

Urdu Texts and Contexts

The Selected Essays

of

C.M. Naim



permanent black

Contents

1	The Art of the Urdu Marsiya	1
2	Homosexual (Pederastic) Love in Pre-Modern Urdu Poetry	19
3	Transvestic Words? The Rekhti in Urdu	42
4	Yes, The Poem Itself	67
5	The Ghazal Itself: Translating Ghalib	79
6	'Pseudo-dramatic' Poems of Iqbal	96
7	Poet-Audience Interaction at Urdu Musha'irahs	108
8	Prize-Winning <i>Adab</i>	120
9	Mughal and English Patronage of Urdu Poetry	151
10	The Consequences of Indo-Pakistani War for Urdu Language and Literature	178
11	How Bibi Ashraf Learned to Read and Write	202
12	Popular Jokes and Political History: The Case of Akbar, Birbal and Mulla Do-Piyaza	225
13	Ghalib's Delhi: A Shamelessly Revisionist Look at Two Popular Metaphors	250

canvas is narrow; its characters, though ideal, are flatly drawn and lack in chiaroscuro, and its story is overly burdened with religious zeal and ritual piety, the two particularly removing any ambiguity or complexity concerning motives. Thus, in spite of its substantial length, the long text is neither better nor worse than its parts, the individual marsiyas. Though not quite an epic, it is an impressive enough poem, with numerous powerful passages, and does suggest the possibilities that the genre had but the poets could not fully explore due to its fundamental identification with a particular religious context.¹⁶

¹⁶ Elsewhere I have argued that the Urdu marsiya cannot be regarded as the true precursor of the modern Urdu *nazm* (a poem on a particular topic in blank, free, or rhymed verse); see C. M. Naim, 'Urdu in the Pre-Modern Period: Synthesis or Particularism?' in *New Quest*, #6 (Feb. 1978), p. 10. The essay is included in C. M. Naim, *Ambiguities of Heritage* (Karachi, 1999; pp. 86-96). For a vigorous, partisan, and quite enjoyable defence of the Urdu marsiya against criticism of any sort, see Ali Abbas Husaini, *Urdū Marsiya* (Lucknow, 1973).

Homosexual (Pederastic) Love In Pre-Modern Urdu Poetry*

In an article in *The Journal of Social History*, Randolph Trumbach rather convincingly presents the thesis that 'the European anxiety over homosexual behaviour is a unique cultural trait which cannot be found in the rest of the world.' He believes that 'outside of Europe homosexual behaviour between adult man and adolescent boy was neither stigmatized nor forced into any permanent role.' He further maintains that, since 1800, 'Westerners have carried throughout the world their peculiar opposition to any form of licit and institutionalized homosexual behaviour. They have in some areas destroyed the indigenous forms and in others have led the members of the elite influenced by Western thought to question or to become ashamed of their traditional forms.'¹

Most authors, like Trumbach, tend to oppose the negative valuation of homosexuality in the West with what they see as a positive one in the East, particularly in the Islamicate societies. It would be more correct, however, to posit for the latter an in-between state of *indifference* which, given sufficient impetus in either direction, turn into either salaciousness or harsh disapproval. In other words, if the European response to homosexual love has been totally antagonistic, the Islamicate East has neither celebrated it in any unequivocal fashion, nor

* Revised. Originally appeared in *Studies in the Urdu Gazal and Prose Fiction*, ed. Muhammad Umar Memon (Madison, 1979), pp. 120-142.

¹ Randolph Trumbach, 'London's Sodomites: Homosexual Behaviour and Western Culture in the 18th Century,' in *Journal of Social History*, 11:1 (Fall 1977), pp. 1, 9, 24.

looked at it with total impassivity. Samuel Z. Klausner's phrase, 'tolerant jocularly,'² perhaps comes closest to describing the latter's response, but only at one end of the scale; at the other end, religious condemnation always remained a serious threat. The following discussion of the treatment of pederastic love [*amrad-parastī*] in Urdu poetry provides support to the conclusions put forth by Trumbach, but aims to bring out in clearer detail the actual range of responses in one Islamicate society.

