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Published in India
By Oxford University Press, New Delhi

First published 2001

ISBN 019 565201 0

The divider pages were created by Adil Mansuri, Urdu poet and calligrapher, now living in New Jersey.

Printed in India by Pauls Press, New Delhi 110 0020
Published by Manzar Khan, Oxford University Press
YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110 001

Acknowledgments

This book, and the paper which was the origin of it, have been four years in the making, and the first person to whom my thanks are due is Jamila for having done many things to make the work turn from 'evanescent visitations' (in Shelley's words) to a tangible reality.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to Sheldon Pollock for suggesting lines of inquiry and Frances Pritchett for asking the right questions, helping with editing, preparing the camera-ready copy of the manuscript, and making the index. Thanks are also due to Sunil Sharma of the University of Chicago, and Ahmad Mahfuz of Jamia Millia University, New Delhi: the former for general assistance with the first draft of the paper which ultimately became this book, and the latter for providing photocopies of a number of hard-to-get books and papers.

I am grateful to my friend Adil Mansuri, now of North Bergen, New Jersey, for designing the chapter dividers with his characteristic fluid and elegant calligraphic rhythms.

A word of thanks is yet again due to Sheldon Pollock for permission to publish this book in advance of his major publication project, which will contain an abridged version of this work in the form of my contribution to the project. I must give thanks to the readers and discussants who took the trouble to comment on various parts of this book during the conferences organized by Sheldon Pollock where the contributers of various papers were encouraged to express their views on the draft papers, and to flesh out embryonic ideas that might emerge during discussions.

I also owe a debt of thanks to Shamim Hanfi, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, and to Qazi Obaidur Rahman Hashmi, Professor and Head of the Urdu Department, respectively, at the Jamia Millia University, New Delhi. It was during my tenure in the Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan Chair in the faculty of Humanities at that university that I wrote, and delivered as lectures, much of the material that finally formed about the first third of this book. I would also like to thank the National Council for the promotion of

Urdu Language, at whose request I delivered a portion of the middle third of this book as the first Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah Memorial Lecture at Hyderabad.

Friends, readers, commentators, and questioners too numerous to mention here helped me resolve my confusions and kept me on the straight path of this book's main theme. I have acknowledged in the notes, I hope faithfully and adequately, the many friends who put me in the way of material or books relevant to my study, or provided me with information which it would have taken too long for me to discover unassisted. All translations from Urdu, Hindi, and Persian are my own.

And finally, many thanks to Rukun Advani, Anuradha Roy, Veena K.P., and Priya Rana, my 'friends at court' at the Oxford University Press, New Delhi, for their patience and understanding.

April 2001 Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

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A Note on Transliteration and Format

For the sake of consistency, Persian words have been transliterated as they are pronounced in Urdu. The letters of the Urdu script have been transliterated as follows:

alif as: a, i, u, ā
b p t ṭ s̈
j ch ḥ ḵh
d ḍ ż
r ṛ z zh
s sh
ṣ ẓ
ṭ ẕ
ʿ ġh
f q
k g
l m
n
vāʾo as: v, ū, o, au
h
ī
baṛī ye as: y, e, ai

nūn-e ġhunnah: ñ
hamzah: ʾ
iẓāfat: -e

In general, Indic words have been treated as though they were written phonetically in Urdu script. In Sanskrit words, to avoid ambiguity the semivowel is transliterated as 'rí' and the retroflex 's' is translated as 'ṣh'. Arabic words have been transliterated with 'w' instead of 'v'.

