



Chapter Five: A True Beginning in the North

Literary activity in Gujrī / Hindī continued to flourish. We have seen the author of *Tārīkh-e gharībī* (1751-57) in Gujarat, justifying the use of Hindī in strong terms. By this time, the towering figure of ‘Abd ul-Valī ‘Uzlat (1692/93-1775), arising from Surat, has made its impress upon the whole of the subcontinent, both physically and intellectually. Physically, because ‘Uzlat moved from Surat to Delhi, and then to the Deccan proper, adorning literary and intellectual gatherings all over the place. Intellectually, because his poetry provides continuities from Valī, and became an important learning source for the writers who followed. The preface he appended to his *Divān* (1758-59) is the first Urdu prose of its kind.

Prose of many kinds seems to have made hesitant beginnings at about this time in the North. The earliest known work is *Karbal kathā* (Tale of Karbala)—a translation, from the Persian, of a religious narrative. Nothing much is known about Fazlī, the Urdu translator, except that he came from around Delhi, and composed the work about 1732. Then there are two *dāstāns*: *Nau tarz-e murassa‘* (New and well-decorated style, 1775) by Husain ‘Atā Tahsīn, and *Qiṣṣah-e mihr afroz o dilbar* (The Tale of Mihr Afroz and Dilbar) by ‘Isavī Khān Bahādur. Efforts to identify and date the latter author have failed; it is however fairly certain that the *dāstān* was composed around 1731-55. The names of Harīhar Parshād Sañbhalī (fl.1730’s), and Bindrāban Mathrāvī (d.1757) and of a prose work by each of the two, also appear. Nothing else is known of them. Saudā (1706?-1781) wrote a couple of pages of Urdu prose in his *Kulliyāt*.¹

¹Saudā, *Kulliyāt*, vol. 2, pp. 433-434.

In addition to the above, two extremely interesting prose works in the North survive from the last three decades of the eighteenth century: Shāh Murādullāh Sañbhalī translated the thirtieth part of the Qurʾān (each part is called a *pārah*, a piece), and wrote a commentary on it. This work, called *Tafsīr-e murāddiyah*, was completed in January 1771—that is, roughly two decades before the full translation of the Qurʾān with brief commentary made by Shāh ʿAbd ul-Qādir of Delhi (1790). Although printed a number of times in the nineteenth century, the *Tafsīr-e murāddiyah* remains largely unknown today. In terms of both prose style and technique of textual explication, Murādullāh Sañbhalī's work sounds more in tune with modern ears. The other prose work is a history of the Rohillas. Called *Qiṣṣah o ahvāl-e rūhelā* (The Narrative and Circumstances of the Rohillas), it was written by Rustam ʿAlī Bijnorī in 1776. Here again, the prose is surprisingly limpid and the argument is easy to follow. The fact that these works remained generally unknown seems to have helped establish the myth that 'modern Urdu prose' began with the College of Fort William.²

By the time of ʿUzlat's death, the Delhi idiom had become dominant in most of the Urdu world, and a separate Gujrī tradition can be said to have ceased to exist by the end of the eighteenth century. ʿUzlat described his language as Hindī.³ This, coupled with the example of *Tārīkh-e gharībī*, would suggest that 'Gujrī' as a language name had fallen into disuse by about the 1760's.

The reasons for the gap in the North from Masʿūd Saʿd Salmān (1046-1121) to Khusrāu (1253-1325), and then the second age of silence, broken only in Gujarat in the early fifteenth century, can now be enumerated as follows:

²For a more detailed account of these two works, see Anṣārī, 'Shāh Murādullāh Sañbhalī', pp. 285-98, and Iqtidār Ḥusain Ṣiddīqī, 'Urdū zabān meñ tārīkh nigārī', pp. 170-87.

³Jalībī, *Tārīkh-e adab-e urdū*, vol. 2, pp. 1006-07.

1) Urdu did not attain the status of a literary language before the Sufis took it up in Gujarat in the fifteenth century, closely followed by the Dakanīs.

2) Masʿūd Saʿd Salmān's and Khusrāu's efforts must be termed casual, and not in accordance with any established mode of writing.

3) The fact that there was literary activity in Avadhī in the fourteenth century (we have Mullā Dāʿūd's poem *Chandā'in* in 1379), but not in Urdu, shows that Urdu didn't have a literary status at that time.

4) Urdu's earliest extant literary products are from Gujarat and the Deccan, and are overwhelmingly by the Sufis.

