

**Nikhil Kumar**

## **Bright Star, Many Splendours**

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's literary life

In 1966, when Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (SRF) was ideating names for his new Urdu literary magazine, the one that stood out was *Teesha*. '*Teesha*', an axe or adze, has come to be associated with Farhad, the stone-mason lover of the Persian story Khusrau wa Shirin. According to one of the popular versions of the story, Farhad had to cut through a mountain to prove his love for the Armenian princess Shirin, and let flow a river of milk.

At that time, among the Urdu literati, there was talk of a sense of lethargy and even an imminent decline of Urdu literature. The Progressive Writers' Association and its adherents were increasingly becoming a spent force. Conceived in response to the fascist and imperialist colonial regime by Indian intellectuals and writers like Sajjad Zaheer, Mulk Raj Anand and Jyotirmaya Ghosh in London in 1935, the Progressive Writers' Association believed that new literature must deal with the problems of societal existence like hunger, poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation. Some of its leading lights were Ahmed Ali, Premchand, Ismat Chughtai and Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Learning from the Western standards of literature and having lost a sense of their own cultural past, the Progressive idea was to reform Indian literature. In their mind, the idea of poetry as an art, to peruse Seamus Heaney,

became a quest for poetry as a diagram for political action. Other ways of seeing were not considered literature and not encouraged. The process of a cultural discontinuity started in 1857, when the colonizer's narrative was boisterously imposed on local creativity. The colonisers read signs of moral decay and intellectual failure in indigenous literature – a perception that gradually seeped among Indians arising out of self-blame and a lack of self-worth. In due course, Indians—led by Syed Ahmed Khan and his intellectual progenies: Altaf Husain Hali, Mohammed Husain Azad and Shibli Nomani—emerged the strongest denigrators of Indian literature.

Faruqi sahab wanted to attempt something ambitious. With his magazine, he wanted to break through the *koh-i-besutun* in Urdu literature that had been encrusted by the domination of colonial narrative and Progressive prescriptions. The second choice of name that was finally selected and ultimately accepted by the registrar of newspapers was *Shabkhood*—roughly translated as ‘surprise attack by night’. *Shabkhood*'s intervention and SRF's lucubration, in times to come, shook the Urdu world and gave it a new life.

\*\*\*

‘Was it just the burning of the midnight oil, or is he a *Djinn*’, someone asked.

For, can you and I run a great literary magazine for forty years, explicate the development and history of the Urdu language and its subtleties, expound on the conventions of Urdu poetry, the *sabk-e-Hindi*, and the Persian influence, write poems, stories and a novel, then translate them to

English, revive a lost tradition, translate more—drama, poetry and horror stories, compile a dictionary, write criticism, and show the mirror to some of the biggest writers and poets? Mahmood Farooqui, *dastango*, writer, historian, film-maker, and nephew of SRF says: if he were to only have edited *Shabkhood*, he would be considered a great litterateur; if he were to only have written the four-volume study on Mir, *Sher-e Shor angez*, he would be considered one of Urdu's greatest masters; if he were to only have rediscovered and written on the Dastan, he would be considered one of Urdu's greatest servants; if he were to only have written his novel, *Kayi Chand the Sar-e-asman*, he would be considered one of Urdu's greatest prose writers. But what we have is all of these, combined with more writing, poetry-making, criticism and editing, and we do not know how to measure that.

I visited Faruqi sahab in early January of 2019, a week before the Ardh-Kumbh started in the ancient city. Allahabad was wearing a new colour. Some buildings that allegedly encroached upon the narrow roads of the city had been nibbled at by Ajay Singh Bisht's diktats. The old river was nonchalant about washing off the sins of a hundred million who were to descend on the city over the next sixty days. In the garden of SRF's Hastings Road home, a garden umbrella had been arranged; the tender sun of that morning led us to sit in the study though. Meeting Faruqi sahab I felt like Beni Madho Ruswa of *Ghalib Afsana* meeting Mirza Ghalib. Or like the railway engineer of *Lahore Ka Ek Waqya* meeting Allama Iqbal. I possessed nothing that made me worthy of having a conversation with Faruqi sahab. But he took care not to make me feel that our meeting was a waste of his time.

Nor did he broach a subject that would make me aware of my own ignorance. The long interviews over two days tired him, but he always responded in detail and with the empathy that only a great man like him can possess. The following is borne out of that conversation and the conversations I have had with his books and those who know him well.

\*\*\*

The Faruqis trace their lineage to the second Caliph of Islam, Umar Farooq. One of the elder sons, among several children of Umar Farooq, was Abdulla ibn Umar—a man of great learning and piety. His descendants travelled and some among them came to India. The paternal ancestors of SRF settled in Koriapar village of Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh, which was established in Firoz Tughlaq's period. On the mother's side, his ancestors came from Khurasan. First settling in Kantit near Mirzapur, which was a powerful locus of Sufis, they later moved to Banaras. Nasiruddin Mahmud Chiragh Dehlavi, disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya and a prominent Sufi, was an ancestor of SRF's mother. Not given much to power and worldly gain, the Faruqis have had only one dynasty of rulers—Faruqis of Asirgarh, Burhanpur—but several Sufis.

SRF's paternal grandfather was a teacher and retired as a headmaster from Normal School in Gorakhpur, where Premchand had also studied. He was associated with three leading Sufis of his time: Shah Fazl-e-Rahman Ganj Muradabadi, Ashraf Ali Thanawi of Muzaffarnagar and saint and poet Shah Abdul Salim Aasi Sikandarpuri of Ballia. SRF's maternal grandfather was also a pupil of Ganj

Muradabadi's. While the paternal side remained confined to clerical jobs and leaned towards religion, the maternal relatives were more educated and became academics and scholars. Two prominent learned people of their time from the maternal side were: Maulavi Khadim Husain Nazim and a great grandfather's cousin, who was the *ustad* of Mohammad Badshah. Badshah compiled a seven-volume dictionary of Persian called *Fahrang-e Anand Raj* (the dictionary of Anand Raj) and named after the Maharaja of Vijaynagram, Anand Gajapati Raj, where he was serving as the *mir munshi* or the chief secretary. Maulavi Khadim Husain Nazim was a poet and SRF's maternal grandfather's great grandfather. He appears as the narrator Beni Madho Ruswa's *ustad* in Faruqi's first short story, *Ghalib Afsana* (translated as 'Bright Star, Lone Splendor' in *The Sun That Rose from the Earth*).

The family's connection with illustrious Sufis and luminaries fostered an environment of books and learning at both his paternal and maternal homes, that Faruqi sahab sensed and picked up. The first four years of his life were spent in Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh, where he was born in September 1935. Later, his father, a school inspector, was transferred to Azamgarh. Faruqi sahab started school there, in 1943. Although he was eight years old, he began in the fifth standard, and gauged, from the furtive whispers of other students, that he was too young for the class. Looking back seventy-five years to that time, Faruqi sahab feels he was 'a little exceptional', even though he didn't feel or know it at that time. Reading and literature was in the air and he had become interested in them even before he joined school. In

the initial days, he studied under a home tutor, whom he hated. Remembering those days of Azamgarh, Faruqi sahab says:

My father—since we were not a lot of people—could pay more attention to us. He used to give us books to read, teach us poetry and also poems of Iqbal. Then the time of scarcity arrived; the war began. Gradually, things started to lessen. I remember my father used to have a camel to go for inspection of schools and used to load his luggage on it (tents, etc.). He also had a *tonga* for office. By 1941, there was neither the *tonga*, nor the camel. Then, members of family increased and so did the war-induced inflation.

Around this time, at the age of six, Faruqi sahab started writing poetry: some imitative, some lacking in metre and some in need of corrections. He recalled that his father once came across his poetry and scolded him for writing ‘bogus, metre-less verses’. A similar incident occurs in *Ghalib Afsana* where Beni Madho Ruswa is reprimanded for writing poetry, but is saved by his grandfather. Faruqi sahab remembers writing an anguished metrical *misra* about his parents being too strict with him: *Maloom kya kisi ko mera haal-e zaar hai* (Does anyone understand the state of my grief?). Writing in his book devoted to questions of modern literary and critical theory of poetry, *Tanqidi Afqar* (Critical Thoughts) in 1982, for which he won the Sahitya Akademi award, SRF’s first proposition was ‘metrical is superior to unmetrical’ and ‘because poems are metrical they are superior to prose’. The sense of metre, though, came to Faruqi sahab long after he had begun writing poetry. One, he

says, because the household did not have any music or singing, since being Deobandi Muslims, even the *Milad sharif* (songs sung in the praise of the Prophet)—common in other households—were not sung at his. Second, Urdu poetry has a considerably rigid metre; many, who do have its sense, have it from the beginning.

Poetry, at one time, was an activity that was started young. Nawab Mirza Khan Daagh Dehlavi (1831–1905), for example, is shown in SRF’s *Kayi Chand the Sar-e Asman* (translated as *The Mirror of Beauty*), as having taken up composing poetry even before he had turned ten. Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797–1869) had written a large portion of his most popular verses today, before he was nineteen. In a lecture delivered at the Thunchan Festival held in Tirur, Kerala, Faruqi sahab rued:

There was a time, and it’s not too far away behind us, when the appreciation of poetry, of deriving enjoyment from the use of words, of creating inner and outer worlds which would hold meaning for more than a moment, was a necessary activity. It was something that we all did: we lived our language, we loved to read and make poetry in it.

