentary is marred by a lack of grip on the idiom, a tendency to use strings of superlatives, and occasional spelling mistakes. A note on transliteration and two indices are provided. The first index is arranged according to the title of the poems and the second one lists proper names.

To conclude, *Query of the Road,* despite its blemishes, is a labor of love. Baidar Bakht's extreme dedication to his subject is clearly visible in the painstaking way he has put this large volume together. One hopes the book will create further interest in Akhtar-Ul-Iman and that we will have a better fare the next time round. A word to the publishers: such an expensive book should have been better produced. Frequent smudges disfigure the pages, leaving no doubt in the mind that the book has been produced in tremendous haste. Books deserve to be produced with care, whatever their quality. ❐

—M. Asaduddin
Jamia Millia Islamia

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Parwaaz: A Flight of Words (Urdu Short Stories by Women). Translated and introduced by Syeda S. Hameed and Sughra Mehdi. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997. 225 pp. Rs. 150.

This delectable translation of eleven Urdu short stories written by women as intriguing as Ismat Chughtai, Qurratulain Haider, Hajira Masroor, Khadija Mastur, Jeelani Bano and Hijab Imtiaz Ali is so smooth and rounded that the stories can be swallowed whole.

Though ostensibly focused on gender issues and the response of women writers to them in the early nineteenth century, the stories in *Parwaaz* stand on their own as a literary expression of women's lives. All of the stories, for instance, center around the relationship women have to their bodies and the subversions of their sexual experience.

The collection is delightful also because the stories are carried along by a certain lightness and buoyancy sometimes revealed in the gothic romances of women, at other times in their joyous and earthy existences as women without men. Often, however, it is in the riotous self-abandonment of their sexual expression that women are shown breaking the molds of age, class, and social propriety to fully extend themselves as human beings who live in the light of their own conscience.

Perhaps the most amusing story of all is Hijab Imtiaz Ali's "Unrequited Love" ("Mērī Natamām Muḥabbat"), a local version of a Barbara Cartland romance, if ever there was one. It is full of the inebriate frustrations of a rich and languorous young maiden who doesn't even know her own mind most of the time as she gazes out of the French windows of her *maḥal*, past her foreign nannies and chaperones. The dark hero, meanwhile, a much older man and a retired army captain, sulks and broods and ultimately kills himself over her.

One of the earliest stories by the writer, "Unrequited Love" is interesting for what it tells us about Hijab Imtiaz Ali. She came from a literary family where her mother was a published writer, attended convent schools and read a lot of European romances. She later married the famous playwright and humorist Imtiaz Ali Taj. Hijab was also one of the first women in Pakistan to obtain a commercial pilot's license and fly private airplanes. Her exposure to the writing style of Sajjad Haidar Yaldaram and the pre-realist phase in Urdu fiction is clear to see.

In sharp contrast is the story "Gaindā" by Ismat Chughtai, who was influenced by the social realism and simple diction of progressive writers like Krishan Chandar and Manto. She writes about two young girls, one a middle-class child

who is characteristically slow to mature, and the other the servant girl, her friend, who grows up too fast and goes through first child marriage, then child widowhood, and then clandestine sex from which she bears a child. But Ismat Chughtai treads lightly and touches with delicate fingers the comrplexity of pubescent sex and the grace and will to survive of the servant girl nicknamed Gainda.

Wajida Tabassum's concise "Utran" or "Cast-offs" is very similar and yet different in the relationship it explores between two young girls, one the darling daughter of a rich household and the other, her playmate, the daughter of her wet nurse. There is a bond of flesh between these growing young women, especially when the servant girl, humiliated by years of wearing the rich woman's hand-me-downs, even on her wedding day, decides to take the first turn with her mistress' eager bridegroom and so give her mistress a hand-me-down groom for life.