5) Since the Sufis addressed themselves to specific groups of followers and devotees, it was natural for their prose and poetry to be preserved, orally or in writing.

6) No Sufi seems to have made Hindī / Hindvī a vehicle for his literary expression in the North before Shaikh ʿAbd ul-Quddūs Gangohī (1455-1538) and Kabīr (d.1518). Neither of these, however, wrote in the mainline *khayī bolī* Hindī / Hindvī that we know as Urdu today. More important, neither was in Delhi, which was the command centre of literary culture in the North.

7) The reason for Urdu's late start in literature in the North is therefore to be found in the fact that the Sufis didn't adopt this language, and it had to wait for religious / Sufi impulses to find their expression in it.

8) The reason for the Sufis' not adopting this language in the early centuries seems to be the universal popularity and general understandability of Persian in the North, obviating the need for the Sufis to use Hindī / Hindvī for their popular discourse.

According to Satish C. Mishra, Gujrī, as an oral language, pre-existed the arrival of the Northern Sufis in Gujarat. He says, 'The language which came to be called Urdu in the later

Mughal age, appears to have evolved in Gujarat in a spoken form, as a result of the influx of immigrants, largely from the Punjab, Sindh, and the Gangetic regions. In its earlier form, it was termed as Gujarī and contained words from half a dozen languages....' While the claim that Urdu first evolved in Gujarat may be a little fanciful—for the language names 'Hindī / Hindvī' or 'Dihlavi' certainly predate the language name 'Gujrī'—Mishra is quite correct in identifying it as the language of immigrants. Some form of the language certainly existed in Gujarat before 1297 when the great influx from the North took place due to 'Alā' ud-Dīn Khālji.

Mishra goes on to say that the language was used 'by the Sultan and his court in Ahmedabad, by the Arab and Persian traders in the coastal marts..., by the Sufis and other Muslim preachers, and finally by the large mass of immigrants who had come in with Alā'uddin Khālji and in subsequent waves.... Thus while Persian was the accepted language for official and formal intercourse, for informal occasions Gujarī became the common language'. Mishra concludes by saying, 'By the end of the sixteenth century, Gujarī had become a widely understood lingua franca, and it would appear that it was spoken as the first language by a considerable section of the people'.⁴

Given the above state of the language in pre-1297 Gujarat, it should come as no surprise that while the Sufis of Delhi were still using Persian for their literary and religious discourse, the patronage of the Sufis of Gujarat caused Gujrī to become a

⁴Abbās 'Alī, *Qissah-e ghamgīn*, pp. 21-22 of the English introduction by the editor, Satish Mishra. *Qissah-e ghamgīn* (Tale of sorrow, 1779), by Munshī 'Abbās 'Alī, is a long (2451 *shī'rs*, or 4902 lines) semi-historical account in Urdu verse of the annexation by the British of Broach, then an independent principality ruled by Imtiyāz ud-Daulah Mu'azzaz Khān. The work has apparently remained unnoticed by North Indian Urdu scholars so far. Madanī, who was Gujarati, writes about it (*Gujrī masnaviyān*, pp. 122-26). The correct name of the poem, as reported by the poet himself, is *Jang-e ghamgīn* (The sad battle) and not *Qissah-e ghamgīn* as given by Mishra. I am grateful to Professor Sushil Srivastava of the M. S. University of Baroda for bringing Professor Mishra's work to my attention.

literary language in its own right by the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The earliest literary text in Hindī / Hindvī extant in the North is Muḥammad Afzal's *Bikaṭ kahānī* (Dire tale, 1625), a poem of 325 *shī'rs* in the *masnavī* form. Also known as Afzal Gopāl, Muḥammad Afzal was not a Sufi in the strict sense, but he seems to have been the kind of lover that Sufis are believed to be. His actual poem may be earlier, but the only datum we have about the poet is 1625, the year of his death, though it is generally assumed that he completed the poem not long before his death. *Bikaṭ kahānī* is a major work and needs to be examined separately. That it is not strictly a religious poem is not the least interesting thing about it.

The seventeenth century did later see some literary activity in the North, though of generally indifferent quality, most of it folk-religious in character, and almost all of it in the century's last quarter. The fact that this literature is of religious motivation would tend to support the notion that some sort of religious impulse has always been needed as push-starter for Hindī / Hindvī literature. Had the Sufis adopted the northern language for literary production in the fourteenth century, the horizon of Urdu literature in the North would be much farther than where it is today.