Then a break occurred. Parents at home started discouraging poetry writing, and even reading. Today, almost no household encourages poetry writing. The signs of the break had started showing even when Faruqi sahab was a child. He blames the British for sowing its foundations: ‘The famous minute of Macaulay of 1835, actually has two things, the second of which is not much read. First that Indians should

receive education which is of some use to the white masters. Second that the local schools —the *madarsa* and *pathshala*—must be closed.’ The study of Sanskrit and Persian and Urdu, which was of no use to the British, was stopped. Additionally, the practice of children being paid a stipend for coming to school up until then was turned on its head, and a fee started being levied for education. ‘The system of stipend in schools was started in the eighth–ninth century in Baghdad’, Faruqi sahab informs us,

Which was provided in addition to food and lodging for the poor students. Education was valuable then. In fact it was a duty, as Prophet had said: even if you had to travel to China (the remotest place in their imagination then) for getting education, you must. It might be possible that there was a lot of mobility among the people because of that. Scholars from faraway lands came to India. Within India, as well, travel took place from Deccan to Delhi, or to Thatta, and then later to Calcutta.

The long-term effect of Macaulay’s economic and mercantile ambition was the throttling of the cultural exchange and mutation of the purpose of education. Then, the rupture of 1857 altered the culture of poetry and poetry writing. By the time Faruqi sahab was born, poetry was still par for the course; it had been devalued, but not entirely deterred. It now needed to have some purpose—of religion, of society, or later of rebellion. At SRF’s house, poetry writing was not especially encouraged, as it was not seen as a means of earning livelihood. Allama Iqbal’s poetry was seen as virtuous by SRF’s father, as ‘it was read as good for Muslims



and addressed to them as well as to all Indians'. Faruqi sahab has shown in his work on Iqbal that Iqbal is, in fact, addressing the entire third world through his writings, a concept which did not exist in that period. Akbar Allahabadi was the only other poet who had a sense of the third world. Apart from Iqbal, religious and some superior poetry had retained its appeal. 'Hafeez Jalandhari's *Shahnama-e Islam*—prophet's biography in verse written in several volumes—was not great poetry, but was very popular and one or two volumes of it were in every household." The difference was that becoming a poet had started being looked down upon.

You had to be a professional man and earning a livelihood was more important than anything else. Education, per se, or by itself meant nothing. Education must be obtained for the purpose of getting employment or becoming useful in order to have a good life. Poetry had started being considered a mind-retarding activity because it did not educate or got you employment."

Among SRF's childhood friends and relatives few had a cursory interest in poetry and fewer still pursued higher studies. Their ambition was to take a degree and get into the railway, police or other government services. 'There were a couple of older cousins who did acquire a master's degree. One of them wrote a novel too, which I have, but they didn't really gain any distinction.' Some of these friends and relatives did not even attempt the civil services exam, as Faruqi sahab later did. 'Although it would have been easy,'

Faruqi sahab says, ‘Muslims had reservations in the ICS then.’ In their village, he says tongue firmly in cheek:

‘there are three distinctive features of us all: one that we are all good looking, second that we are all very honest in personal life as well as in our work, and third that *hum samajhte apne aap ko bahut kuch hain* (we think highly of ourselves). I had an older cousin who was a beautiful man, as was his father, who had died before I was born. He had studied in Aligarh and was known there as Abdullah Jaan because of his beauty. He played sports, did horse riding, played hockey very well, did everything that a man at that time was supposed to do. This cousin had written a novel, but I never considered him an idol. Maybe I had some *tedh* (crookedness) in me, or maybe because he was not Krishan Chander or Rajinder Singh Bedi or Manto.

For his interest in literature and writing, Faruqi sahab was teased and nicknamed ‘philosopher’ by his father. Yet, he continued to write and read, but put his ambitions of getting published on the backburner.

In the beginning, I used to read novels in hiding, like my father. The first novel I ever read was *Shamim*, followed by *Anwar*, both by Munshi Fayyaz Ali. By the time we came to Gorakhpur in 1949, I was reading voraciously; be it serious, historical or crime fiction or horror, thriller novels. Thanks to Munshi Tirathram Firozपुरi, may god grant him place in heaven; he translated a lot from English to Urdu, especially

thrillers. It was like *halwa* to us, *jitna mil jaye utna kha jao* (eat as much as you get).

In Azamgarh, below SRF's house was a book-binder's shop. Late in the afternoon, after coming back from school, Faruqi sahab would sit and read whatever books arrived at the binder's: 'whether it went into my head or not, I would read it without fail'. In effect, it became a process of absorption. When Faruqi sahab reached High school, he had got the sense of reading English. The first English novel he read, whose name he does not remember properly, was a crime story, and was probably called 'The Purple Claw', in which the murderer had a purple birthmark. We get more sense of his adolescent reading from his 2014 short story *Qabz-e Zaman* (translated as 'Timecompression' in *The Sun that Rose from the Earth*). The narrator reminisces: "When I grew up, my taste for terror or horror or ghost stories also grew, to the dimensions of almost irresistible habit. This weakness for thrilling books remains to this day." Faruqi sahab also read Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, which, when he first read it, he 'didn't grasp fully, especially the subtleties of its satire'. Apart from Austen, Faruqi sahab was enthralled by Thomas Hardy. In an interview given to *The News on Sunday*, he recalled:

When I was in high school, I had started reading Thomas Hardy. I remember how passionate I was to bring his books home, marvel at their volume when my heart would sink at the thought of reading them. Yet, when I finished reading them, I would wish they had been even longer. There was no philosophy and no agenda behind reading, just plain passion. The idea

was to fill your heart with as much reading as you can, and of course write.

When I met him recently, Faruqi sahab was again reading Hardy on his reading device—Kindle—gifted by his granddaughter, but he finds him unreadable now because of the world he represents: ‘There was a time when Hardy’s view of life stuck with me for a long time. Now it seems somewhat simplistic to me.’

Reading has had a sun-like presence in SRF’s life. Cousins remember him reading while walking on the way to school as either friends or brothers flanked him for his safety. Thankfully not too many cars plied on the roads then. SRF’s elder daughter Mehr Afshan Farooqi, Associate Professor at University of Virginia, has observed his ‘extraordinary, deeply engrossed reading. He had a book open while eating dinner or drinking tea’. In the acknowledgments section of his book on Intizar Husain, Mahmood Farooqui writes of SRF:

It is rare even for the finest scholars to have read everything worth reading in a language, past and present. Yet it is my observation that he has read everything worth reading that was ever written in Urdu (across disciplines) and most of it in English, Persian and probably Arabic, besides.<sup>i</sup>

After schooling in Azamgarh and Gorakhpur, where he studied the sciences, arithmetic, English, Urdu and Persian (until High school), Faruqi sahab took admission in Maharana Pratap College in its first batch for Bachelor of Arts. Although he was supposed to go to St Andrews, the

older college of the city, where his father had also studied, he didn't, as his father wanted him to study Geography apart from English and St Andrews didn't offer Geography. In those three years, SRF expanded his obsessive reading to subjects like psychology and philosophy. He joined Allahabad University for a master's in English in 1953. The University was in its prime then and still had its two legendary English teachers—Satish Chandra Deb and Phiroze E. Dastoor.

In an interview given to *Hindustan Times* in 2006, Faruqi sahab fondly remembered his alma mater and his teachers.

I cannot remember knowing or meeting anyone even half as learned as Professor SC Deb. He had an answer to any question about European literature. Apart from English he knew many other languages, including French, Italian, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and Persian. Prof. Deb's memory was absolutely stunning. He remembered an astonishing amount of English poetry and drama by heart and could even cite the act number, the scene number and the line number if he was quoting from a play.

About Dastoor, he said

I submitted two of my papers to Dr. Dastoor when I was in MA Part-I, believing that I had done a good job. When he returned the papers to me after a few days, I was chagrined and disappointed to see that each line bore corrections. I went to his home on Elgin Road on one Sunday to understand why my text had merited such copious corrections. True gentleman and kind

teacher that he was, he sat down with me for two hours and went over each and every correction and explained to me why the corrections had been necessary. It was an eye-opening experience for me to see what exactly good English meant.

Recalling I. A. Richards's (who later became a great influence on Faruqi sahab) visit to the University for a lecture on a poem of P. B. Shelley's, in reference to Dr Dastoor, he said:

The lecture was held in the History Department's large lecture theatre which was overflowing with the audience keen to hear the legendary Richards. After the lecture Dr Dastoor rose to give thanks and said 'it was an extremely enlightening lecture. I am now dying to go back home and read my Shelly again.' We all laughed and applauded the most generous of tributes from one great teacher to another.

SRF's last MA final class was a memorable one. A newly arrived Cambridge and Allahabad University alumnus Dr Harivansh Rai Bachchan

came to teach us and we mustered courage to tell him that we wanted to relax by listening to his poems. He obliged us and recited many couplets from *Madhushala*. He had a very sweet, enchanting and thrilling voice. I can never forget it and it is still in my most brilliant memories.

Today, Faruqi sahab is less forgiving towards the University. The English department, unlike that of today, was highly

elitist, as the moniker ‘Oxford of the East’ suggested. Faruqi sahab topped the university yet did not receive first class grades. Probably because, as he says,

my tongue was fast, and I questioned a lot. Everybody knew that I was a good student yet I ended up with 59 per cent marks. In viva examination, usually good students received good marks—at least 70–80 over hundred—but I did not get them in both years of MA in Allahabad University.

Or probably because he did not dress with care. In university years, Faruqi sahab used to wear coloured *kurta pyjamas*, and not the three-piece suits that were preferred equally by the students and professors then. Or probably because, ‘Deb sahab was not *meherban* [towards him in his collegiate years]’—, Faruqi sahab demurring, trailed off.

Despite his dressing sense or because of it, Faruqi sahab managed to fall in love with the best-dressed woman in the University—Jamila Hashmi. Fifty years later, in an interview to Mayank Austen Soofi, Faruqi sahab recalled:

Jamila’s sense of dressing was a kind of byword among the college-going women in Allahabad. She favoured short kurtas with the gharara style of pyjamas. Decades later, a distinguished woman poet in Hyderabad asked me about my wife. Referring to her maiden name, she said, ‘Does Miss Hashmi still dress so well?’