Urdu, as the primary language of high culture for the vast majority of South Asian Muslims for at least three centuries, shares a great deal with the two dominant languages of Islamic civilization, Arabic and Persian. In Islamicate societies, poetry's symbolic language has always been the more appropriate or safe medium to express controversial, even blasphemous, ideas. That is true for Urdu too. The theme of homosexual love was not treated in Urdu prose until the middle of the 20th century,³ but what couldn't be said in prose in the preceding three hundred years was always licit in poetry. The following discussion examines the modes and attitudes found in the Urdu ghazal of the pre-modern—i.e. pre-1857—period, then elucidates them further by bringing in for comparison the ideas of the so-called Uranian poets of nineteenth century England.

As is well-known, the Urdu ghazal began in the Deccan in the seventeenth century inspired by the Persian ghazal, but with a uniquely indigenous naturalness about it. Avoiding the ambiguous *ghazal-i-muzakkar* of Persian—the lyric in which a male lover seemingly addressed another male—the Urdu poets of the Deccan, in addition, not only wrote ghazals in which a

² 'Sex Life in Islam,' in *The Encyclopedia of Sexual Behaviour* (New York, 1961), Vol. 1, p. 547.

³ Only four such stories come to mind, Ismat Chughtai's '*Lihāf*' (The Quilt), Sa'adat Hasan Manto's '*Dhu'ān*' (Smoke), Krishna Chandra's '*Irānī Pulāo*' (Iranian Pulao), and Muhammad Hasan Askari's '*Phislan*' (Slipperiness). Tellingly, the first two caused trouble to the authors in the colonial (Judeo-Christian inspired?) legal system.

male addressed a grammatically-gendered female, but also adopted the Indian tradition of having a female address a male. The Islamicate kingdoms of the Deccan were destroyed by the Mughal armies by the end of the seventeenth century; the centre of Urdu culture and poetry then shifted northward, much closer to Turkish and Iranian influences—first to Aurangabad, and then to Delhi. The practice of using a female voice was gradually dropped in the ghazal itself, and was reserved exclusively for quasi-pornographic verses describing lesbian, as well as heterosexual, affairs.⁴ The practice of using a female grammatical gender with reference to the beloved was discontinued. Instead, at Delhi, the conventions of the *ghazal-i-muzakkar* became exclusively dominant. Now, grammatically, the beloved in the ghazal was always masculine, as was the lover. The practice continued in Lucknow, where heterosexual eroticism was relatively more frequent and explicit, resulting in a kind of fossilized conventionality; later, it was denounced by the reformer critics of the late nineteenth century, and explained away by still later apologists.

When we look at the pre-modern Urdu ghazal, particularly that of the earliest poets of Delhi and Lucknow, the following features immediately draw our attention.

All grammatical references to the beloved are in the masculine. Even when an obviously feminine attribute of the body or dress is mentioned, the verb form shows a masculine gender.

Many a verse contains a reference to an exclusively masculine attribute, namely the down [*sabza* or *kat*] on the cheeks of pubescent boys.

A large number of verses refer to certain exclusively, or predominantly, 'masculine' items of dress or accoutrement, such as turbans, caps, swords, and daggers.

References occur to some social context or character trait, which, in the context of that particular society, was considered chiefly to belong to the male domain. For exam-

⁴ See the article on Rekhti in this book.

ple, the beloved might be depicted as wandering in the market, sitting in the company of men, or acting bloodthirsty.

In many verses, particularly by some of the earliest Delhi poets, there occur quite unambiguous references to young boys, using such terms as *laundā* (lad), *larkā* (boy), *bacca* (child), and *pisar* (son). A smaller number of verses contain even the names—real or fictitious—of individual boys. Overwhelmingly, however, the beloved remains anonymous.

