

Dear Faruqisaab,

Hope this mail finds you in the best of your health.

It was a pleasure meeting you last week. The book launch event was riveting as I got to know many nuggets about the book.

Thanks.

I am writing to you with the questions that were left out from the interview. Kindly go through them and answer at the earliest. We plan to publish the interview this week.

My answers are below, in blue.

1. You are known as TS Eliot of Urdu criticism. Have you ever been influenced by Eliot? How do you feel about this comparison?

I don't know that anyone seriously compared me to Eliot. There are similarities, no doubt. For example, both of us wrote criticism as well as poetry. I was a great admirer of Eliot's poetry and criticism when I was young. His criticism struck me very often as brilliant, and sensitive. He was certainly one of my models in my early days in criticism, but not so much as, say, Richards. I still admire Eliot's poetry.

2. Something about your childhood days. About growing up seeing a pre-independent India and then post independence?

This will take more space and time than I can afford at present. I have vivid memories of the happenings related to the Quit India Movement, and later, of the Cabinet Mission and its Plan. Of our great leaders, none of whom I saw or heard at time because we had no radio and we lived in a small town, my memories are confined to what I learned from the newspapers and what I gleaned from the conversations of the grown ups. The memories are sharp even now. No one ever came to Azamgarh where I lived from 1939-1948. My most vivid memory of the bigger names is that of doing a salaam to Maulana Hifzur Rahman the great Jamiat Ulama leader. I can never forget his almost angelic smile and the way he shook hands with me. There was no condescension at all. I was told that he was great orator too, but I never got to hear him. I was too sleepy. (I must have about 9, or 10.)

I remember my maternal grandfather's fighting and winning the 1946 election on a Muslim League ticket from Varanasi. But he didn't go to Pakistan. I liked his gesture in not running away like most of the Muslim League leaders of UP.

My childhood was spent in the shadow of WWII. (I was born in 1935.) Those days were days of great scarcity and hardship for all.

And I remember the arrogance of the English, and even of the 'desi' Christians. More than arrogance, I felt that the English were aloof. They didn't much care that we suffered hugely in the War.

3. Your academic background. Which college did you go to, what subjects did you specialize in etc?

I went to school in Azamgarh (1943-1948), passed my High School from Gorakhpur (1949). In those days we had to study a whole cartload of subjects in High School. I wasn't much good in any subject except English, Urdu, Persian. I was passionately interested in History but not the way it was taught in school. It seemed to ignore the people and concentrate on the rulers. This was particularly galling when we came to the so-called 'English' period of Indian History.

I passed the Intermediate and B.A. examinations from Gorakhpur (1951, 1953). I read no Urdu or Persian because my father wanted me to concentrate on useful and worldly subjects. I obtained my M.A. in English from the University of Allahabad (1955).

4. Do you think criticism has done its duty towards literature during the last few decades? What are the problems?

Over the past score of years, most Urdu criticism seems to me to have deviated from its real task: to make literature accessible, to interpret literature and to help establish healthy norms and canons. Unfortunately, Urdu critics seem to concentrate more on creating hegemonies and spheres of influence.

5. There was a controversy related to plagiarism when your book 'Urdu ka Ibtidai Zamana' was published. It was alleged that you have been lifting material from various articles and presenting them in a new shape under your name. Your comments.

There was no controversy. There was an allegation, clearly motivated, that I had lifted some ideas from Abu Muhammad Sahar, a person whom I knew and greatly respected. Let me quote from my 'Early Urdu Literary Culture and History' (OUP, Delhi, 2001, p. 21):

"Abu Muhammad Sahar briefly anticipates some of the points made by me in the present work. Unfortunately, Sahar's text came to my notice only after I had prepared the final draft of this work." I made the position clearer in the first Indian Urdu edition of this book (New Delhi, Maktaba Jamia, 2001). The first Pakistani Urdu edition came out well before any of the above two.

As a rule, I don't answer allegations against me, especially if they are frivolous. No one was convinced by the allegation anyway. They inserted the allegation into the Wikipedia entry on me. Wikipedia promptly withdrew it when they came to know that the allegation was false, frivolous and motivated. The allegation was then inserted as an entry about me in some other web site. I didn't think it worth a reply.

I am sad to see you bringing this up. I am not sure it was in the best taste. I have written very nearly fifty thousand pages of Urdu and English in more than fifty years of writing life, a life which is not ended yet. A plagiarist couldn't survive that long. *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* was not my first book of literary criticism, and by no means the last either. Why are there no allegations of plagiarism about any other text written by me before, or after this book?

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, July 17, 2013.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards

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