Love, he thought, would rescue him, as he like Macbeth felt ‘cabin’d, cribb’d, confined’ at home. On 26 December 1955,

almost immediately after completing his master's degree, SRF married Jamila Hashmi. He had intended to teach, and pursue further studies, at Allahabad University, but despite four teaching vacancies and his top marks, he could not get through, while his classmates did. For PhD, he had chosen the subject 'English symbolism, and the influence of French'. He was assigned to be supervised by Dr Harivansh Rai Bachchan, who had done his thesis on W.B. Yeats and was known to be a modernist. 'I was, as I was before, careless,' SRF recalled. 'He asked me to come meet him one day in the department to discuss the topic. I couldn't go as it was pouring. The following day when I went, he came down heavily on me. So, I left. I did not know how to get scolded.'

Post the disappointment at Allahabad, Faruqi sahab went to Aligarh, where there was a chance of lectureship, but even that did not turn out well. Shortly afterwards, Faruqi sahab began teaching at Satish Chandra college of Ballia, where he taught for a little less than a year, before moving to teach English literature at Shibli College in Azamgarh for two years. It was here that his friend and colleague Dr Hafiz Siddiqi, who later went to the National Defence Academy in Khadakwasla, recommended he apply for the civil services. 'Although I was not keen on the civil services he insisted that I fill the extra application form he had acquired.' Faruqi sahab passed the examination and joined the postal services in 1958–59. Naimur Rahman Farooqi, younger brother of Faruqi sahab and former Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University, remembers that period, as one of his earliest memories: 'When he got into the civil service, he was the first in my family to do so. I was very young at that time but



I distinctly remember how proud and pleased we all were.’ While working in the postal services, SRF began learning French, for a Universal Postal Union Conference that was to be held in Delhi. Although his classes were aborted once the Chinese war of 1962 started, he did not stop learning the language at home later. It came in handy when he read Baudelaire or translated poems for *Shabkhoon*.

\*\*\*

Before *Shabkhoon* began, SRF ran another magazine, albeit circulated within the household. The rag, compiled out of pages from old notebooks, started in 1944, when the young editor was in class 8. ‘I was very interested in coming up with stories, and narrating those to younger siblings and cousins,’ he told me. His elder sister, Zohra, who had a penchant for reading and writing, and he would together contribute poems, essays and stories for the compilation. Laughing heartily—he rarely misses an opportunity to laugh at himself—he added, ‘The magazine had a very original name—*Gulistan*’, meaning a rose garden and the name of a very well-known book by Saadi. In the same breath he added how conscious he was even at that time:

I had ideas about Hitler and wrote in the magazine that ‘he is a bad and cruel guy, although Subhash Chandra Bose meets him occasionally’. From some newspaper or magazine, I had cut out a picture of Hitler and pasted it in the magazine and given it a caption: ‘Hitler, *duniya ki khaufnaktareen hasti*’ (world’s most horrific personality). I was probably reading English propaganda about Hitler.

The magazine ran intermittently, until the family moved to Gorakhpur. It whetted SRF's appetite for writing, a temperament for which, he thinks, he always had. Beginning with short stories, the first one of which was published in 1949, Faruqi sahab went on to write poetry, criticism, fiction and essays. 'I used to wait for rejection slips from editors; at least one got to know that our post had reached,' he said recalling that magazines of the time rarely bothered to answer letters. The first time Faruqi sahab realised his story had been published was when his mother sent him to buy something at a *kirana* store and, fortuitously, the shopkeeper gave the article wrapped in a paper that had his story printed on it.

One of his stories, written first in Urdu, was later translated into English and published in the Allahabad University magazine. It came in for high praise and one of the professors said: 'It seemed to have come from the pen of a master story writer.' Later, around 1950–51, Faruqi sahab managed to get his first novel serialized in *Meyar*, a magazine published from Meerut. Except a friend who might have preserved a copy, *Daldal se Bahar* (Out of the Quagmire) is no longer available. It was a first-person account of a protagonist who falls in love, only to realise he is meant for greater things. Today, Faruqi sahab disowns it, embarrassed by its puerility, its intent to show the 'reality of life', an uncompromising 'moral' view of the world and all-knowing smugness. 'I know all the answers in that novel, I know what sin is, and what is redemption; how life should be led in a city. Everything I knew at that time I had poured in it.' He is thankful that it is lost, even if it existed he would have

withdrawn it as his novel. He is also happy that no poems from that era survive, for they were ‘even more unprepossessing than the fiction’. At this time though, apart from writing Urdu poetry, Faruqi sahab was also writing poetry in English, which, he admits, was praised and enjoyed. He wrote a few essays on modernism, in imitation of T. S. Eliot, which were not published. What is remarkable is, despite having grown up in such a traditional environment, he was very interested in modernism and modern writing, which he says owed to his reading of Eliot, Yeats and others.

Not all who read voraciously read literary criticism. But a master’s in literature requires the understanding of its tools and how they are employed. SRF’s time in Allahabad University and his later pedagogical experience led him to read not only English criticism but also Urdu. He immersed himself in the language of his poetic forebears realising if he had ‘to do anything, it must be done in Urdu’. One reason was the underwhelming state of Urdu criticism that overflowed with generalities: ‘Critics did not talk of specifics, and did not distinguish between two writings. For example, they said Mir is Mir, and Ghalib, Ghalib. Neither did it help Mir, nor Ghalib, nor me.’ Faruqi sahab was looking for clarity and an elucidation that could conjure for the reader the fundamentals of Urdu writing. Criticism, he thought, should be able to enlighten and not obfuscate. He probed deeper, and began reading with the lens of differentiating.

His first criticism writing was on Ghalib, but the piece was not published. Then he wrote on literary theory. Articles in

this strain appeared first in *Saba*, a Hyderabad based magazine brought out by poet Sulaiman Arib.

He was an open-minded, large-hearted person and was a good poet considering those times. His magazine—like most Urdu magazines of the time—was highly impoverished. It was published only if ads came in. There, I sent a couple of essays on literary theory. In 1965, I wrote an essay on T.S. Eliot, when he died, and titled it Part 1. Later he asked me to write the part 2, which amounted to about thirty pages. He also published some poems of mine.

*Jamia*, a magazine published by Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), printed SRF's essays on Ghalib. Some articles on Iqbal and Ghalib were printed in another AMU magazine.

The publishing industry was disappointing, Faruqi sahab says, as most publications were callous with submissions. Around 1963, while posted in Allahabad, SRF used to attend a Thursday Club gathering organised by Dr Ejaz Husain—former head of department of Urdu at Allahabad University, a Progressive, and a prominent personality in Urdu circles—where aspiring writers would read and discuss new works. Once, during an argument, Faruqi sahab held forth and was encouraged to write, but his long essay on fiction was misplaced by the magazine he sent it to. He had similar experiences with popular magazines, such as the government-run *Ajkal*. By this time, he had begun thinking about starting his own magazine. 'Sulaiman Arib was promoting a number of Hyderabad writers. Allahabad did not have any less.' Faruqi sahab wanted to bring out a modern

magazine which could stand its ground in front of the Progressive onslaught. The model of *Encounter* magazine was in his mind, where the discussion was paramount and not politics; which had good-quality paper; and letters to editors were not ignored. ‘Much later we learnt that *Encounter* was funded by the CIA, though at that time it had a lot of respect.’

*Shabkhood* was started with the ‘moral and monetary support’ of his wife, Jamila, who came from a well-to-do family and was the principal of Kidwai Memorial Girls’ Inter College, an institution she and her father had set up in 1954. In the interview to Soofi, Faruqi sahab keenly appreciated his wife’s support:

What I cannot forget is that my wife wholeheartedly supported my magazine *Shabkhood*, which provided a forum for me and others like me who felt stifled under the Progressives. Without Jamila, there would have been no *Shabkhood* and without *Shabkhood* my struggle to become a writer of my kind would never have ended.

Like its founder and funder, the magazine proved to be fiercely independent. The first issue, dated June 1966, came out in April. Dr Ejaz Hussain was the first editor:

Only in name though. I didn’t think at that time that if we had a stance against the Progressives, that it would become a terror for them. That it would become a stigma to be called *Shabkhood* writers or modern writers. After a few months, I removed Ejaz sahab’s name as editor, as it must have been embarrassing for him. He was a Progressive after all. Then, I named

Jamila the editor, although I was doing most of the work on it.

*Shabkhood* was a sensation from the very beginning, and caused an uproar. The Progressives did not encourage new authors to choose their own themes, and the insistence on writing about what Faruqi sahab called an ‘image of hope, of the revolution to come’ was losing relevance a decade after Independence. With *Shabkhood*, he tried to give space to writers who did not fit the Progressive model of writing—based on Premchand’s—which, he thought, had become monotonous and compartmentalised. Experimental fiction, fiction that broke the mould was encouraged in *Shabkhood*, as were new and Allahabad writers. Urdu had a large number of modern writers who were ‘neither talked about nor published in magazines. Some were published in Pakistan, but not here.’ Faruqi sahab believed that everyone must be allowed to survive in ‘literature’s many houses, many mansions’. And that ‘experimentation was the key of progress for literature’. SRF’s daughter Mehr Afshan, as a young reader, though, was not a fan of the modernist Urdu fiction published in *Shabkhood*, ‘perhaps because I was too young to understand or enjoy the heavy symbolism’. Despite criticism, the magazine continued to print fiction and poetry that were unacceptable elsewhere.