For almost one hundred years after 1857, the developments in Urdu literature remained intimately tied with the changes occurring in the social, political, and educational life of the Muslims of India. During that time, most of the major contributors to Urdu literature were actively involved in various reformist movements within the Indo-Muslim society, their basic concern being what they called the 'backwardness'—educational, political, social and economic—of the Indian Muslims. (They were, in fact, concerned only with the upper and middle classes of the people.) As a result, there developed an overarching tendency to justify literature in terms of its social usefulness, which, in turn, led to the creation of a habit of either condemning, or explaining away much in the Urdu literary heritage.⁵ That was especially the case concerning the evidence for homosexual love in the pre-modern Urdu ghazal. We need not concern ourselves with the wrath of the moralists—it is all too familiar—but a look at the arguments put forth by the apologists would be instructive.

The first explanation the apologists offered was that the use of a masculine gender was simply a grammatical necessity—it is the form required by Urdu grammar for all universal, non-specific statements.

⁵ The first, and most far-reaching critique, of Urdu poetry on moral grounds was made by Altaf Husain Hali in his *Muqaddama-i-Si'r-o-Sā'iri* (1893). For a comprehensive discussion, see Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and its Critics* (Berkeley, 1994). The most fervent, and morally impeccable, defence of Urdu poetic traditions was made by Masud Hasan Rizavi in his *Hamāri Sā'iri* (Lucknow, 1928).

That grammar-bound universality, they next argued, lent itself to keeping the beloved anonymous—the society's cherished sense of propriety demanded that women shouldn't be mentioned in public statements. A male grammatical gender was employed to protect the honour of the beloved, who was actually a female.

Conventionally, the beloved in the ghazal could possibly be (i) the *ma'būd* (lit., the one who is worshipped), i.e. God; (ii) the *mamdūh* (lit., the one who is praised), i.e. the patron; or (iii) the *mahbūb* (lit., the one who is loved), i.e., the beloved. The more common practice, however, has been to observe only a binary reference—*ma'sūq-i-haqīqī* (lit., the true beloved), i.e. the Divine Beloved, and *ma'sūq-i-majāzī* (lit., the metaphorical beloved), i.e. the Earthly object of love—the latter could be taken as either a young boy or a young woman. Consequently, the apologists contended, the use of a masculine imagery was absolutely necessary to create—and sustain—that crucial two-fold referential aspect of the ghazal. They claimed that almost every 'true' ghazal verse could be interpreted as simultaneously referring to the 'metaphorical' [*majāzī*] love and the 'real' [*haqīqī*] Love.⁶

There were two Sufi beliefs that authorised this claim. Firstly, all earthly phenomena reflect the beauty of the Divine Beloved and therefore when a Sufi looks at an attractive face, be it of a young boy, he sees in it only the beauty of God's own 'Face.' Relevant here were a few apocryphal

⁶ Ghalib (d. 1869) chiding Qadr Bilgiri for not maintaining the desired reference, wrote, 'The earthly beloved [*ma'sūq-i-majāzī*] may be addressed in the second person both by singular *tū* and the plural *tum*, whereas God is addressed either in the second person singular, *tū*, or in the third person plural, *vo*, the latter implying *qazā-va-qadr* (the judged and measured decrees of God, or Fate). In your ghazal you have sometimes used the rhyme verb *ho* in a manner that does not allow any reference to the earthly beloved [He then quotes a Qadr couplet that contains, "You bring us into the world"; then adds,] Tell me, who are you addressing? Except for Fate, no woman [*randī*] or boy [*laundā*] can be said here to be the addressee.' Malik Ram (Ed.), *Kutūb-i-Ghalib* (Aligarh, 1962), p. 262.