Raushan 'Alī wrote his long *Jang nāmah* (Battle chronicle), also called *'Ashūr nāmah* (Tenth-day chronicle), in verse, in 1688-89. Ismā'īl Amrohvī wrote his *masnavī* called *Vafāt nāmah-e bibī fātimah* (Death chronicle of the Lady Fātimah) in 1693-94. Both are poems of folk-religious character. It is interesting to note that Raushan 'Alī's *Jang nāmah* is closely modelled on Miskīn's *Jang nāmah-e muḥammad ḥanīf* (Battle chronicle of Muḥammad Ḥanīf) in Gujrī, the date of which has been determined by Zāhīr ud-Dīn Madanī as 1681.⁵ Coming as it does close on the heels of Miskīn's poem, it is likely that Raushan 'Alī's poem was influenced by Miskīn's. If this is true, it would mean that literary contact of a fairly immediate kind existed between the South and the North in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Miskīn describes his language as

⁵Madanī, *Gujrī masnaviyān*, pp. 25-26.

Gujrī,⁶ while Raushan 'Alī describes his as Hindī / Hindustānī / Hindvī, on different occasions.⁷ The fact that Raushan 'Alī, although a close follower of Miskīn, still calls his language by a different name, would suggest that he considered his tradition different and separate from Gujrī.

Muhammad Afzal is the first secular name in the history of Urdu literature in the North. Barring the folk-religious poems of the last quarter of the seventeenth century, there is nothing between Afzal and the first truly full-time Urdu writer in the North. He is Ja'far Zaṭallī (1659?-1713), and by the time he makes his presence felt, the century is about to flow into the next. The whole of the seventeenth century is spanned between Afzal and Ja'far, but neither's work offers any clues or hints about the great efflorescence that was to take place in Delhi early in the new century, and which was to go on undiminished, through war and strife, civil commotion, political disintegration, and foreign sway, for a hundred and fifty years.

Mas'ūd Ḥasan Rizvī Adīb (1893-1975), the major *marṣiyah* scholar of the century, possessed two nearly identical manuscript anthologies of ancient *marṣiyahs*. Judging from the fact that they were nearly identical, he concluded that the anthology must have existed as a popular book of *marṣiyahs* to be sung or recited on appropriate occasions. The language of the poems is generally very similar to that of *Bikaṭ kahānī*. According to Mas'ūd Ḥasan Rizvī Adīb, one of the manuscripts has the following colophon, in Persian: 'This anthology was finished on Tuesday, 11 Rabī ul-Šānī, in the twentieth regnal year of Muḥammad Shāh Bādshāh Ġhāzī, by the hand of the lowly faqīr Muḥammad Murād'.⁸

The *hijrī* date corresponds to July 18, 1737. Adīb concludes that if the language of these poems is compared with that of Ja'far Zaṭallī (1659?-1713), 'there will be no doubt at all but that these *marṣiyah* writers are prior to Mīr Ja'far, and are

⁶Madanī, *Gujrī maṣnaviyān*, p. 25.

⁷Jalībī, *Tārīkh-e adab-e urdū*, vol. 2, p. 47.

⁸Adīb, *Shumālī hind kī qadīm tarīn urdū nazmeñ*, pp. 17-18.

probably from the second half of the eleventh century *hijrī*, or the seventeenth century CE'.⁹

The poems in the anthology have little artistic merit, but are invaluable to the historian. Adīb may have been somewhat optimistic in placing all the poems early in the second (first?) half of the seventeenth century, but many of them certainly belong there, and are our only transitional links between *Bikaṭ kahānī*, Raushan 'Alī, and the early phase of Ja'far Zaṭallī.

Once we accept the fact that the jumpstart to Urdu literature was provided by the Sufis everywhere in Gujarat and the Deccan, the question naturally presents itself: Why didn't this happen in the North too? I have proposed above that the reason for this seems to be the universal comprehensibility of Persian to the Sufis' audiences in the North. It wouldn't be enough to say that the Sufis didn't adopt this language because it didn't have enough respectability. The Sufis were no respecters of worldly respectability, and who is to say that it was not their literary efforts that gave respectability to the largely plebeian Hindī / Hindvī in Gujarat and the Deccan?

It is quite likely that Persian was generally understood, if not fluently spoken, by vast urban and semi-urban masses in the North by the end of the fourteenth century. Military presence, and commercial and administrative penetration of Persian, must have had much to do with it. Something similar seems to have happened with Portuguese in Calcutta for a short while in the seventeenth century, and with English in Madras from the mid-nineteenth century on. In the early centuries of Hindī / Hindvī, there seems to have been an osmosis of Hindī / Hindvī into Persian on a scale that has not yet been fully appreciated. Doubtless, Persian has contributed liberally to Hindī / Hindvī, but the traffic has not been entirely one way.