I was criticized a lot. They also called me an agent of the CIA and American minded and a person with borrowed ideas. But it became so popular that many who were on the fence, or even the Progressives were later published in my magazine; sometimes through their own submission and sometimes at my request.

For example Ali Sardar Jafri sent his poem or Ismat Chughtai sent something or Rajinder Singh Bedi sent some story. It became a kind of revolution and a rebellion at the same time.

C.M. Naim, Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, concurs:

Its pages were open to everyone, and it was not tied to any organized literary movement as was the case with its important contemporary *Kitab* published from Lucknow. The latter declared itself to be a Progressive journal, though not the official journal of the Progressive Writers Association. *Shabkhood* was not a 'non-progressive' or 'reactionary' journal in any sense. It no doubt allowed for formal experimentations of every kind but its politics was the same as *Kitab's*, though the latter might not have agreed. But that's the problem for the Progressives to resolve.<sup>ii</sup>

It had been decided early on that *Shabkhood* would be more than a highbrow literary magazine, for which Faruqi sahab ensured that there were articles, stories and poems of general public interest. He had come across Krafft-Ebing's famous book *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which along with Havelock Ellis's *Psychology of Sex* were, at that time, two acknowledged classics in the study of sex, sexual diseases and human psychology as it affects sex and vice versa. As an advanced subject, it was new in Urdu and was seen as interesting for the public. Faruqi sahab translated and published it in a few instalments. He also translated poetry, drama and prose for the magazine. Some poets who appeared

in translation were Ted Hughes and George Macbeth, as well as French, Chinese, Persian, and Sanskrit poems. Translated fiction published in *Shabkhood* was mostly horror, thriller or ghost stories.

I used different names to publish them—Javed Jabil for fiction, Jamila, my wife's name for poems, and criticism, reviews and some poetry under my own name. I did not want to give the impression that the only person who writes in *Shabkhood* is Faruqi, and also to give some variety to the list of contents.

For Russian translations, *Shabkhood* had Ameena, who was a dancer, and for Chinese, Faruqi sahab had found a student from JNU. Criticism from other languages was also translated and published in the magazine. *Shabkhood* also gave adequate space to letters from readers. C.M. Naim says

Being a monthly, it continued the great tradition of letters from the readers. In its case, it was often those pages that people first turned to. (Though in its later decades, those pages became infested with personal feuds.) But these exchanges were often very informative and inspiring to younger readers. *Shabkhood* put before its readers not only the finest products of the new writers but also helped that audience appreciate the same in an informed manner.

*Shabkhood* was edited with great care, C.M. Naim further adds, and it introduced several fine writers.

I also believe Faruqi often spent a lot of time interacting with a writer concerning a submission



before publishing it, doing what a proper editor does. It was the high quality of the publication and not just Faruqi's personal contacts that made writers in both Pakistan and India eager to publish in *Shabkhood*.

In fact, Intizar Hussain and Enver Sajjad have written that in India it was because of *Shabkhood* that they came to be known. In its last issue, *Shabkhood* listed the writers that were published in it and the number of times they appeared in its pages. 'In the first two years of *Shabkhood*, I didn't allow any Pakistani writer to be published,' Faruqi sahab said with a chuckle, 'because Urdu poets in India used to be very proud of being published in Pakistan. So I wanted poets from there to ask to be published in *Shabkhood*.' Soon, the word spread and *Shabkhood* became popular across the border and writers started to send their submissions. Initially, they were rejected and only Muhammad Hasan Askari, the great writer and critic, was published, as 'he was from Allahabad University, and was one of us'. Once, the statement had been made, Faruqi sahab started publishing everyone: from Ahmad Mushtaq to Zafar Iqbal, from Mohammed Alvi to Ameer Hanfi, from Adil Mansuri to Salim Ahmad. When Faruqi sahab wrote to Balraj Komal, a great poet of his time, asking for his poems, the latter was taken by surprise, as he had never been published in India before. Young writers like Ahmad Mahfooz, who now teaches at Jamia Millia Islamia, were also published in later years.

Above all, Faruqi sahab got a chance and space to write. At the time *Shabkhood* began, as compared to his reading, his writing was minuscule. *Shabkhood* became his crucible for questioning, analysing, distinguishing, foregrounding the

paramountcy of language, and ultimately rescuing from the abyss some of what was lost. His effort was to rediscover and ‘if on rediscovery I were to find that it was not relevant, I would have said so. For someone who enjoys creative writing if our own literary past is not valid then why is Chaucer or Euripides valid?’ His fidelity to the pre-eminence of classical form of prosody was consummated on the pages of the magazine, coming as a bequeathal from Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot that ‘all ages are contemporaneous’. The magazine testified to Faruqi sahab’s belief that what was before, is also relevant and valid; that, without understanding the past, one cannot understand the present. Faruqi sahab would later write:

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. Poetry was conceived as an activity that was just there, like air, and needed no aetiology. 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.

In 1940, Kalimuddin Ahmed, a professor of English and an important man of letters wrote *Urdu shayari pe ek nazar* (A Glance at Urdu poetry) in which he condemned the form of the *ghazal*. Calling it semi-barbaric, for every *she’r* was different and ideas didn’t have a beginning or an end, he suggested such a form of art hampered intellectual growth. It was an unwarranted attack on the Urdu *ghazal*, and by that time, Faruqi sahab says ‘the defenders of it were all dead.

There was no Iqbal, nor Akbar Allahabadi'. The response, therefore, was not proper:

Someone wrote, while all *she'rs* are different, there is one mood to it. This could have only been said by someone who had not read the *ghazal*. For Firaq Gorakhpuri, *ghazal* was a series of climaxes—which is also not true. It has to be either something more, or less than that.

SRF's ire against the critics of the time was the silence surrounding Kalimuddin Ahmed's basis of writing what he did. When *Shabkhoon* started, Kalimuddin Ahmed was alive and Faruqi sahab questioned him in its pages: 'Why should *ghazal* be pitted against an English poem? Is the formula given by English poetry, the only poetry? If you complain that Ghalib did not write a sonnet, my complaint with Wordsworth is why did he not write a *ghazal*.' Essentially, SRF's argument was following Muhammad Hasan Askari's maxim that every culture has the right to form its own artistic standards and norms. Later Faruqi sahab wrote extensively on the *ghazal*, that is also available in English. His path-breaking essays 'The Expression of the Indian Mind in Urdu Ghazal', and 'Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the Eighteenth Century', discuss in detail the *ghazal* form among other subjects.

The windfall of the criticism in *Shabkhoon* was heaved on the Progressives for their rigid teaching and tenuous understanding of literature. Book reviewing—that was full of cronyism then, and still is—was bold in *Shabkhoon*. SRF wrote copiously, especially criticizing the Progressives for their 'bad poetry'. Tailing the colonial compradors, such as

Hali, Shibli and Azad, the Progressives were writing with the agenda of showing a mirror to society. They believed that pre-1857 poetry was a reflection of a decay in Indian society. Much of their lack of understanding of our literary culture, or its disavowal, was owed to the discontinuity rendered by the British-led post-Uprising massacre. Faruqi sahab was the first to point to the commonalities between the colonial masters and the Progressives, and also to the deeper theoretical and political implications of the legacy of the colonial definition of our culture that was followed by the Progressives. The first stand, therefore, of Faruqi sahab was anti-colonial, rather than anti-Progressives, as was generally believed. What troubled Faruqi sahab most was the attempt to constrict the creative field, which was, ultimately, attenuating the language.

‘Among the poets, Sahir was my hero, so were Jazbi and Faiz, but I grew out of them. They were so childish in their world-view, and so limited in the creation of their poetry that I had to grow out. They have very limited meanings. There is no questioning. The only appealing thing about Faiz’s poems is that there is an emotional environment, but if you analyse, there are many things that make his poetry very poor. Rarely is there a poem by Faiz, which can be said to be the perfect poem or near perfect poem. He has some favourite words; he uses them and makes poetry, whether they fit or don’t.

In comparison the primary concern of the older poets like Mir and Ghalib was to renew and refashion the language, thereby demonstrating and realizing its potential. Asif Farrukhi,

physician, writer and long-time reader of *Shabkhood* based in Pakistan feels, while he read the Progressives and especially Faiz all his life, the arguments put forth by Faruqi sahab were built in a very well argued manner. ‘His judgments on Faiz and others were hard hitting, but they were very logical. It brings out the fact that Noon Meem Rashid is as important a poet, as perhaps Faiz is. His process of evaluation was on the dot and criticism in Urdu was ultimately the gainer.’<sup>iii</sup>

In an interview given to his old friend and poet Prem Kumar Nazar, Faruqi sahab explained his approach to looking at a literary text:

First and foremost, one needs a thorough knowledge of the language; equally important, one must have an intuitive grasp of meanings, and potential for meanings, in a textual situation. Then there is the paramount necessity of having a full or nearly full knowledge of poetics, the cultural assumptions, and the world view that informs a given text. It is not enough to know only that particular text intimately: one must also know numerous other texts of the same type, by the same author, and other authors.... [The critic or the reader also must know the] literary culture that produced the work in question, its expectations, what is understood by the term ‘poetry’, how it relates its past to its present. Poems are made on, and by, and through, other poems. This is particularly true of classical Sanskrit, Perso-Arabic, and Urdu poetry. It is even true of modern western poetry.<sup>iv</sup>

For SRF, modern poets who are conscious of, and make creative use of, classical writers are the truly original poets of their time. ‘The best comment on a poem is another poem,’ he says quoting Frank Kermode.