Another very bold story comes from Khursheed Mirza, who is better known as the aging but very lively actress of countless television plays. Khursheed Mirza came from a literary family where her elder sister, Rasheed Jahan, was a pioneering progressive writer who believed in writing and fighting for women's emancipation. Khursheed Mirza's rebellion was more personal as can be glimpsed from her autobiographical story, "Aapee."

"Aapee" focuses on the romance between an older, married woman and a much younger man who grows up almost alongside the young bride in the sprawling family house. But the romance remains far from platonic as the two doomed lovers discover what they mean to each other just before the young man is to be married off to one of the daughters of his beloved.

But to say that these stories are about the out-of-order sexual experiences of women would be totally misleading and voyeuristic. They are about women as embodied, sexual beings with desires and needs and not as self-sacrificing mother goddesses or *dēvīs* who are only good and who only nurture men and children.

The stories are about how women experience their bodies and express themselves through their bodies. As such, no contemporary Urdu work comes to mind where women have taken on similar themes and dealt with them with as much candor and vitality.

The stories are just as poignant about women without men. The two classic "Ustānī" stories come from Khadija Mastur and Jeelani Bano, two women writing very similar stories in Urdu from across the border. The *ustānī* stories are about that peculiarly embittered and crusty old creature, the spinster school marm, a stereotype that did much to keep young, middle class girls from taking up the profession of teaching.

But the *ustānī* stories arise from the same social situation across the border when, after the partition of India, many young women had to take on the role of earning a keep for the entire family after losing fathers and brothers to the war of attrition.

Razia Sajjad Zaheer, wife of the famous left-wing writer whose name she

affixes to her own, tells quite another story of joyous solitude and quiet strength in "Laṅgṛī Mumānī" or "My Lame Aunt." This is a story of gentle humor about a young woman who decides not to marry at all when her groom-to-be takes a fall from his horse and dies accidentally. She decides to live on in the village, spurning her suitors to tutor some children in the Qur'an, feed her goat and many birds, grow vegetables, and partake in the affairs of the village that often require one to possess a sane head above one's shoulders.

This slim volume also carries a picture of each author as a young woman and not as the venerable matriarch that one is generally accustomed to seeing them as in other anthologies. This, in fact, almost sets the intimate, good humored mood in which *Parwaaz* has been put together. As such, it sets a precedent for other anthologies of women's writing. ❐

—Samina Choonara

[Gratefully reproduced from *The Herald* (Karachi), March 1997, pp. 145–6; edited for the *AUS*.]

Tariq Rahman. *Language and Politics in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996. 320 pp.

This excellent volume deserves wide circulation. Of particular interest to readers of the *AUS* will be its historical analysis of the dynamics of Urdu use in Pakistan and its implications for the future development of Urdu.

The author documents the political dimension of language use in each of Pakistan's language communities from their historical emergence to the present. It is surprising that this should be the first full-length publication to deal comprehensively with a subject which is so crucial to the history of Pakistan. The work is based on highly competent original research, meticulously balanced in its judgments, and well written. It is likely to serve as the major reference on the subject for some time to come.

Rahman begins by listing the major languages of Pakistan in order of the number of confessed primary speakers (from the 1981 census): Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Siraiki, Urdu, Balochi, Hindko, Brahui. Minor languages including (also in order of numbers) Gujrati, Potohari, Shina, Burushaski, Khowar, Kashmiri, Wakhi, Domaki, Kohistani, Kalasha and Balti are briefly characterized. Punjabi accounts for just under half of the total (48.17%), well over three times the number of the next contender, Pashto, which accounts for 13.14%. Urdu, at fifth place, is claimed by 7.6%, just under ten million speakers in 1993 figures, or less than one sixth of the Punjabi figure. Of the remaining languages, which have only rarely been politically visible at the national level, Baluchi is strongest at

3.02%.

It must be said immediately that although Urdu ranks low as a spoken language, it is of course the primary language of literacy for the overwhelming majority of Pakistani readers and writers. It would have been interesting, therefore, for comparison and context (though its relevance to Rahman's purpose is only indirect), to know the percentage of literacy, and how literacy in the national language (presumably increasing) may be affecting attachment to the languages of region and what the author and others have called "ethno-nationalism."