Persian's second oldest dictionary, and the first to be prepared in India, is *Farhang-e qavvās*, compiled by Faḫr ud-Dīn Qavvās Ghaznavī in 'Alā ud-Dīn Ḳhaljī's time (1296-

⁹Adīb, *Shumālī hind kī qadīm tarīn urdū nazmeñ*, p. 25. Since the second half of the seventeenth century is more or less co-terminous with Zaṭallī, Adīb probably meant here 'first half', and 'second half' in the text is either a slip of the pen or a typographical error.

1316). It was followed by the *Şihah ul-furus* of Muhammad bin Hindū Shāh in 1327, *Dastūr ul-afāzil* of Hājib-e Khairāt Dihlavī in 1342, *Ādāt ul fuḡalā* of Qāzī Badr ud-Dīn Dihlavī in 1419, *Bahr ul-fazā'il* of Fakhr ud-Dīn bin Muḥammad Balkhī in 1433-34, *Zufān-e goyā* of Badr Ibrāhīm in 1433-34, and *Sharaf nāmah-e muntrī* (1475) of Ibrāhīm Qavvām Fārūqī. There must have been more, but these are the ones that have come down to us. All these dictionaries have one thing in common: they enter many Hindī / Hindvī words as lexical or glossal items. Persian dictionaries of great depth and range continued to be produced in India until well into the nineteenth century. We don't need to go into the details of them here, except to say that most, if not all, of these dictionaries were designed for an Indian readership, but generally expected a high degree of sophistication from their users, especially from the sixteenth century onwards.

Two inferences must, however, be drawn from the widespread Persian lexicographical activity in India in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the fact that these dictionaries contained, one way and another, a great number of Hindī / Hindvī words. First, Hindī / Hindvī was making inroads into Persian in a fairly noticeable manner; and second, these dictionaries were needed because people in large numbers were reading Persian. It is noteworthy that the pace of dictionary production, though not its quality, slackens in India from the second half of the seventeenth century.

It shouldn't be surprising, then, that Persian-Urdu or Urdu-Persian glossaries should be an important early linguistic activity in Hindī / Hindvī in the North. Thus Hakīm Yūsufī (fl.1490-1530) wrote a *qaṣīdah* 'about Hindī words' that glosses a number of Hindī / Hindvī verbs and nouns into Persian. In 1553, Ajay Chand Bhaṭnāgar compiled a fuller verse glossary, on the pattern of *Khāliq bārī*, a verse glossary that is attributed to Khusrau.

The point would therefore make itself that in the North, up to the seventeenth century, most people who were potential producers and consumers of Hindī / Hindvī literature, or who would follow the discourses of the Sufis and other holy people,

knew enough Persian not to need a local language for instruction and delectation. Persian, it would seem, was the local language for most if not all of them. This would also account for the emergence of Reḡhtah, first as a genre, then as the name of the language in which the Reḡhtah text was composed, and then as any poem composed in the language called Reḡhtah.

'Reḡhtah', as we know, means, among other things, 'mixed', and 'the mixture of lime and mortar used for building activity'. Reḡhtah thus became the name for a poem in the language of which either Hindī / Hindvī was added to a Persian template, or Persian was added to a Hindī / Hindvī template. The earliest Urdu poetry in the North, even such a sophisticated poem as *Bikaṭ kahānī*, reveals the Reḡhtah mode in action. *Bikaṭ kahānī* has 325 *shī'rs*; of these, forty-one are directly in Persian; twenty have one line of Urdu and one of Persian; and in another twenty, half of one line is Persian, the other half being Urdu. This kind of mixing is even more prominent in the anthology discovered by Mas'ūd Ḥasan Rizvī Adīb.

Since it is impossible to obtain a sense of this phenomenon of Reḡhtah without actually reading a text, I'll do the next best thing possible: I'll give an analytical description of some samples. From Adīb's anthology, a *maṣnavī* by the poet Ṣalāh contains 99 *shī'rs*. Here is how the first ten *shī'rs* are constructed:

1. First line: Persian. Second line: first three words Persian, then an Urdu verb, then the last two words Persian of a construction not used in Urdu at all.
2. First line: Persian. Second line: first word an Urdu verb, the rest Persian, but such that it could pass for Urdu.
3. First line: Persian. Second line: first three words Persian, then an Urdu verb, then the last two words Persian of a construction not used in Urdu at all.
4. First line: could pass for Urdu because it has an Urdu verb; the rest Persian, but assimilable in Urdu. Second line: the first word a Persian verb, the rest Persian, but assimilable in Urdu.