*Shabkhood* ceased publication in 2006, in its fortieth year. Faruqi sahab had developed a heart condition and had not been keeping good health. Devoted readers sent him letters, and even monetary contributions, in the hope that the magazine would continue, but after consultations with his wife the decision remained unchanged. In the last stages of the magazine, Asif Farrukhi recalls<sup>v</sup>:

Faruqi sahab would send me copies for his group of friends in Pakistan, which I used to circulate. One of my most prized possessions is the copies I brought in 1982 from Delhi given to me by a friend. These were older issues of the magazine, which I had missed owing to the postage problem between India and Pakistan. Now, when I take down the bound copies from the shelf and look through them, I realize that it has not aged. So many different things come up, like the discussions and Faruqi sahab would sometime contribute small pieces on meaning of terms, events, who has passed away, what kind of books are being published, etc. *Shabkhood* occupies an extraordinary position in Urdu literary history.

C.M. Naim feels *Shabkhood* was the single most important literary event in Urdu after 1947.

People forget that even before 1947 it was Lahore that had most Urdu presses and journals and newspapers.

Not Delhi, not Lucknow, not Patna or Bombay. After '47, Delhi became more active, particularly with the arrival of many editors and magazines from Lahore. But Lahore became still more productive. Particularly when Delhi declined with the decline of Urdu among the non-Muslims in Punjab and Doaba and Bihar. But for many years at least there was an exchange of publications. A more complete break in that regard happened after the September 1965 war when the borders became firmly closed and even postal contacts were terminated. *Shabkhood* met a very urgent need.<sup>vi</sup>

Our conversation about *Shabkhood* meandered from SRF's inquisitiveness to English enlightenment to the Persian polymath Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi. Faruqi sahab says:

Thinking grows through questioning. With enlightenment whatever harm was done, was done, but what was gained was that the breadth of thinking expanded. In Hindu philosophy there is a school of Charvaka who do not believe in God. In Buddhism there is no concept of God. Muslims, though, have always been fearful of religion, but in 11<sup>th</sup> century, there was a person, Zakariya Razi, who questioned the divinity of the Quran. The clerics told him if the Quran is not a divine speech, go and write like it. Razi said he could. Iqbal's famous *misra*—*Jeeta hai Rumi, hara hai Razi*—is on him. There has always been an opening for a new thinking in our land and we have a tradition of challenging everything. No one murdered Razi and he was allowed to do what he wanted. In this regard

European enlightenment was very useful to us because it taught us to challenge. There are of course other conclusions of it too like nationalism, and extremism.

It was a digression from our topic of discussion, but as Arun Shourie, former cabinet minister says about Faruqi sahab, ‘One can learn so much from his mere asides!’

As he remarked on the idea of challenging everything, he remembered *Shabkhood*, and said calmly:

I did all of this. If you call it an accomplishment, call it so. I did nothing in one way. If I had not challenged the way Mir and Ghalib were being read, I wouldn’t have reached where I have—in my learning, in my understanding and in my writing.

\*\*\*

In the 1980s, the academic Frances Pritchett, now a professor of South Asian literature at Columbia University, was working on the oral tradition of *qissa* and *kahani* in Urdu and Hindi, and had become interested in translating the *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*. She encouraged Faruqi sahab to read the *dastan*, which until then he believed was meant only to be seen and heard. It was a form of oral storytelling in medieval Persia that later arrived in India and remained in existence till the beginning of the twentieth century. The narrative, according to Pritchett, involved the *dastango*—the narrator telling tales of heroic romance and adventure.

*Dastan-e-Amir Hamza*, which chronicles the life of Amir Hamza, was widely popular in India, particularly in the nineteenth century. The publisher Munshi Naval Kishore,



who ran one of the most prominent presses in nineteenth-century India, sat down the *dastangos*, writers and calligraphers, and printed 46 volumes of it between 1883 and 1905. After Naval Kishore, the second-most critical figure for the *Dastan* to still be in existence is Faruqi sahab, who found, collected and read all the 46,000 pages, containing twenty million words, of these long-out-of-print books. He now considers the *Dastan* the epitome of Urdu and also its greatest wealth. He is currently finishing the fifth volume of analysis of this unique form of literature, titled *Sahiri, Shahi, Sahibqirani* (Warlordship, Kingship and Lordship of the Auspicious Conjunction), and he assumes it will take at least seven more volumes. The first volume lays down the theories of the *Dastan*. The second is on its different publications over the years. The third is a reference volume on the characters, names and places. He has also determined the order, though loose, of the forty-six books. From the fourth volume onwards, he has started introducing the different books of the *Dastan* and has written about the first six books. The fifth will carry the next six. He is not sure if further work on it will be possible given his eyesight and inability to write owing to his declining health.

C.M. Naim believes:

Faruqi's work on the *dastans* of the Hamza cycle will stand unique for a very long time, and is not likely to be surpassed. Let's face it, who can honestly set about reading over forty-six large size tomes and retaining much of them in memory for analysis, comparison, and explanation? And bring to bear on the material insights from both Western and 'Islamicate' literary

theories? Of course, a unique ancillary to Faruqi's contribution is the re-emergence of 'dastangoi' as a performance art.<sup>vii</sup>

'Today,' Mahmood Farooqui, the reviver of *Dastangoi* as a theatrical art, says,

this art form provides for the sustenance of more than twenty-five artists across the country. It is now a common sight in literary and theatre festivals, which are not a few, in India. For a literary critic to discover something that would become an instrument of livelihood, is rare.<sup>viii</sup>

The extensive study of the *Dastan* revived the creative fiction writer in Faruqi sahab who had been waylaid by the magazine work. In 1997, the bicentennial anniversary of Ghalib was celebrated across India. While it was the tradition of *Shabkhoon* to not bring out a special number on any occasion, it could devote a certain number of pages to a subject. Therefore, writings on Ghalib were commissioned, but hardly any new perspectives came, except for a paper by a Hindi PhD student. Faruqi sahab had admired Krishna Mohan's ideas about Ghalib, when he had first heard it presented in a seminar, although it was opposed to his own views. Given the Hindi-Urdu politics in India, Faruqi sahab was apprehensive about publishing Krishna Mohan's piece in the first pages of *Shabkhoon*. Therefore, he decided to write a story that was modelled on Malik Ram's *Mirza Ghalib Se Ek Mulaqat* (A Meeting with Mirza Ghalib) and Mirza Farhatullah Beg's *Dihli ki Akhri Shama* (Delhi's Last Candle, translated in English as *The Last Mushaira of Delhi*).

SRF's *Ghalib Afsana*, like both those books, had a first-person narrator—Beni Madho Ruswa—telling the story. Ruswa was able to summon a convincing historical atmosphere with his verbiage and deft use of Ghalib's own words, presenting the poet in the autumn of his life. The effects of verisimilitude invoked by various literary devices made the story popular and the narrator a powerful voice from the past. In this story, as well as his others on Mir and Mushafi, SRF deployed the technique of providing a descriptive background to the characters. He told me that this germinated in his reading of the *dastan*, and that he realised that the extraneous details (which he later used in his novel *Kayi Chand the Sar-e Asman*) provide 'distance, depth and body to the characters as well the events that befall them later'.

*Kayi Chand*—written in four years, but imagined over a period of several years—is a summation of a lifetime of reading and cultural osmosis. When, in 2002, Faruqi sahab was convalescing at his younger daughter Baran's house in Delhi, and sleep was scarce, Wazir Khanum would haunt him. The frame of a story within a story undulated in his mind. On one such sleepless night, he pulled out a scrap of paper and started writing what would become *Kayi Chand*. Later, when the characters of the novel started appearing and had him in thrall and the frenzy to write was aflame, Baran tells us, he would get up surreptitiously before the break of dawn to work on the novel. The heart condition precluded him from stressing himself with cold or sleeplessness. Therefore, to ensure that SRF did not have to step out, his wife got a passage laid between the study and the bedroom

and had it kept warm with heaters. In between, for a year and a half, though, the novel was not touched. The computer on which it was saved had conked out and the draft disappeared, grating Faruqi sahab no end. Ultimately, when the novel came out, it was received as a masterpiece of a serious artist, a culmination of all the strengths of SRF's genius, like the *amrit* squeezed from the churning of the ocean. In the novel history is painted with imagination, and the imagination is iridescent like Van Gogh's. The title taken from a *misra* of one of the greatest modern poets and a contemporary of Faruqi sahab—Ahmad Mushtaq—mirrored the novel in various ways. There are several characters who are extraordinary and the atmosphere is pregnant with possibilities of an important change in the Indian society. The city of Delhi, memorably imagined in the novel, has a wealth of talent and a group of powerful people in terms of experience of life and sensibility, but the potential remains unexploited. There is a quiet effort in the novel to refute the modern British-oriented thinking that Delhi was effete and that it didn't have the strength of character to be able to resist the change or to keep itself together. In SRF's hand, the novel brings alive those times with exquisite detail.

'His knowledge of the culture of the times—right down to the textiles and the embroidery on them—is unmatched,' says Shourie<sup>ix</sup>, who thinks *The Mirror of Beauty* is one of the greatest novels written in India in the last few years. And the novel for him shows 'that the century we have forsaken as decadent had in fact developed a highly sophisticated culture and a subtle aesthetic'.

SRF's fiction has been appreciated for its extraordinary power of imagination. Ahmad Mahfooz, for example, says, 'He writes as if he is transcribing from a film he is seeing on Mushafi or Mir.' C.M. Naim, on the other hand, felt, he was eavesdropping on those poets of yore. And Shourie, giving as illustration, his story *Savaar* (the Rider), says 'By the time he has finished describing the scene when the rider is said to have passed through the bazar, you really don't know if there really was a rider who did so or whether it was all just an instance of mass hysteria: that is skill of a very high order.' Asif Farrukhi had been a great admirer of SRF's literary criticism, but that changed when he wrote his fiction. 'His novel became my favorite, which I read twice and which I also published in Pakistan. His vision of the past and how he creates a lively situation with words is exceptional. *Savaar Aur Doosre Afsane*, which was ground breaking in its own right, has been in some ways overshadowed by the sheer magnitude of the novel.'<sup>x</sup>

What is more, Faruqi sahab translated both the collection of short stories, and the novel, into English. Apart from being a prose stylist par excellence in Urdu, he is a master of the English language. Though when I asked if it was possible for the novel to have first been conceived in the English language, he claimed that it could not have been, because

the sensibility that the novel tries to represent doesn't exist in the English culture. The sensibility of the language, the sensibility of the people who spoke that language, the people who populate this novel, their mores, their style of living and believing, their

worldview, belief system—those cannot be described in English at all.