There are thirteen chapters in all. The first three are introductory. Chapter One presents the objectives and organization of the volume. Chapter Two deals with theoretical and comparative context, especially language policy, the issue of power, and the relation of language to ethnicity. The language struggles of Belgium, Canada, South Africa, Guam, Ireland, Spain, Liberia, and Sri Lanka are adduced for comparison, as are the political implications of enforced changes of script in Turkey and the Soviet Union. These are generally useful in establishing the distinctiveness of the Pakistani experience and the nature of the challenge confronting the scholar who would present a useful analysis and assessment of it. The third chapter deals with language policy in the British period, both the administrative record and the evolving controversies that underlay it. Here again other imperial situations are adumbrated to some advantage, especially those of other British territories, but also the Spanish and the Portuguese cases in the New World, and the French in Africa. But the greater part of the chapter is taken up with discussion of the "Orientalist" and the "Anglicist" worldviews among the British, the debate between them, and their contribution to policy. To begin with, the Orientalists were in the ascendant, bolstering the classical languages, especially Persian and Sanskrit, as the existing languages of administration and learning. But in time their high evaluation of "oriental civilization" ended paradoxically by undermining it. Anglicist pressure grew and was responsible for the final replacement of Persian by Urdu in 1837. This legal act was seen by Muslims as the elimination of the last symbol of the Mughal Empire. "For along with Persian the cultural ascendancy of the Muslims too melted away" (p. 37). But historically the most important point is that "the British policy towards the vernaculars did create identities and mobilization which were partly language-based" (p. 38). The replacement of the classical languages with a choice between English and one or other vernacular "in a certain sense" made the so-called vernaculars "a British construct." This was because of the British role in language planning, in standardization, in orthography and in the writing of dictionaries (p. 39). Thus the scene was set for the role of language in politics after 1947, in both India and Pakistan, in ways that—somewhat ironically—are not altogether unlike the experience of Soviet Central Asia. If the history of this relationship in India and Pakistan has diverged since 1947, it is because Pakistan is smaller and because of the gradual emergence of the Mohajirs—a factor peculiar to Pakistan—as a distinct

community on the political and linguistic stage.

But Rahman does not oversimplify. The forces that supported the teaching of English to the élite and the vernaculars to the rest were complex and diverse, both among the British and among South Asians, and neither credit nor blame should be lightly apportioned. The remaining chapters—the body of the book—deal with the political history of particular languages from their historical emergence up to the present: the Urdu-Hindi controversy, the Bengali Language Movement, the Sindhi Language Movement, the Pashto Language Movement, the Language Movements of Balochistan, the Siraiki Movement, the Punjabi Movement, Minor language Movements, and finally the Urdu-English Controversy—each receives chapter-length treatment. Although other writers, both Pakistani and non-Pakistani, have dealt with aspects of this story, nowhere else is all the basic case material brought together systematically with this explicit focus on the political dimension.

Much of the detail is fascinating. Of particular interest to this reviewer was the struggle that surfaces from time to time in all language movements between the drive to promote the vernacular as a vehicle of community identity on the one hand and the fear of "ghettoization" from loss of full proficiency in Urdu (and English) on the other—probably the major force for the development and success (such as it is) of Urdu in Pakistan today. For not only does Urdu hold first place as the medium of primary education and therefore of literacy, but for the large proportion of the population for whom literacy is either beyond reach or of little importance, Urdu (more than English?) is the established lingua franca in any activity that reaches beyond the local community.

The two strongest vernaculars have always been Pashto and Sindhi. But the success of Pashto as a medium of education has been hampered by a historical consequence of its tribal base: tribesmen do not typically become school teachers; many of the teachers in N.W.F.P. are Hindko speakers, and either do not speak Pashto or are not very comfortable in it (p. 149). The Sindhi situation, on the other hand, is unique because of the Mohajir problem. It is not just a question of the local language against the national, but of conflict between the (existing) local language and the (intrusive) immigrant language.