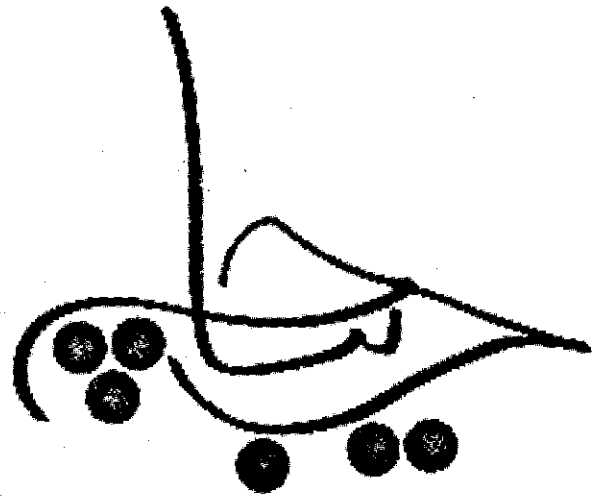
Translated verses are indented more deeply than translated prose passages. Individual verses are separated by blank half-lines, and where groups of verses all come from a single poem, they are all enclosed by a single set of diagonal slashes (/).

Footnotes always give cited authors' names in the form and order in which they can be found in the Bibliography. Judgments about which name to cite (author or translator, in some cases), and which name to use for alphabetization, have in every case been made by the author.

Names of authors of Urdu and Persian works have been given with diacritics. However, where an author writes in English also, or where his name has come to have a standard form in English, that form is used without diacritics. No completely consistent policy is possible here; I have made the decisions as best I could.

The above transliteration system represents choices I made, as part of the larger process of editing and formatting the manuscript and preparing camera-ready copy. Any errors or idiosyncrasies, therefore, are mine rather than the author's. It was a pleasure to be part of the NEH project group from which earlier stages of this extremely valuable study emerged, and a pleasure also to help put the book into its final form.

Frances W. Pritchett



Preface

The business of literary historiography in modern India has been conducted according to British or seen-as-British formulations about the nature of history. This is particularly true of Urdu, where there was no genre called literary history, nor a notion of literary history as an account of birth - growth - [change] - [likely / probable] - decay, before the advent of English-style literary thought in India. In the Indo-Muslim literary tradition, of which Urdu is the exemplar par excellence, literature was viewed as synchronic: nothing ever went truly out of date, hence nothing ever was truly new. This was not to say that literature was static, monolithic, a fossil in the museum of history. For literature not only grew in quantity, it also had a dynamics of increased or diminished production.

Most importantly, its sameness involved, or rather implied, change--although the change was oftener subtle or internal rather than overt, and affected small though vital details, and didn't follow an agenda, private or public. Literature flowed in a continuum, and not in 'periods'; there were no qualities specific to the 'ages' in literature, except in a superficial sense of language-use.

All this was implied, or explicit, in Arabo-Persian literary theory; it also had close connections with Hindu literary and philosophical thought. G. C. Pande says, 'If God is the true seer and poet and creator, all human poets are so only by a fitful and fragmentary participation in His imagination as dimly reflected in human consciousness'. Such an approach denies the existence of discontinuities, except as ephemeral occurrences in the non-immanent human consciousness. 'A final and irreducible discontinuity will arise only on the assumption that such a radical discontinuity obtains in the history of human consciousness and society.'[1]

---

[1]Pande, 'The Nature of Imagination', pp. 9-10.

The question is not whether such a non-interventionist view of literary creativity (God, or Time, does not interfere in the creative imagination) is true. The main point is that this is how the pre-modern Indian literary culture, which includes Urdu literary culture, viewed the problem of time and change. In this view, the movement of literature was circular rather than linear, and there was no demand upon man to design his creations so as to have them accord with the formula 'make it new', a formula that Ezra Pound later prescribed for his fellow Modernists.