Faruqi sahab told me that it could either be viewed as a triumph or a disastrous failure that he could do things in Urdu that he could not in English.

For example, high literary Urdu has a certain flavour, which is impossible to translate into English. At times, I was able to find a word that was more or less suitable. Like the word *hazrat* or respected *huzoor* has been translated into ‘Presence’, which, outside the domain of the book, would not have meant anything.

As the author of the novel, he was able to take certain liberties, though, and chose to sacrifice certain high Urdu and archaic words, but he said that he compensated by deploying nineteenth-century English that is considered archaic today. ‘It took away a certain flavour of the language. What came was another flavour: the feeling of antiquity. It was a substitute which had to be accepted.’ A language which has distinctions—like Malayalam, or Kannada and even Japanese—of higher literal language and which is able to convey the atmosphere and the sensibility of the time, he says, only that language can do some justice to the original book.

The novel was nominated for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2015, the year in which Jhumpa Lahiri won for one of her weakest novels *The Lowland*. The jury rejected the prize to *The Mirror of Beauty* on the grounds of it being too archaic.

\*\*\*

Translation, a lifelong activity for Faruqi sahab, began with answering translation questions in school examinations. His first major work of translation, in 1950, was an essay by John McMurray, titled *Dialectical Materialism as a Philosophy*, first published in 1934.

I had a general interest in philosophy and had developed strong anti-Marxist sensibility at that time for two reasons—one that I read in some books in Urdu about the Marxist-Communist regime in Russia, which contained a number of Muslim states and that these people were at pains to eradicate all signs of Muslim thought and literature in those countries. They had even changed the script from Arabic to Cyrillic. Then there was a friend of my father, who was very religious and at that time he had a flowing beard, a typical Muslim beard. I had heard that he had been a communist as a young man. So I asked why he had left communism. He gave a strange reply: communism has no morals; that it is *bad-akhlaq*—the people as well as ideas. It is a vague word meaning unethicity, immorality, etc. It helped me develop a particular type of anti-Marxist thinking. Therefore, I thought it was an interesting essay to translate. The second part of the essay was quite surprisingly in praise of Nazism and Hitler, which I omitted. I translated the first part and sent to a magazine, which published it.

Over the years, SRF translated poems from several languages to Urdu and Urdu poems to English, and translated his own

poems to English. In the early 1990s, Faruqi sahab translated from one foreign language to another—Persian poems into English—in a small and beautiful book, *The Shadow of a Bird in Flight*, that contains 107 pieces from sixty poets representing the best in the Indo-Persian tradition. Time and publisher permitting, he wishes to expand on the pieces. For *Shabkhoon*, Faruqi sahab translated short stories and criticism written in English and French. He has also translated Plato, Bharatrhari, Kalidas, Hafiz and Mir, and a few years ago, four books of the widely read Ibn-e Safi detective series. The range and volume of his translation work is staggering.

‘The activity of translation always fascinated me, but I was not sure what its theory was,’ he told me.

Only much later, I began to understand the complexities and complications of translation. The nature and temperament of the language matters—how close or how far is it from the language’s culture. English, for example, is very far from the ethos and culture of Urdu, Persian or Arabic. Every age in which you translate has its own idiom and that is imposed on the input language. Translations of the same poems of Hafiz done in different times, are so different that one cannot believe that they are the same poem. The modern sense of translation is that one should try to bring out the spirit of the text.

When translating, SRF asks himself, he said, how the spirit of the input language can be infused in the output language, especially when they are so different; even finding



satisfactory translations from Persian to Urdu is difficult for him. ‘Of course, no two translators can ever be satisfied with each other, and they always quarrel. It can even go down to abuses, like the famous Nabokov–Edmund Wilson feud on translating Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* in the pages of *Encounter* magazine.’

To translate authentically and faithfully has been an unsolvable riddle for Faruqi sahab. He firmly believes that, in reality, one cannot translate. ‘Translation is what a black and white photo of a colour picture is. It is authentic in detail, but it is not the original. But of course, it must be done if one wants to enlarge the horizon of the language and of the mind itself.’ The question that ultimately should be posed to the translator, he believes, is ‘whether you are being honest to yourself, or you are being honest to the poem, or to the input or output language of the poem.’ SRF’s solution to the conundrum is that two translators should work on a text: one, an expert in the input language and the other, in the output language.

I have done that with Muhammad Husain Azad’s *Ab-e Hayat*, which was translated with Pritchett. She brought her imperfect Urdu and perfect English and I brought what I thought was my perfect Urdu and imperfect English. While I would generally agree with the translations, later though she had changed certain texts, or insisted, in the interest of modern English, on certain phrases, which I thought didn’t convey the sense of the Urdu word or phrase. Even that was a bad compromise.

One of SRF's influences was A.K. Ramanujan, whose main contribution to translation, he believes, 'was to break up the lines and spaces. He created geometrical designs in his poems through indentation, following early modern Russian writers like Mayakovski and Mikhail Tsetlin.'

Most recently Faruqi sahab has translated his selection of Mir's poetry for the Murthy Classical Library of India, published by Harvard University Press. And yet, he believes Mir is untranslatable.

Sheldon Pollock, who is the editor, a friend, and a very learned man, insisted, in the interest of modern American English to change some of my translations. For example, the she'r *Chahun to bhar ke kauli utha lun abhi tumhe kaise hi bhari ho mere aage to phool ho*. I translated *bhari* as heavy/hefty. He was of the opinion that it will not work, given the modern idiom, and I had to give in to his insistence on using a very American word. It taught me more about the impossibility of translations than anything else. Mir's poetics is so difficult. He is able to pack many ideas and meanings in seven to eight lines. There are various meanings, given the fact the words had an overlay of traditional meanings and usages over a large chunk of time and space.

And this is after a lifetime of studying Mir that resulted in *Sher-e Shor Angez*, for which he earned a Saraswati Samman, the highest literary award in India.

Nevertheless, translation has always fascinated SRF and although he accepts defeat, he is ever ready to undertake it.

\*\*\*

Valery had said that poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking. Everything is elevated in dancing, so is the case with poetry. Apart from translations and criticism, while editing *Shabkhood*, Faruqi sahab wrote poetry in the time left at hand. His first collection, *Ganj-e Sokhta*, came out in 1969 to much acclaim. Over the years, he wrote exploring all forms of Urdu poetry—*nazm*, *ghazal*, *ruba’i*, *qasida*, *marsiya*, *etc.* Faruqi sahab takes great delight in writing *ruba’i* and may be the only one or one among the very few to have written in all the twenty-four metres. The *ruba’i* is, like most genres of Urdu poetry, adopted from Persian, and has an extremely rigid metrical scheme. Yet, it has always held high prestige and is regarded as proving ground for poets. Ahmed Mahfooz says, ‘The tint of Faruqi sahab’s *ruba’i* is so different that it can be recognized from afar.’ SRF’s *Kulliyat* (collection of poetry), which also has some previously unpublished *ghazals* and *nazms*, has now been published. Mahfooz says:

His *ghazals* have a profusion of meaning rendered by ambiguity, which can be said to be in the tradition of Ghalib. Faruqi sahab, in his poetry making, leans towards the difficult, the new, and the ambiguous, and his diction tends to deviate from the traditional. The classical and the modern are so well assimilated in his poetry that it cannot be identified. There is a conscious effort to create new meanings. His *nazms* though are different—the words behave differently, are very deeply felt, and is dense. It is similar to Noon Meem Rashid.<sup>xi</sup>

Writer S.A. Ashraf and some others have called SRF a *dimag ka shayar* (poet of the mind), as opposed to a *dil ka shayar* (poet of emotions)—a formulation he doesn't agree with. He says: 'Two kinds of poetry have been written in the last 400 years of Persian of which Urdu is a direct descendant. One can be described loosely as poetry of emotions, one that evokes bare emotions. The other is that stimulates you intellectually.' SRF believes he is a *khyal bandi* poet, one that is defined by abstract themes, ideas and word play. Such poetry is said to have an umbilical attachment with the *rasa* theory of Sanskrit literature. He says: 'I used to be very unhappy with myself when I used to feel that I don't write like say Shaharyar, who is my immediate contemporary. Or even Mohammed Alwi, who I admire much more than Shaharyar. I was not able to create poems like them, but what can one do?' Faruqi sahab brings abstract imagery and entities into his poems, but says word play is not his cup of tea anymore. 'It was *dal-roti* for those poets, but that is difficult for me. In spirit my poetry is quite different from what is being written today or what was being written in my time. Given the difference, people are justified in saying that it is not good poetry.' For me, his poetry bears an abiding illumination. Every encounter with it is fresh and demanding, and as any great literature should be: endlessly renewable.

Unfortunately, he does not think poetry of great quality is being written today. 'I have not seen any new talent that has held my breath in Urdu,' he told me.