In fact in none of the four provinces of Pakistan does the major vernacular have a clear field. In Baluchistan (*pace* several non-Pakistani writers) the Baluch fear not Brahui but Pashto (the language of the northern districts of the Province). In N.W.F.P. the problem is not the minor languages of the northern areas, but Hindko, which is strong especially in the cities. In Punjab, Siraiki has become the major rival of Punjabi. These linguistic rivalries redound to the advantage of Urdu. Therefore, so long as Pakistan thrives, so will Urdu.

Other points of interest in the book include the attention given to the significance of the choice of standard script (e.g. *naskh* or *nasta'līq*) for each language, and political issues in the establishment of orthography. I was happy also to note that the author does not see Brahui as a separate identity. "The Baloch national-

ists regard attempts at promoting language as the only criterion for nationality as a conspiracy of anti-Baloch forces … These attempts, they argue, come from anti-Baloch forces, i.e. the government of Pakistan or neo-imperialist foreign scholars; they do not come from the Brahvis, who see themselves as Baloch" (p. 159). But overall, "What is certain is that language *policies* [emphasis supplied] are so intimately related with politics that, if they change, the political map of Pakistan will also change …" (p. 257).

There is little to find fault with, but it is worth mentioning that the author appears unaware that a significant portion of the Afghan Pashtun élite has for long been not Pashto- but Dari-speaking. More attention might have been given to Persian, particularly to the significance of its underlying role as the classical language. Even though its visibility has diminished greatly since the 1960s, Persian is still a major source of new vocabulary for all the languages of Pakistan, and it still counts a significant number of speakers in N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan, only a small proportion of whom are recent immigrants. But Persian, it is true, has not been of direct political significance in Pakistan.

Rahman gives his sources and methods carefully in the preface. Both his personal experience and his research were largely urban, based on archival materials and interviews, rather than ethnographic inquiry or sampling in various parts of the country. He controls Hindi, Pashto, Punjabi, and Siraiki as well as Urdu. I found his command of English impressive, as for example in his discussion of the "sacerdotal" idiom of religion (p. 2). More than once he laments the lack of funding and other public support for this type of research and scholarship—reminding us of our own condition in the humanities in the West. We shall soon be on a level playing field … ❐

—Brian Spooner
University of Pennsylvania

Sher Shah Saiyid. *Dil kī Vuhī Tanhā'ī.* Karachi: Fazleesons Ltd., 1997. 206 pp. Rs. 120.

Tasadduq Sohail. *Tanhā'ī kā Safar.* Karachi: Fazleesons Ltd., 1997. 109 pp. Rs. 100.

A common motif threads these collections of short stories together. Even the titles are symptomatic. In short, the uncertainty which becomes a way of life for those Pakistanis or Indians who go abroad in search of better prospects. Actually, a way of survival rather than a way of life would be a better wording to express what is essentially a predicament. They are the misplaced persons, the traceable missing, presumed alive.

They escape, for various reasons, from their native countries, only to find that life is not easy anywhere. In alien societies they live perpetually in dread, often subliminal, the dread either of absorption or of rejection. Sometimes they return, pressurized by real or self-fabricated memories of the good old days. The nostalgia soon wears thin, and by now accustomed to living in far more organized and responsible societies, they find the chaos at home unbearable and flee. After a while, nostalgia, like a recurring itch, makes them restless once more, forcing them to return and flee again. And so it goes on and on. Perhaps, in the end, they simply get inured to it. By profession a doctor, a gynecologist to be exact, Sher Shah Saiyid believes that real people and real situations suffice to form the basis of fiction. He, therefore, makes it clear at the beginning that most of the characters and happenings in his stories are real and the resemblances would not be incidental.