There is an Arab proverb *mā taraka 'l awwalu li 'l-āḳhir*, 'He who went before left nothing for him who came after'. Another form of the proverb is *kam taraka 'l awwalu li 'l-āḳhir*, 'He who went before, left a great deal for him who came after'. In spite of the apparent paradox, the two utterances are the same. The first one means, 'Everything that was sayable has been said [so we only imitate what has been already said]'. The meaning of the other is, 'There's a lot that the ancients left [for us to finish, or to imitate and build upon]'. Mukund Lath says that after Ānandavardhana, some classical Sanskrit theorists

> denied the very possibility of original creation in poetry. These critics argued that the purpose of poetry was to express universals of experience (*anubhāvyanubhāvasāmānyam*). Such universals were finite in number and common to all men at all times, past and present. And, as such, they had already been expressed by earlier poets, leaving nothing for the modern poet to say.[2]

Later, Mukund Lath cites Ānandavardhana to the effect that it is possible for two poems to be similar in appearance, but different in spirit.[3]

True enough, there were theorists like Rājashekhara, and poet-theorists like Ḳhusrau who granted the possibility of being entirely original in poetry. According to Rājashekhara, all poems, except some very few (which he called *ayonī*, sourceless)[4] were made from other poems. 'Rajasekhara would recommend cultivation of the art of poetry by imitating, nay, even plagiarising cleverly, the lines of other poets.'[5] Ḳhusrau says that one must satisfy four conditions before qualifying for the rank of 'Master'. He himself, he says, satisfies but two, and thus is only 'half a master'. He says that he is a follower of his forerunners, Sanā'ī, Ḳhāqānī, Sa'dī, and Niẓāmī. One of the conditions that he sets for a master is that 'He should not, like dishonest tailors, sew a coat of a thousand patches by using pieces cut from the fabrics of [other] people'. Although Ḳhusrau emphatically claims that he has never 'borrowed', the very fact that he declares himself to be a follower of certain past masters shows that while he may not have borrowed consciously, he was a traveller on a well-trodden path.[6]

When Urdu literary histories or historical-literary-theoretical accounts of Urdu literature came to be written, the first one as early as 1880, their authors took pains to blame Urdu literature for lacking in 'originality'. That the Urdu poets 'chewed morsels that had already been chewed over and over again' became a favourite among the charges most commonly framed against them. Literature was seen as a social-functional, and not an aesthetic-artistic, object, and Urdu literature seemed to fail on this count too. Literary history was seen as a history of individual departures and initiatives, leading to 'change'. Continuity was seen as 'no-progress'.

If history had a beginning, presumably it would have an end--and perhaps a renewal, too. So what kind of end, and what pattern of growth or decay, could be descried or predicted for Urdu literature? There are three prominent models:

(A) The literature of the past was better, more 'natural'. So the history of Urdu literature shows decay by virtue of a consistent deviation from the 'natural'. There is no renewal possible. One should salvage the best of the past, and start

[2]Lath, 'Creation as Transformation', p. 18.

[3]Lath, 'Creation as Transformation', p. 28.

[4]Lath, 'Creation as Transformation', p. 20.

[5]Krishnamoorthy, *Indian Literary Theories*, p. 258.

[6]Ḳhusrau, *Dībāchah-e ġhurrat ul-kamāl*, pp. 42, 39, 41.

afresh. Literature should be pressed into the service of social reform and change, should be made more 'natural'.

(B) The literature of the past was better perhaps, but it was limited in scope. It grew old quickly, and died, and is now beyond revival. A new beginning is needed, and even possible. The new start should be firmly grounded in European (read, 'British') pragmatism, and in an ethic that is service-oriented.

(C) The literature of the past was indeed better, but the past can't be recaptured. There are many reasons why there can be no going back, but the main one is that the times have changed. All that one can do now is to selectively cultivate the best of the past.

These positions are not always clearly stated, but are like major premises, though inarticulate at times, running through the writings of the three greatest modernizing Urdu critics who wrote between 1875 and 1914. The first model is that of Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥālī (1837-1914), the second bears the stamp of Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzad (1830-1910), and the last one is derived from the writings of Shiblī Nuʿmānī (1857-1914). The most interesting thing about these authors is that while they might not have always agreed on quite what constituted the past, they were agreed on the point that literature, at least Urdu and Persian literature, seemed to have an inveterate tendency to decline with the passage of time.