You can view it as an answer of a cantankerous old man, who feels that old times were great and the newcomers are *gadhe* (asses). In old times, Urdu literature

characterized a breadth of mind. In *Mirror of Beauty*, for example, you see a young poet like Daagh being appreciated, and the older masters are keen to have him under their fold. Though, in modern times, somehow, this activity took a different turn; maybe because everyone wanted to be different and new; maybe because people and their characters, their way of looking at things changed. When my time arrived, the older generation did not exhibit that kind of generosity towards the new writers, as was shown in the pre-modern times. Like Iqbal, for example, is a great poet, in any language, and by any standard. But people picked at his language, remarking there is too much Punjabi, or there is an incorrect usage of Persian. If his usage was new, it should have been welcomed. Older writers condemned *Shabkhoon* mostly for non-literary reasons, but portrayed it as literary. They said: ‘*Shabkhoon*’s policy was to condemn older writers and that it led astray at least two generations of writers by placing the emphasis on wrong things.’ There was a sense of petulance in the older generation, which unfortunately is still there. Although I think I should be absolved of that crime because I have encouraged young people all my life. Household names of Pakistan and India, most of them have found a place and encouragement and understanding in the hands of *Shabkhoon*. Quite a few of modern writers made a name because they found a fertile field in the pages of *Shabkhoon*.

He suggested that people are no longer reading creatively.

There is need to read Mir, Ghalib, and Sauda and Mir Anis—the way they dealt with language, and emotions and their observations of life, and how deep they went into things and how deftly they used the language. In fact, people have written to me asking what is the need to read—poets are born from the heart. Well, then....

The main contributor to this tendency, Faruqi sahab believes, is the bad quality of teaching at our universities. While the number of people reading Urdu has increased, the language itself is not growing because of bad teaching. Urdu has expanded its readership and people conversant with other languages such as Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali and Hindi are enjoying Urdu poetry. It might be because Urdu has a certain cache of culture, or because of its affinity with other Indian languages, or maybe because people believe that Urdu is something valuable.

The way it was tried to be uprooted from our midst after partition, [Faruqi sahab says,] that, we have been able to recover. What I am not happy about is that people are not being led to understand the real literary world of Urdu. They should be able to say and distinguish between good and bad. At homes, Urdu is not being spoken. Even in families where children are reading it in school, they are not speaking it. Urdu needs to be brought back home.

Often, in literary festivals, Faruqi sahab is asked for his opinion on his choice of the best poets. It is one of the rare

questions he dislikes. A couple of years ago at the *Jashn-e Rekhta*, a very well-attended festival of Urdu, a visibly irritated person got up to complain that Faruqi sahab had not mentioned Irfan Siddiqui's name even though the discussion was about modern Urdu poetry. Those who know Faruqi sahab know that Irfan Siddiqui was, as he says, his *hum-nivala* and that he has cried for him and still does. SRF's honest response to the person was that while Siddiqui's poetry was brilliant and everything in modern poetry could be found in it, it cannot be said to have brought a new turn to modern poetry.

SRF's contemporary Pakistani poet and politician, Zafar Iqbal, heard someone tell him that Faruqi sahab had put him next only to Ghalib. When Faruqi sahab met him in Pakistan, the conversation led to whether he really had said that. Faruqi sahab clarified that he had not, but that should not worry him, for it was a trivial matter. Zafar Iqbal, amidst much friendly banter, responded to him in Punjabi that: *Muya aur muqra, dono ek hi hota hai*. What Faruqi sahab had actually said was that 'the effect of *Gulaftab* was like what the effect of Ghalib's divan would have been when it came out in 1841.' *Gulaftab* is one of Zafar Iqbal's books of poems, which according to SRF, 'was very bold, had Punjabisms, and was full of experimentations, and the poet had managed to do something new.' And the divan of Ghalib that was published in 1841, was different from the form of Urdu poetry that was being written at that time.

Urdu is perhaps one of the most self-aware languages of the world, and in this world of Urdu, SRF's opinion, we learn from these incidents, has the value of gold. Therefore, to not

ask about SRF's favourites—although, I knew he does not like making lists, as it leads to a kind of canon-making and unnecessary controversies—was irresistible. The poetry (and prose) he has enjoyed over the years has been surmised in the following table:

<b>SRF's choice of the best</b>			
<b>Greatest Poets</b>	<b>Greatest Prose writers</b>	<b>Post-Iqbal generation of poets</b>	<b>His best contemporaries</b>
Nusrati Bijapuri (d. 1674)	Mulla Vajahi (d. 1659)	Miraji (1912–1949)	Ahmad Mushtaq (1929–)
Shaikh Khub Muhammad Chishti (flourished in 1614)	Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797–1869)	Noon Meem Rashid (1910–1975)	Zafar Iqbal (1933–)
Vali Dakani (1667–1720/25)	Muhammad Husain Azad (1830–1910)	Akhtar ul Iman (1915–1996)	Mohammed Alwi (1927–2018)
Mir Taqi Mir (1722–1810)	Shibli Numani (1857–1914)	Majid Amjad (1914–1974)	Balraj Komal (1928–2013)
Mir Babar Ali Anis (1802–1874)	Muhammad Husain Jah (d. 1899)	Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984)	Adil Mansuri (1936–2008)
Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797–1869)	Mir Amman Dihlavi (1750–1837)		Salim Ahmed (1927–1983)



Akbar Illahabadi (1846–1921)	Saadat Hasan Manto (1912–1955)		Nasir Kazmi (1925–1972)
Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938)	Muhammad Hasan Askari (1919–1978)		Munir Niazi (1928–2006)
Khwaja Mir Dard (1721–1785)	Intizar Husain (1925–2016)		Shahryar (1936–2012)
Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda (1713–1780)			Amiq Hanfi (1928–1988)
Shaikh Imam Bakhsh Nasikh (1776–1838)			Bimal Krishan Ashk (1924–1982)
			Kumar Pashi (1935–1992)
			Irfan Siddiqui (1939–2004)
			Zeb Ghauri (1928–1985)

\*\*\*

The extent of SRF's contribution is beyond any adjective that one can conjure up or anything that can be straitjacketed into a definition. He is like an everlasting breeze that has opened up the landscape of the Urdu language. Asif Farrukhi thinks

Faruqi sahab is peerless and is several people rolled into one. He holds his work in an exalted position for his

encyclopedic personality and for his range. There is hardly any facet of Urdu literature he has not touched. He is a ground-breaking critic with a thorough argument, based in tradition as well as completely a man of his times. He is at once a modernist and a classicist. He has achieved union of the two impossible.<sup>xii</sup>

For many writers, critics and academics, Faruqi sahab has been a model. Both Asif Farrukhi and Ahmad Mahfooz believe that literary sense in Urdu, in the post 1965 period has been moulded by Faruqi sahab, as he has been able to change the way the world of literature is perceived. ‘In modern times there is no one who has had more impact on a language than Faruqi sahab,’ Mahmood Farooqui says. ‘Maybe Gurudev in Bengali, but his influence was more than just because of his writing.’

C.M. Naim, himself a great scholar, has high regard for SRF. He says:

It may not be a fashionable way to say it but I view Faruqi Sahib as the greatest ‘facilitator’ that Urdu had the good fortune to have. Ever. What does a facilitator do? He makes some difficult task easier for others. He expands possibilities for others. In this case, for serious readers of pre-modern Urdu literature. What began as old fashioned *sharh* or explanation of the ‘harder’ verses of Ghalib eventually turned into an extraordinary project of revealing to us the literary

presuppositions, linguistic and rhetorical rules and conventions, as well as the poets' ambitions to change or break the same that made the classical ghazal and the Urdu dastan so fascinating and effective. In other words, he showed us what made that body of literature 'great'. His work showed us in the clearest manner that it is not enough to say 'Mir said xyz,' and therefore he is great. It is equally important to fully understand 'how' he said it. And Mir would have agreed with him.

Mahmood further adds:

SRF's greatest contribution is to recover the Indianness of Urdu poetry. He has showed and showed it brilliantly in his works that how Urdu poetry, taking from the tradition of Perso-Arabic poetics is also taking from the Sanskrit poetics and how close it is to those traditions. In his work one clearly sees a cogent and a brilliant attempt to locate Urdu literature in a wider theoretical, poetical framework and allows us to discover an Indianness that had been lost to us.<sup>xiii</sup>

Shourie, who has met Faruqi sahab on a few occasions, believes:

His concern for the culture of those times—his deep feeling that we have internalised a wrong impression that the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were a time of decadence; his concern for our people and our country today: these have shone through whenever I have met him. And every time I have felt that I am in the presence of a real scholar.<sup>xiv</sup>

For the past fifteen years or so, SRF has been compiling a small dictionary of about 15,000 rare words in Urdu that were used by the poets. The words being collected are not used by modern writers, or their meanings have changed over time. The available texts, from where these words are being collected, are unreliable or badly printed. Ahmad Mahfooz has helped him with 400 words from Insha Allah Khan Insha's collection. Faruqi sahab told me the work is nowhere near finished, but 'I am trying to do what I can. If I am able to collect those 15,000 words, I think I will have done something substantial.'

If the Nobel is awarded for a lifetime's work in service of a language, in using the resources of a language and the imagination to its apogee, there is only one writer who truly deserves it. Faruqi sahab has, in fact, recovered for us from oblivion a whole literary culture and the many-splendoured vestiges of our cultural past, for which no award exists.

This recovery from the pervasively schismatic rule of the British forms the nucleus of all his life's work. However, C.M. Naim disagrees:

It is wrong to describe as 'recovering our past – linguistic and cultural'. It is like saying 'biryani' stands for Mughlai culture (when even the concept of 'Mughlai' is of a doubtful nature). It is incorrect to think that there was a single linguistic past even among the Delhi-walas, when we know that Ghalib's Urdu letters did not have the syntax of the Urdu *dastan* telling, or that the *karkhandars* and 'Panjabis' of Delhi, for example, spoke what the people in Red Fort

did not. More meaningful and accurate would be to describe them as attempts to ‘reconstruct versions of the past using carefully selected linguistic detail and material culture’.<sup>xv</sup>

Nevertheless, Faruqi sahab quotes Iqbal to describe his life’s work:

*Meri tamam sar-guzasht khoye huon ki justaju* (the story of my life—seeking those lost ones). The difference is, I have done more than *justaju* (seek). I bring a whole baggage with me when I read Mir or Ghalib and I try to find what else is there in the poem apart from whatever is on the surface. I admire it for its own brilliance and its own beauty. But deeper than that if there is something else to explore and enjoy, I must.