Hadith too, for they refer to the Prophet's alleged vision of a handsome male; many Sufistic writers used them to support their own contentions. The Mughal prince Dara Shikoh (d. 1659), for example, quotes with full confidence one such apocryphal Hadith in his Sufi treatise, *Sakinat-al-Auliyâ*. Arguing that when 'the Attributes-less' descends to the level of 'Attributes,' [He] can be seen exclusively by prophets and saints, 'as is evident,' Dara Shikoh writes, 'from the Hadith, "I saw my Lord in the most beautiful form of a youth, who was beardless and had ringlets."'⁷

Secondly, at the beginning of his spiritual quest, a Sufi seeker should first direct all his love towards his mentor [*mur-sid*], who could only be a male. Only later could the disciple, through the help of the mentor, hope to reach his true goal, God—who again must always be referred to in the masculine.⁸

The above explanations, insisting that the interpretation of most, if not all ghazal verses, must be either heterosexual or mystical, were put forward to refute the simpler conclusions one might have drawn from the first three features listed in our previous list—a masculine grammatical gender, masculine physical attributes, and masculine items of dress and accoutrement. With reference to the fourth feature—a male social context—the apologists offered that the beloved of the ghazal was a courtesan. She moved freely among men, was seen in public gatherings, had countless admirers, and by nature and profession she was fickle as well as ruthless. That she was not

⁷ Dara Shikoh, *Sakinat-al-Auliyâ*, trans. Maqbul Beg Badakhshani (Lahore, 1971), p. 94. The alleged Hadith is not found in any authoritative collection.

⁸ Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi (d. 1325), is recorded saying, 'Whenever I attended a *samâ*' gathering and listened to the verses being sung—and I swear by my Shaikh's robes—I always took them to refer to the most excellent attributes of my Shaikh. Once I heard a man recite, "Don't walk so elegantly, lest you suffer someone's evil eye." I was instantly reminded of the utmost perfection of my Master's sublime character, and my heart caught fire.' Amir Hasan Ala Sizji, *Favâ'id-al-Favâ'id*, ed. Muhammad Latif Malik (Lahore, 1966), p. 166.

referred to in the feminine was again an extension of the social convention concerning modesty and propriety!

As to the verses containing explicit references to handsome boys, they were generally ignored, or the writers were designated unimportant. An interesting case in that regard was that of Mir Taqi Mir (d. 1810), consistently mentioned as the greatest of Urdu ghazal poets. Some critics have written about the protocol [*adab*] of love as depicted in Mir's verse, while many have reconstructed Mir's ill-fated love—allegedly for a female cousin—on the basis of selected verses and some ambiguous autobiographical material. Few, however, mention the many verses of Mir which contain references to boys, even after Andalib Shadani culled such verses together in a notorious essay published decades ago.⁹

Mir's fondness for this particular theme becomes apparent when we compare his ghazals with the ghazals of four of his five most important contemporaries, Hatam (d. 1781), Sauda (d. 1780), Qa'im (d. 1793), and Abru (d. 1733). In the case of the former three, we find very few verses containing unambiguous pederastic references. The only exception being the theme of *kât* (down on the cheeks), which is indeed found noticeably, though in almost all instances merely as a convention necessitated rhyme. Abru's verse, on the other hand, is full of pederastic references, and displays, only in this regard, much similarity with Mir's poetry. No wonder, therefore, that their contemporary Qa'im, in his *tazkira* (literary biography) called Abru a *husn-parast* (lit., a worshipper of beauty) and described Mir as *sam'-i-anjuman-i-'isq-bâzân* (lit., a candle lit in the gathering of love practitioners). The two terms, contextually, strongly imply some homosexual proclivity on the part of the two poets.¹⁰ Abru, actually, was quite outspoken in one verse.

⁹ Andalib Shadani, 'Mir Sâhib kâ ek *Kâs Rang*,' in *Tahqiqât* (Bareilly, n.d.), pp. 135–80.

¹⁰ Muhammad Qiyamuddin Qa'im, *Maqzan-i-Nikât*, ed. Abdul Haq (Aurangabad, 1929), pp. 14, 40. Mir, in his own *tazkira*, calls Qa'im a *husn-*

*He who avoids boys, and desires women,
Is not a lover, but a man of lust.¹¹*

In Abru's case, not much is known about his life except that he was from the family of a sufi saint. His verse, however, displays a marked aversion to conjugal life and women, and shows a pronounced fondness for boys. Mir, on the other hand, married twice and had children; he also left us a great deal of autobiographical material, including some tangential evidence for heterosexual attachments, but nothing that could unequivocally confirm the predilection in many of his verses.¹²