5. First line: Persian. Second line: the first four words Urdu, followed by a two-word Persian construction not used in Urdu at all.

6. First line: Persian. Second line: Urdu.

7. First line: Persian. Second line: Urdu.

8. First line: a Persian verb followed by an Urdu construction, then the last two words Persian, but assimilable in Urdu. Second line: Persian.

9. First line: Urdu. Second line: Persian, but assimilable in Urdu.

10. First line: Urdu. Second line: Persian.¹⁰

Another sample from Adīb's anthology, a *marṣiyah* by the poet Qurbān 'Alī, consists of 12 *shī'rs*, of which the first four are analyzed here:

1. First line: Persian, but with an Urdu verb. Second line: Persian.

2. The whole *shī'r* Persian.

3. First line: Urdu, but with a Persian construction not assimilable in Urdu. Second line: Urdu.

4. First line: Persian. Second line: Urdu.¹¹

Muḥammad Afzal's famous *Bikaṭ kahāntī* consists of 325 *shī'rs*, of which the first twenty-five are constituted as follows. Those *shī'rs* not mentioned are in 'normal' Urdu.

4. First line: Urdu. Second line: mostly Persian, but assimilable in Urdu with some stretching.

10. First line: Urdu. Second line: Persian, except that the last two words are Urdu.

14. First line: the first four words are Persian, the rest Urdu. Second line: Urdu.

15. First line: Persian except for one Urdu word, artificially Persianised. Second line: Urdu except that the last but one word is Persian, though assimilable in Urdu.

¹⁰Adīb, *Shumālī hind kī qadīm tarīn urdū nazmeñ*, p. 57.

¹¹Adīb, *Shumālī hind kī qadīm tarīn urdū nazmeñ*, p. 125.

16. First line: the first two words are Urdu, the rest Persian. Second line: Persian.

21. First line: a Persian adverb and verb, the rest Urdu. Second line: half Urdu, half Persian.

22. First line: half Persian, half Urdu. Second line: Urdu.

23. First line: Urdu. Second line: Persian.¹²

The popularity of Rekhtah in the North seems to have retarded the growth of Hindī / Hindvī literature. Though not unknown there, Rekhtah never had much of a presence in the South. The reason for Rekhtah's northern popularity seems to be the tilt in the North Indian mind in favour of Persian. The tilt may have been because of snobbery, or because of the immense prestige in that part of the country of *sabk-i hindī* Persian poets. Or maybe both reasons were in operation.

Evidence of the tilt in Persian's favour can be seen in the distinction between 'Rekhtah' and 'ghazal' that was long made in the North. As we have seen, the former was used to denote a poem in a language which was a mixture of Persian and Urdu; later, the term came to be used for the plain 'Hindī / Hindvī' language too. But the important distinction was that Rekhtah, whether in mixed language or plain Hindī / Hindvī, was not considered ghazal, even if it was in the ghazal form. The term 'ghazal' was reserved for the Persian ghazal alone. This distinction is a vital indicator of the nature of Urdu's literary culture in the North, and it is surprising that it has never been examined. The following *shī'r* of Qā'im Chāndpūrī (1722/25-95), made notorious by Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād in his *Āb-e ḥayāt*,¹³ somehow didn't evoke any curiosity among us as to its real meaning:

/Qā'im, it was I
Who gave Rekhtah the manner
Of a Ghazal. Otherwise
It was but a feeble thing

¹²I use the text as established by Sherānī in *Maqālāt-e sherānī*, vol. 2, pp. 104-05.

¹³Āzād, *Āb-e ḥayāt*, p. 98.

In the language of the Deccan/.¹⁴

No one seems to have asked what Qā'im meant by giving Rekhtah 'the manner of the ghazal'. Surely there was a lot of ghazal in both Dakanī and North Indian Hindī / Hindvī before Qā'im Chāndpūrī? He had his own *ustāds*, Saudā (1706-1781) and Dard (1720-1785), right there when he wrote this *shī'r*.¹⁵ It should be obvious that he meant Persian when he said 'ghazal', even if his boast would have been seen as bad taste by his *ustāds*, in the sense that it belittled their own achievement.