Explaining his intellectual trajectory to a correspondent in 2010, Faruqi sahab wrote<sup>xvi</sup>:

Faruqi until age 35 was created by many Western poets and novelists and dramatists, particularly Shakespeare and Hardy, and Western theorists of literature, and Ghalib. Faruqi after 35 and until age 40 was created and nurtured by a sustained interlocution with Ghalib, closely followed by Iqbal and Western writers. Faruqi after age 40 was generated almost entirely by Mir, closely followed by Iqbal, the *Sabk-e Hindi farsi* poets, many 18th c. Urdu poets, and Ghalib. Now Faruqi is nearly 75 and doesn't want to go anywhere else.

Today, at 84, Faruqi sahab says:

I do not want to strike out elsewhere not because I think I have learned whatever I have learned, or I know what I should know, but because I think that my last station should be my past from where I have gained—unknowingly or deliberately, in a small measure or in a large measure—my literary and creative strengths. Whatever I learned from Western literature, much of it I had learned by the age of 45. Some of it coloured my vision, some of it blurred my vision. Later, the blurring went away and I was able to put things in perspective. My own literature is as valuable as any other literature. If I cannot provide a Shakespeare in Urdu, I can certainly provide a larger and bigger context, which is multi-lingual and multi-cultural, which Shakespeare does not have. Therefore, I have to stay here, to discover and rediscover, to visit and revisit my heritage because it has gone into my making and it has gone definitely into my making after the age of 40 or so when I first realized with a shock that it is wrong to believe that literary values are universal. My literature and culture has suffered tremendously because of the artificial and forcible impositions of Western values on it and it has become lopsided and our appreciation of literature has become half-blind, or even totally blind.

Coupled with his intellectual growth was his development as an anti-colonialist. Having been a witness to Partition, the anti-colonialist thrust became a powerful force in his life and works. At home, although he realised the increasing

acceptance of English as the lingua franca, he discouraged his children from using it. Baran Farooqi, younger daughter and Professor of English at Jamia Millia Islamia, wrote in an article for *The Punch* magazine<sup>xvii</sup>: ‘Such was his sense of what I much later understood to be a post-colonial identity that he refused to be called “Daddy” or “Papa” by us. All of us called him Bhai.’ In fact, even the name of the dogs couldn’t be Tommy or Tiger. They would invariably be Badal, Bijli, Rustom and such-like.

SRF’s favourite de-stressing activity has been spending time with his pet birds and animals and the filling of the many food and water bowls in the house and cleaning out the large bird house in his *angan* (courtyard). Like his favourite poet Mir, he adores animals and birds. Baran remembers the names of the many varieties of birds and pigeons that Faruqi sahab kept in Lucknow and whose names he taught to the sisters and even the different types of grains they ate.

Mehr Afshan’s earliest memories of her father are

glimmers of a man with a mass of curly hair and spectacles. I have vague remembrances of a conversation around what I should address him as. I guess my parents didn’t settle on a form of address because I ended up calling him ‘Bhai’ which was short for Bhai sahib! More definite memories are going with him to a large bookshop called Universal’s where he would browse for a long time and I would be in the children’s section avidly reading as much as I could. I would select and set aside a thick story-book. My father would buy the book for me. These excursions

were very special and formative moments in my childhood.<sup>xviii</sup>

Faruqi sahab is a family man who is not afraid of showing affection. Mehr Afshan says: ‘He displays emotions that generally men in Indian families don’t care to. He makes it a point to be in touch with the family by talking on the phone at least once a week.’ ‘He has been a father figure for us especially after the sad demise of our father in 1972. His profound scholarship and high position in the society have left a distinct and deep influence on me,’ says his brother Naimur Rahman Farooqi<sup>xix</sup>, for whom, as well as for his other siblings, Faruqi sahab was a role model.

Despite his position and influence, Faruqi sahab never gave much importance to politics. ‘Society does not need you, whether you are there or not it does not matter. Society, if it lets you, write you must,’ he says perusing Brodsky.

Your duty is to be a good writer, not to be an activist and do not proclaim that every writer should be one. Cliques are even worse. You can be a political being in your life, not in your writing. I don’t let politics intrude in literature. If a RSS *karyakarta* writes a good poem, I will appreciate it.

Mahmood says SRF’s politics is

that of Urdu. He wants to break the shibboleths around the language. The *she’r* that best describes his politics could be: *zahid-e-tang-nazar ne mujhe kafir jana aur kafir ye samajhta hai musalman hun mai* (the devout thinks I am an infidel, and the infidel understands me



to be a man of religion). At his heart, he believes in social welfare and equal opportunity for all.<sup>xx</sup>

\*\*\*

In 1968, Faruqi sahab started building his house near what is now called Bahuguna Market in Allahabad. Despite a joke he is fond of cracking—‘Houses are built by fools, and the wise live in them’—he designed the house himself. It has a large outer courtyard with roses and a variety of chrysanthemums, where Changez Khan Bahadur and Bholi, his dogs, loll about in the winter sun.

Inside, a large room has been converted into his library, which doubles up as his meeting and writing room. One of the walls has a photograph of his wife during her time at Allahabad University, and others feature his brothers, sisters and cousins. There is also one of Ghalib and another, surprisingly, of Syed Ahmad Khan. On his computer desk, where he checks his emails and writes, sits, facing him, his father’s photograph—one he had taken. Books, in both English and Urdu, fill the shelves that stretch from floor to ceiling. There are a number of fat dictionaries, and editions of Shakespeare’s complete works. Tea—the best-quality *lopchu* tea—is brought covered with a tea cozy on a trolley. Parrots and sparrows can often be heard breaking into a hullabaloo outside.

It was here that after coming back from work every day and finishing his dinner and conversations with the children that he used to enter at 8 and stay till late in the night. Mehr Afshan remembers ‘seeing him silhouetted in the light glowing from his desk lamp, writing late into the night. All

lights in the house were off. There was something sacred about writing'. It was also in this house that frequent poetic soirees would be held. A 'constant stream of writers pouring in who could get drunk and even vomit on the carpet', Baran recalls.

My mother and some other women intellectuals, if they happened to be there, occasionally sang ghazals. One of my aunts, now better known as Mahmood Farooqui's mother, used to visit and I remember her singing Faiz's *Mujhse pahli si muhabbat mere mehboob na maang*. Mother often sang Ghalib's *Nuktacheen hai gham-e dil*.<sup>xxi</sup>

Naiyer Masud, one of the greatest modern Urdu short story writers and a great friend of Faruqi sahab was a frequent visitor—in Allahabad or when Faruqi sahab was posted in Lucknow. Once when the Gomti was in spate and had flooded most of Lucknow, Faruqi sahab moved to stay with Masud in his house, *Adabistan* (abode of literature). He has dedicated his translations of Mir to him and Irfan Siddiqui, quoting Sa'ib:

Gradually, this dust Bowl became empty of the loved ones,  
Not one among those who came took the place of those  
who went away.

In former times, people grieved for those who went before  
Now they grieve for us, those who are left behind  
—Sa'ib Tabrizi<sup>xxii</sup>

As I left the house and Faruqi sahab came to see me off, he told me that I should have stopped him from holding forth. 'If my wife had been there, she would have asked me to shut

up, as she had once when in Lahore I went on and on. She knew that I spoke too much. *Ab kahan kuch reh gaya hai?* [What is left now?]

There are still those chapters of the novel to be written. There are still those rare words to be found for the dictionary. There are still those volumes on the *Dastan* left.




---

<sup>i</sup> A Requiem for Pakistan: The World of Intizar Husain Mahmood Farooqui, Yoda Press

<sup>ii</sup> Author's email interview with C M Naim

<sup>iii</sup> Author's telephonic interview with Asif Farrukhi

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.urdustudies.com/pdf/13/10premConvers.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Author's telephonic interview with Asif Farrukhi

<sup>vi</sup> Author's email interview with C M Naim

<sup>vii</sup> Author's email interview with C M Naim

<sup>viii</sup> Author's interview with Mahmood Farooqui

<sup>ix</sup> Author's email interview with Arun Shourie

<sup>x</sup> Quotes based on interviews taken by the author

<sup>xi</sup> Author's interview with Ahmad Mahfooz

<sup>xii</sup> Author's telephonic interview with Asif Farrukhi

<sup>xiii</sup> Author's interview with Mahmood Farooqui

<sup>xiv</sup> Author's email interview with Arun Shourie

<sup>xv</sup> Author's email interview with C M Naim

<sup>xvi</sup> <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/srf/ownthoughts.html>

<sup>xvii</sup> <http://thepunchmagazine.com/the-byword/non-fiction/reading-father-love-life-and-literature-in-the-presence-of-father>

<sup>xviii</sup> Author's email interview with Mehr Afshan Farooqi

<sup>xix</sup> Author's email interview with Naimur Rahman Farooqi

<sup>xx</sup> Author's email interview with Mahmood Farooqui

<sup>xxi</sup> <http://thepunchmagazine.com/the-byword/non-fiction/reading-father-love-life-and-literature-in-the-presence-of-father>

<sup>xxii</sup> Mir Taqi Mir, Selected Ghazals and Other Poems, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, Murthy Classical Library, Harvard University Press