In other words, he is a poacher, intruding into other people's lives, extracting interesting, or harrowing, details from them, and slapping them together as stories. Nothing new about it. All writers poach. But they often cook what they catch and cook or transform it beyond recognition. Sher Shah Saiyid offers us things in the raw, dripping wet and stained with life's juices. He tells his stories straight and tells them uncomplicatedly. That's the saving grace. The method has its advantages and also its limitations.

As most of our attitudes are marked, or marred, by contradictions and hypocrisy, the characters one comes across in Sher Shah Saiyid's fiction are, whether good or bad, in general miserable. They fail to come to terms with the reality facing them. In order to escape its pressure they abandon it and prefer another reality which, although alien, acts as a buffer. So deep down, what they desire is not affluence but a feeling of permanent alienation.

In "Sōtā hūā Shehr," a Professor of physics finds that it is dangerous to stick to one's ideals in a corrupt country and leaves it to survive elsewhere. It is possible to sympathize with him but there is a side to his personality which is too credulous. The same can be said about the central character in "Sipah-Sālār." Nevertheless, they at least possess something, that is, their illusions. On the other hand, the hypocritical characters in "Pas-e Ā'ina" or "Bāṅkē Bihārī" can point to nothing which they can call their own. They are the mindless nightmares we see all the time. Possibly the best stories in his collection are "Dard kā Rishta" and "Laila." Each highlights a woman's sensibility and courage. Is a rapport with women his strong point?

It is true that Sher Shah Saiyid is not overtly judgmental. He does seem to take sides though and is not subtle about it. That is why his characters, civil or villains, are not tragic enough. They all appear to live in a grey sequence of insignificance. It is an interesting debut in any case. Sher Shah Saiyid has arrived on the literary scene but has he any further to go? Realism, such as his, guarantees little, except entropy.

Tassaduq Sohail began his career as a short story writer, migrated to England

in 1961 to earn a better living, took to painting and enjoyed a measure of success as a painter. Only recently has he reverted to his old love. In his first collection of stories he too deals with the problems of misplaced persons but his touch is lighter. Not averse to allow some play to his imagination, his stories have more air blowing through them. A bit of humor here and there lends them some buoyancy.

His stories, not always but often, though rooted in reality, twist and turn to seek unexpected angles. Good ghost stories are such a rare commodity in Urdu fiction that "Qabristān" would automatically qualify for a spooky anthology. "Darakht" is about a dialogue between a man and a tree and revolves around a sense of strange togetherness. "Āvāgavan" deals with illusion and self-deception, but in the context of the story these negative elements become meaningful. "Ṭā'ir-e Lāhūtī" could have been very funny but a trite ending spoils it. Tassaduq Sohail had got hold of a good idea but didn't know what to do with it and capitulated easily. The best of the lot is "Makkʰī" in which an immigrant from the Subcontinent, now a British citizen, lives in an old people's home. He wants to keep a housefly as a pet, turns his room into an exceedingly dirty place to make the fly feel at home, and can't understand why he is being taken away to a lunatic asylum. It only shows that asylums are not invariably safe havens. ❐

—Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman
Savērā *(Lahore)*

Studies in Pakistani Popular Culture. Edited by William L. Hanaway and Wilma Heston. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications and Lok Virsa, 1996. 615 pp., 26 plates. Rs. 500.

This book is an unusual and valuable contribution to the study of Pakistan. Seven scholars, working in various fields in the humanities, with experience in Central and South Asia, were funded under a single grant from the Smithsonian Institution to work in Pakistan between 1987 and 1990. They include an art historian, a folklorist, three linguists, and two specialists in folk literature. Each scholar exhibits the characteristics of a particular humanistic discipline: the exuberance of the art historian, the ataraxy of the folklorist, the assiduity of the linguist, and the particularity of the student of genre.

Although the authors all knew each other and each other's work they were not in any sense working together. Apart from the length of the articles, therefore, the book bears more resemblance to an issue of a journal than a unitary volume: the entries are not interrelated in any way beyond their fit into the larger framework of the humanistic study of Pakistan. But while this peculiarity may restrict its interest to a relatively small band of specialists, for such people it con-

tains much that is of great interest and on subjects that are rarely treated.