Similarly, in the literary biographies [*tazkirât*] written by some of the poets themselves, we find certain poets described as being '*âsiq-peša* (lit., lover by profession) or *husn-parast*, while others might be mentioned as being extremely handsome, and desired by all and sundry. An example of the latter would be the case of Abdul Ha'i Taban, whom Mir in his *tazkirâ* calls *nanjavân-bâ-mazâ*, (lit., a delectable youth) and *ma'sûq-i-âsiq-mizâj* (lit., a beloved with the temperament of a lover).¹³ Taban himself is reported to have been in love with another young poet named Sulaiman, who equally returned his devotion, and who, according to Qa'im, turned ascetic after Taban's early death.¹⁴

parast. See Mir Taqi Mir, *Nikât-al-Su'arâ*, ed. Abdul Haq (Aurangabad, 1935), p. 122. The selective use of these epithets implies some specificity, and supports my contention.

¹¹ '*jo laundâ chor kar randî kôn câhe // yo koi 'âsiq-nahîn hai bul-hayas hai.*' Najmuddin Mubarak Abru, *Divân-i-Âbrû*, ed. Muhammad Hasan (New Delhi, 1990), p. 283.

¹² For a detailed discussion, see C. M. Najim, *Zikr-i Mir: The Autobiography of the Eighteenth Century Mughal Poet: Mir Muhammad Taqi 'Mir'* (New Delhi, 1999), pp. 193-203.

¹³ Mir, *Nikât*, p. 108.

¹⁴ Qa'im, *Maqzan*, p. 67.

There is also a remarkable *masnavî* by Abru.¹⁵ In this untitled poem of some two hundred and fifty rhymed couplets, Abru lays down the ways a boy should dress and behave in order to entice lovers. The poet encounters a young boy in a Delhi street; the boy, attractive in looks, is slovenly in dress and manners, thus showing, according to Abru, a sad lack of awareness of his own charms. Abru, therefore, engages him in a conversation and, finding him eager to learn, instructs him in great detail in the ways of a beloved [*ma'sûq*]. The following is merely a summary of Abru's instructions.

The boy should keep his hair long, parted in the middle, combed and braided, and properly oiled. The forehead, however, should be left exposed, and kept free of loose hair.

He should carefully look after his skin, and avoid excessive sun. He should apply to his face at night an ointment made of lemon juice, saffron and jasmine oil, washing it off in the morning. The boy should whiten his teeth, but darken his gums with *missî*, while his lips should be red with betel juice. A line of collyrium should be laid in his eyes and red marks of henna on his finger knuckles—though not on his palms.

The boy should dress elegantly, and also adorn himself with ornaments. Abru gives details of the desired items of jewellery, clothes, turbans, caps, and shoes. He asks the boy to use perfume, and frequently use a handkerchief to wipe his face.

The boy should be coy and playful, a bit flirtatious even, but not overly so. At moments he should be considerate, and at other times neglectful. He should learn to use his eyes, for the eyes can express in a thousand ways.

A *ma'sûq* (beloved) should have a sense of dignity. He shouldn't be too proud, but without some degree of haughtiness, he cannot be a *ma'sûq*. A *ma'sûq* is like a king; the lovers are his courtiers. Each lover should be given a distinct

¹⁵ Abru, *Divân*, pp. 298-308. See 'Abru: Advice to a Beloved,' translated by Saleem Kidwai, versified by Ruth Vanita, in *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*, ed. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (New York, 2000), pp. 161-168.

status and function, reflecting his inherent nature, and then accorded commensurate treatment. The 'king' should see to it that his 'courtiers' don't cause harm to each other.

The boy should never drink in the company of lowly people. Nor should he seek monetary reward from anyone. He should never ask; the lovers will give him everything on their own. What lies in the boy's fate will reach him regardless.

When down should first appear on his cheeks, the boy shouldn't shave, for now has arrived beauty's 'spring.' So long as the beard remains soft, the boy should continue as before, but when it toughens, he should shave both mornings and evenings. Finally, when his bloom is gone and his lovers start losing interest in him, the boy should abandon the ways of a *ma'sûq*, be humble and friendly with everyone, and seek to mix with other handsome youths.