Another thing that the modernizers seemed to ignore was that the acts of literature were, first and foremost, cultural acts, and no literary history could pretend to be complete without reckoning with the literary culture that produced the literature in question. The *taẕkirah*, the biographical dictionary cum anthology, which was an extremely popular genre from the mid-eighteenth century to nearly the end of the nineteenth, excelled as an unselfconscious representation of poetry as just that--a cultural artifact.

Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, author of *Āb-e ḥayāt* (1880), the first 'modern history' of Urdu poetry, was rich with insights about and comments on the literary culture, but it was also apologetic--about both the culture, and the fact that its history

as written by him had the flavour of the *taẕkirah*. Later historians, almost to a man, ignored issues of culture, just as they neglected, or rather refused to study, the poetics and the inter-lingual, cross-cultural influences that went into the making of Urdu literature.

Urdu, by virtue of its vast reach over the subcontinent, inherited, and also cultivated, many interconnections with other local languages. Also, Sanskrit has always been an overt presence in its linguistic structure, and a covert, though by no means inert, presence in its literary domain. Then there was the immensity of the Persian area, spreading from Armenia to almost the borders of China, which also provided linguistic and literary material to Urdu. Urdu thus acquired, in a comparatively brief period of time, a richness and colourfulness which even older Indian languages would be hard put to rival.

But the great expanse of Urdu's area also generated problems that were not encountered by other literary cultures. There are, for instance, problems of historicizing, of historical space, the literary canon, canonical versus non-canonical pronunciation and usage, suppression or promotion of regional identities, the dynamics of hegemonic literary centres like Delhi and Lucknow, the emergence of new institutions like that of *ustād* (master) and *shāgird* (pupil) in the art of poetry. These problems, or at least many of their characteristics, are peculiar to Urdu.

Then there is the question of relations and relativities of power--social, cultural, and political. Though Urdu was never one of the languages associated with power--its false but widespread reputation as a 'court language' and '*shāhī* language' notwithstanding--it commanded a cultural prestige quite out of proportion to its antiquity. This affected Urdu's literary culture and production in subtle ways, especially from the middle of the nineteenth century, when its name changed to 'Urdu', and its proper, historical name 'Hindi' was assigned to another language. These questions have rarely been discussed in Urdu historiography, except as marginal and already-settled issues.

Another thing which is peculiar to the literary culture of Urdu is its strong inclination toward self-examination. While it was always there, this tendency becomes very pronounced from

the eighteenth century. Poets examined--with a view to praise or blame--each other's writings, commented copiously on their friends' and pupils' works, avidly awaited news of literary creations from faraway places. Mīr (1722-1810) was not exaggerating when he claimed that his poems had travelled to distant lands, to places even outside the country. The stereotype of the Urdu poet, however, has unfortunately been that of a self-regarding recluse, unaware even of the rose-garden just beyond his window, as a famous (and unsubstantiated) story about Mīr tells us. The Urdu writer's awareness of his literary and social environment is quintessentially expressed in the *tażkirah*s, but unfortunately they were cast aside by most literary historians as of no special use, except for settling--if at all possible--marginal disputes about dates and names.

It was for these reasons that the project 'Literary Cultures in Indian History', designed and directed by Sheldon Pollock, George V. Bobrinskoy Professor of Sanskrit and Indic Languages at the University of Chicago, came as a welcome opportunity for me--and to many others like me working in Indian languages--to organize my thoughts on the literary history and culture of my language, try to see how they fit into the larger Indian reality, and then set down a narrative that made some sense of a material that had remained largely inchoate so far. This book grew out of the paper that I produced for Sheldon Pollock's project.

Numerous debts are incurred during the thinking-out and writing of such a book. It is impossible to acknowledge all my debts. In the notes I have given, I hope fully and accurately, the source of all texts and all information that I owe to other authors. The names of some friends too occur in the notes as having brought some information or text to my attention. Some other friends are mentioned in the acknowledgement at the beginning of the book. All flaws and errors of course are my own.

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi
Allahabad
September 30, 1999