The volume falls naturally into three sections, dealing in turn with visual, aural, and literary material. Doris Srinivasan discusses continuities in the history of textiles in Swat; Margaret Mills documents food selection, preparation and consumption, and the associations between food and a wide range of social interaction and interpretation in a mainly Kho community in the Ishkoman Valley between Hunza and Yasin; Peter Hook provides text, translation, annotations and discussion of a Shina version of the 16th-century Tibetan epic *Gesar of Ling*; Elena Bashir contributes a comparative study of quotatives and complementizers in the entire Sprachbund of northwestern South Asia, from Balti to Baluchi, and Burushaski to Brahui. Wilma Heston investigates the relationship between poetic genres in Pashto and the medium of song. Each of these pieces is fifty pages plus, but the volume ends with a documentation and discussion of the chapbook industry in Pakistan, that amounts to almost three hundred pages. In such a wide-ranging compendium it is of course not difficult to find irrelevancies and omissions, if not errors. Apart from the problem of coherence, methods are often not explicit, and the reader is not infrequently left wondering about the distinctiveness and significance of what he is reading. But whatever criticisms might be made, the book cannot be said to fall short on data. Some might even find the diversity of themes an attraction in itself, and it must be said that appearing as it does in the year of the Jubilee it draws attention not only to the variety but to the intrinsic interest of Pakistani folk culture fifty years on, in art, in language, and in the cultural life of ordinary people. (An unexpected bonus is in the personal detail of some of the authors' mini-biographies that precede their articles.)

Readers of the *AUS* will find particular interest in the second half of the book, which is the work on chapbook publishing in Pakistan by William L. Hanaway and Mumtaz Nasir. The currency of Urdu on this level has received little attention. It is noteworthy that twenty-three percent of the works the authors collected are in Urdu, while thirty-six percent are in Pashto and thirty-nine percent are in Punjabi. The remaining twelve percent are in Persian, Arabic, Sindhi, Siraiki, Baluchi, Brahui and Khowar.

The authors have given a brief description of the chapbook-publishing industry, and defined and introduced the chapbook phenomenon, making clear that "chapbook" is a European, not a Pakistani or South Asian, category, despite its significance throughout South Asia and beyond. In the body of the study they describe how chapbooks are produced, dealing with design, printing, advertising and distribution. They list the major producers and give a meticulous bibliography of over eight hundred items that were on the market at the time of their study. A glossary of trade terms is also provided. The principal centers of chapbook publication in 1989–90 were, in order of quantity, Lahore, Peshawar, and Karachi. It is significant that although Karachi was not visited (because of the security situation at the time) a "fairly large number" of chapbooks published in Karachi were collected in other cities. This suggests that not only is there a

national rather than only a local readership for the genre but that future attention to the missing component from Karachi might add interestingly to the current findings.

An important bonus of this work lies in the way it highlights the number and variety of languages in which literary work is published in Pakistan (all drawing, as is pointed out, on a common stock of cultural matter), and the position of Urdu within that variety. The subject matter of Pakistani chapbooks turns out to be as varied as that of its European equivalent in the 17th to 19th centuries, and draws attention to the extent of the larger cultural area to which Pakistan historically belongs: a culture which even now, after fifty years of national separatism, is still not always easily distinguishable from Persia, Afghanistan, India and Central Asia. A brief comparison of Pakistani chapbook production with its equivalent in neighboring countries is also given.

The book as a whole achieves a successful and useful combination of the study of Urdu and Urdu letters not only with the study of other languages in Pakistan, but with the everyday life of ordinary Pakistanis, who, whether they speak Urdu, read it, or barely use it, know it as—alongside Islam—the most tangible marker of their Pakistani identity. The editors and publishers should be complimented on their production of a valuable source of information, carefully presented, in an attractive volume, with only rare misprints. ❐

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