The issue is settled beyond doubt by Muṣḥafī. In his eighth *divān*, which would have been compiled around 1820-24, we have the *shī'r*:

/Muṣḥafī, my Rekhtah is
Better than Ghazal--
For what purpose should
One now be
A devotee
Of Khusrau, and Sa'dī?/.¹⁶

While Delhi claims, almost imperialistically, to be the pristine seat of Urdu literature, and this claim colours and affects the literary culture of Urdu in many ways, the fact remains that Delhi began with a bias against Dakanī / Hindvī, and patronised the hybrid genre Rekhtah for a long time, and even named the language Rekhtah (which also means 'poured, scattered, dropped') as if by way of reminder of its lowly origins. Considering this bias, it is not surprising that there is very little Urdu literature in and around Delhi before 1700. The surprising thing is that there is still so much.

In its effort to cancel or nullify its Dakanī / Gujrī-linked past, or as a defence mechanism, Delhi's literary culture

¹⁴Qā'im Chāndpūrī, *Kulliyāt-e qā'im*, vol. 1, p. 215.

¹⁵Qā'im lived from 1724 to 1795. While no exact date for this *shī'r* can be suggested, it is likely that it was composed around 1760, or even earlier; that is, when he was writing his *taẓkirah* (1744-52) and would have been reading some Dakanī poets.

¹⁶Muṣḥafī, *Divān-e muṣḥafī*: The Eighth *Divān*, p. 52.

developed an arrogance and consequent indifference toward non-Delhi literature. It was an attitude that survived well into the twentieth century. Even Delhi literature, if it didn't conform to 'ghazal' standards, was not accommodated in the contemporary or historical canon. No space was allowed to Raushan 'Alī, or Ismā'īl Amrohvī, in the *taẓkirahs* that were compiled by Mīr and Qā'im in 1752 and 1754 respectively.

Mahmūd Sherānī has attributed the Urdu community's indifference to its earlier literary heritage to an undue absorption with things English, causing detriment to our own cultural heritage. He calls this 'an unpardonable indifference', and says that 'the current of English, and English-worship, runs so deep and extensively in us now that we not only keep away from everything of our own country, but also have begun to abhor it'.¹⁷

The truth, however, seems to be that poets like Afzal and Ja'far Zaṭallī suffered neglect, and even contempt, at Delhi's, and Delhi's successors'—the modern critics'—own hands. Very few *taẓkirahs* mention these two poets. None of the modern historians of Urdu literature pay much, if any, attention to Afzal and Ja'far. The former remains practically unknown in academia, and the latter, even if mentioned, is viewed with an air of disapproval and disgust.

Ram Babu Saksena, for instance, who wrote an influential history of Urdu literature in English (1927), doesn't mention Afzal at all, and puts Zaṭallī in a list of 'clowning' poets, and gives no further details.¹⁸ Hāmid Ḥasan Qādirī writes a short and inaccurate paragraph on Afzal; he does give a page or so to Ja'far Zaṭallī, but describes him as essentially a minor, clownish figure.¹⁹ Muhammad Sadiq mentions them not at all. Annemarie Schimmel does not recognise Afzal, but gives some importance to Ja'far Zaṭallī as a social satirist.²⁰ Zaidi discusses

¹⁷Sherānī, *Maqālāt-e sherānī*, vol. 2, pp. 96-97.

¹⁸Saksenā, *Tārīkh-e adab-e urdū*, p. 209. I am here using 'Askari's Urdu translation of the original English text.

¹⁹Qādirī, *Dāstān-e tārikh-e urdū*, pp. 32-33.

²⁰Schimmel, *Classical Urdu Literature*, p. 157.

both, but does so briefly, and seems to have no appreciation of the linguistic or literary importance of the two poets.²¹ Zaidi's, however, is the most extended treatment that I have seen of these poets in an English-language history of Urdu literature. In this day and age of a plethora of dissertations and specialised studies on even minor, local figures, I cannot recall any study dealing with Ja'far Zafallī.²² On Afzal there are two, but both are actually editions of *Bikaṭ kahānī*.²³

One can't but feel grateful to Jamīl Jālibī, and Gyān Chand and Sayyidah Ja'far, whose Urdu histories give adequate space, if not adequate literary-critical attention, to Afzal and Ja'far Zafallī. Jamīl Jālibī likes *Bikaṭ kahānī*, but does not assign it any place in the pantheon of Urdu literature.²⁴ His attitude to Zafallī is essentially the same as that of Annemarie Schimmel. Gyān Chand devotes almost his entire attention to establishing what he determines as the real identity of Afzal, and says almost nothing about his literary value. He writes a small treatise on Zafallī's life and language, says very little on his status as a poet, and is clearly uncomfortable with his 'obscenity'.²⁵

Both Afzal and Zafallī are major poets. Afzal is also the inventor of the *bārah māsah* genre (a kind of 'shepherd's

²¹Zaidi, *A History of Urdu Literature*, pp. 67-68, 119-20.