In this poem, as also elsewhere, Abru expresses no carnal feelings. In fact, he makes a point of condemning homosexual lust, much the same way he condemns the heterosexual.

Apart from the literary evidence, we also have few contemporary accounts that indicate that pederastic relationships were fairly common, and accepted as a matter of fact, in the eighteenth century Delhi. They were not frowned upon or publicly condemned. A significant source of that kind is the brief memoir of Dargah Quli Khan's, a nobleman who came north from the Deccan, and stayed in Delhi for three years (1738-1741). Khan finds pederastic love very common in Delhi, and gives the names of a few of the more notable boys [*amrad*] and lovers [*amrad-pasand*] of that time. About Mirza Ma'no, a young noble, he writes, 'His adeptness in entrapping the beautiful ones is magic. Young noblemen learn the finer points of this art from him, and take pride in being his pupils. He is the organizer of this gathering of cherubs [*gilmân*] at [the mansion of Azam Khan, an older *amrad-pasand* noble]. A beautiful boy not attached to this assembly is out in the dark, and a boy not included in these gatherings cannot be considered beautiful.' He also describes a professional *amrad* (a beardless youth)—'Miyan Hinga Amrad has a

fair complexion and wears pale-yellow garments. He presents his dance performances in front of the Red Fort every evening. Senior and reputable people come to see him, pretending they were going to the Chandni Chowk. . . . He is extremely handsome . . . and earns a lot of money by selling himself, but he never goes to anyone's house. His lovers and buyers come themselves to his place.'¹⁶

Further insight in the homosexual (pederastic) love in pre-modern Urdu poetry, and in the ethos of the poets themselves, may be gained by bringing in for comparison, the poetry and ideals of the so-called Uranian poets of English who celebrated pederastic love between 1890 and 1930.¹⁷ It may make us better aware of the wide range of ways people have responded over time to this love, and how society's stigmatisation—or lack of it—could produce different responses, excuses, and explanations.

The term 'Uranian,' according to Timothy d'Arch Smith, was derived from *Urning*, a term coined by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a pamphleteer in Germany between 1864 and 1870 defending the 'naturalness' of homosexual love. Ulrichs sought 'to establish a theory of sexual inversion upon the basis of natural science, proving that abnormal instincts are inborn and healthy in a considerable percentage of human beings; that they do not owe their origin to bad habits of any kind, to hereditary disease or to wilful depravity; that they are incapable in the majority of cases of being extirpated or converted into normal channels; and that the men subject to them are neither physically, intellectually, nor morally inferior to normally constituted individuals.'¹⁸

¹⁶ Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqa'-i-Dihli*, ed. Khaliq Anjum (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 69-70 and p. 102, respectively.

¹⁷ Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London, 1970). The poets included are Edwin Bradford, Ralph Chubb, Samuel Cottam, Edmund John, John Nicholson and John Stuart-Young.

¹⁸ Smith, *Love*, pp. 225-6. A summary of Ulrichs' views may be found in Appendix B to Havelock Ellis, *Studies in Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inver-*

Near the end of his book, Smith mentions several themes that distinguish the poetry of the Uranians from the more common poetry of heterosexual love.

One dominant theme for the Uranian poets is the fleeting time of boyhood. 'It was all too clear to the Uranians that their adoration for an ungrown creature was perforce the swiftest of nature's romances, prone to suffer from the boy's psychic and somatic changes as he grew towards maturity.'¹⁹ The Uranians lament the growth of hair on the boy's face and limbs, and that he would soon be wearing trousers instead of shorts. They dread the day when he would eventually fall in love with a girl. Such realistic fears do not haunt the Urdu poets, neither in the ghazal, where literalism is in any case not preferred, nor in other genres. The cheeks of the boy in the ghazal get covered with a fuzzy growth, but a conventional pun allows Urdu poets to view it as the herald of Youth's 'spring,' and not necessarily his 'autumn.'²⁰ As for the possibility of the beloved's himself falling in love, it is considered out of the question in the classical ghazal—the convention does not allow it. It, however, is an essential possible event in a minor genre called *vāsokt*, where the poet adopts a peevish pose, and prays for his beloved to fall in love with some cruel person and thus suffer like him.