²²There is just one modern edition of his work, Na'im Ahmad's 1979 edition (Ja'far Zafallī, *Kulliyāt*). It has a rather simplistic preface. It must be said to Na'im Ahmad's credit, though, that he didn't bowdlerise the text.

²³The first is Maḥmūd Sherānī's, included in his *Maqālāt*, vol. 2, p. 95; the paper containing it was first published in 1926. The other was published in 1965 in the journal *Qadīm Urdū*, edited by Mas'ūd Ḥusain Khān, of Osmania University, Hyderabad.

²⁴See Jālibī, *Tārīkh-e adab-e urdū*, vol. 1, pp. 62-67, on Afzal, and vol. 2, part 2, pp. 91-115, on Zafallī.

²⁵See Gyān Chand and Sayyidah Ja'far, *Tārīkh-e adab-e urdū sattarah sau tak*, vol. 5, pp. 10-34 on Afzal; vol. 5, pp. 57-73, on Zafallī.

calendar') in Urdu. The first ever *bārah māsah* was perhaps composed by Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān, and no one except Afzal seems to have taken it up ever since. Afzal's poetry is recognised, though very briefly, by Mīr Ḥasan, who wrote in his *taẓkirah*, completed about 1774-78:

Muḥammad Afzal: *takhallus* Afzal, is of ancient times...hās composed a *bārah māsah* called *Bikaṭ kahānī* about his own state...has half Persian and half Hindī, but popularity is a *donné* of God. [The poem] affects the hearts of the people.²⁶

Mīr Ḥasan's observations have a hint of disapproval, because Afzal wrote in the classic *Rekhtah* mode, which had fallen into disuse (and in fact disrepute) by that time. Mīr Ḥasan's remarks may have actually put potential readers off *Bikaṭ kahānī*. And the poem is not autobiographical, as Mīr Ḥasan assumed. It is a first-person narrative of a lovelorn woman. The poem abounds with lively, colourful imagery, and has the easy flow and controlled passion characteristic of major love poetry.

Ja'far Zafallī was perhaps the greatest Urdu satirist, and that is saying a great deal, considering that Urdu is particularly rich in satire and humour of all kinds. But Zafallī is more than a satirist: he is a lover of words, and of bawdiness and porn (both soft and hard) which he uses as a weapon of satire, and also as a means of expressing his spirits, high or low. He is a master of variety and technique, and a profound student of life and politics.

Ja'far Zafallī is not a 'light-hearted' pornographer in the mode of Šāhib-qirān Dihlavī (fl. 1770's), who mixes erotica and hard porn in his main-line ghazal verse. And his present murky reputation notwithstanding, Zafallī is not at all like Dr. Ashraf 'Uryān (d. 1940?), perhaps the last serious and assiduous (if somewhat tasteless) pornographic poet in Urdu. Both Šāhib-qirān and 'Uryān practice pornography for vulgar

²⁶Mīr Ḥasan, *Taẓkirah-e shu'arā*, p. 41. Mīr Ḥasan gave no name to his *taẓkirah*. Later editors wrongly called it *Taẓkirah-e shu'arā-e urdū*, which creates several false images; I am therefore using the neutral *Taẓkirah-e shu'arā*.

thrills, and for asserting their 'maleness'. By contrast, a great deal of Zaṭallī's porn is his way of venting his searing anger, disapproval, and social or personal rage. Some of his obscenity serves for the expression of his dire straits, mental or financial. Some he uses to let off the steam of his high spirits. The English poet of whom Zaṭallī invariably reminds us is almost his exact contemporary: John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1647-1680). Both Rochester and Zaṭallī have an astonishing grasp of a variety of poetic techniques, and both are serious commentators on contemporary life and politics. Both have a wide-ranging active vocabulary. In his prose, Zaṭallī writes savagely wounding satires on Aurangzeb; and yet in his *Jang nāmāh* (Battle Chronicle) and elegy of Aurangzeb, one can hear the ominous footsteps of the change and decline between which and the Empire there was only the towering wall of Aurangzeb's presence.

Both Afzal and Zaṭallī are important linguistically because they use a language which is fledging itself out of its somewhat tawdry Reḳhtah form, and is on its way to emerging as the nearly perfect medium that it did become within about four decades of Zaṭallī's death. Zaṭallī's vocabulary is larger—and, naturally, much more varied—than that of Afzal. His career marks the major watershed in the history of Urdu literature, and not only in the North. The skills developed over the previous two centuries and more may not all have been available to Zaṭallī, and in any case, there was little by way of humour or satire in Gujrī and Dakanī. Zaṭallī must have learnt from his great Persian predecessors, especially Fauqī Yazadī, an Iranian who spent some time in India during Akbar's reign (1556-1605). Fauqī and Zaṭallī share, among other things, a proclivity for pornography for the sake of fun as much as for the sake of satire and lampoon.

Compared to Gujrī and Dakanī, the language of both Afzal and Zaṭallī sounds less outlandish to modern northern ears. The reason is that it has very little Sanskrit *tatsam*, Telugu, Marathi, or Gujarati in its vocabulary. The Persian component of their language—the effect of Reḳhtah or of direct natural absorption, or both—is familiar enough; so is the Braj and Avadhi component. A good bit of their vocabulary, which was retained by Delhi writers over much of the eighteenth century,

has been lost to mainline (Delhi-Lucknow) Urdu, but it survives in the Urdu spoken in Eastern India, and is also comprehensible to Urdu speakers in the South today.

Saudā has a seventeen-*shī'r* Urdu poem—an elegy on Imām Ḥusain—that he describes as being in a language 'mixed with Dakhani'.²⁷ In fact, the poems of both Saudā and Mīr abound with usages which are Dakanī, that is, usages that we today in our ignorance believe to be specific to the Urdu of the South. Similarly, many usages that mainline Urdu philology has been regarding as specific to Ābrū, Ḥātim, and others, are to be found in seventeenth and eighteenth century Dakanī too. This suggests that except for the strong southern content, the register of 'Hindī' and 'Dakanī' was much the same in the seventeenth century. The language of Delhi changed substantially during 1760-1810, while that of the East and the South remained comparatively immune to change.

Parochialism and a chauvinistic belief in the superiority of their own idiom and usage—both of which became hallmarks of the speakers of the Delhi register of Hindī / Reḳhtah in later years—are nowhere in evidence before the 1750's. In fact, if there was an upper register at that time, it must have been located in the South, and that's why we see Vaj'hī admonishing younger poets in his *Quṭb mushtarī* (1609-10) against using words not sanctioned by the *ustāds* through their own usage.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, the 'Indian style' was the order of the day everywhere in Iran, Turkey, and Indo-Muslim India. The influence of Sanskrit and Braj and Avadhi on Indo-Muslim literary thought had begun more than a century earlier, and had assumed a distinct and strong presence during Akbar's reign. By the 1640's, we have Pañḍitarāja Jagannātha in Dārā Shikoh's and Shāhjahān's courts. Jagannātha's own poetry in Sanskrit is clearly imbued with Persian influences, and most poetry of the Indian style in Persian should find responsive echoes in Sanskrit-trained ears.²⁸

²⁷Saudā, *Kulliyāt*, vol. 1 (Āsī edition), pp. 245-46.

²⁸Prof. Sheldon Pollock has examined the poetry and poetics of Jagannātha in a forthcoming volume containing all the papers generated by the collaborative project which resulted in the present work.

If the prestige and popularity of Persian retarded the growth of Hindī / Reḳhtah literature in the North, the influence and power of the Indian-style Persian poetry nevertheless had salubrious effects on Reḳhtah / Hindī poetry and theory when Reḳhtah / Hindī came into its own in Delhi in the late 1600's. Shāh Mubārak Ābrū (1683/5-1733) is the first major poet in Delhi in the new century. He must have begun writing poetry late in the seventeenth century, and is generally regarded as having adopted *ihām* extremely early in his career. We have seen Khusrāu claiming to be the inventor of a highly elaborate kind of *ihām* in poetry. But the immediate influence on Ābrū seems to have been Sanskrit through Braj Bhāshā and 'Indian-style' Persian poetry. Even Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, who blamed Urdu poetry for being too Iran-oriented, acknowledged that *ihām* must have come into Urdu poetry from the Sanskrit.²⁹

Ābrū, and indeed whoever entered upon the business of poetry in Dakanī / Hindī / Reḳhtah in the early eighteenth century, came under the influence of Valī, and in many ways Valī has been the poet of all Urdu poets since the first decade of the eighteenth century.

²⁹Āzād, *Āb-e hayāt*, p. 99. It should be noted that Ābrū came from Gwalior, an important area in the geography of Braj Bhasha.