While the Uranians often express jealousy towards women, considering them their rivals, Urdu poets do not. Even Abru's contempt for women is not tinged with jealousy; it is in fact more in line with the attitude of certain Sufis who abhorred conjugal relations because the latter perforce contained some carnality.²¹

tion (Philadelphia, 1904), pp. 225–239. The appendix, signed 'Z,' was probably written by John Addington Symonds, according to Smith, a precursor of the Uranians.

¹⁹ Smith, *Love*, p. 163.

²⁰ In Persian and Urdu poetry, the faint down is often referred to as *sabza-ikat*, lit., the beard's verdure, an allusion to spring's burst of greenery.

²¹ For example, the strong negative remarks of al-Hujwiri (d. 1063). See R. A. Nicholson, *Kashf-Al-Mahjub of Al Hujwiri* (London, 1936, 2nd edition),

Another favourite theme of the Uranians is a sense of their own guilt; they remain acutely conscious of the stigma that society and religion attached to their particular erotic feelings. 'Often, the uselessness, the frustration, even the immorality of their passions, are spoken of by the Uranians. A boy is damned for his beauty, the poet self-castigated for yielding to his charms.'²² That seems not to be the case with the pre-modern Urdu poets. The Indo-Muslim milieu was neither actively sex-positive, as the ancient Greek is supposed to have been, nor was it blatantly sex-negative, as seems to be the attitude of the Judeo-Christian England. It was mostly indifferent, instead, in matters related to sexual tastes and habits, but willing to show tolerance in that regard if so required.

The indifference came from both components of the Indo-Muslim milieu. No pre-modern Hindu-dominated literature of India depicts much homosexual love—the Muslim-dominated Persian and Urdu being significantly different in that regard. Textual evidence of another kind, however, suggests that homosexual erotics were not unknown among the Hindus, and that the response there, too, was indifference. In his famous treatise, *Kama Sutra*, Vatsyayana describes, without a trace of disapprobation, two types of eunuchs—one dressed as males, the other as females—with whom men engaged in oral sex.²³ Similarly, in the fifth century *Laws of Manu*, we find that 'a twice-born man who commits an unnatural offence with a

p. 364. Also, Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975), pp. 426–35.

²² Smith, *Love*, p. 166

²³ *The Kamasutra of Vatsyayana*, trans. Richard Burton and F. F. Arbuthnot, ed. W. G. Archer (London, 1963) pp. 116–9. Vatsyayana refers only to oral sex. In the pre-modern Islamic literatures of the Middle East and Central Asia, male homosexual act was anal, with the strong hierarchy of 'top' and 'bottom.' See Charles Wendel, 'The Denizens of Paradise,' in *Humana Islamica*, II, 1974, pp. 29–59. Also, the discussion of the hierarchy's psycho-social ramifications in Iran in Reza Baraheni, *The Crowned Cannibals* (New York, 1977), p. 45 ff.

male . . . shall bathe, dressed in his clothes'²⁴—a minor offence. On the Muslim side, too, things are not drastically different. The Qur'an contains only two verses, 4:15 and 4:16, that are understood as referring to homosexual acts, but there too the language is mild compared to what the Qur'an says about heterosexual fornication or adultery. Concerning women, 'If any of your women/ are guilty of lewdness,/ Take the evidence of four/ (Reliable) witnesses from amongst you/ Against them; and if they testify,/ Confine them to houses until/ Death do claim them,/ Or God ordain for them/ Some (other) way (4:15).' Concerning men, 'If two men among you are guilty of lewdness, punish them both. If they repent and amend, leave them alone; for God is Oft-returning, Most Merciful (4:16).'²⁵ Ignoring the telling difference between the two punishments, what is noteworthy here is that both are far milder than in the case of adultery, where each partner is to be precisely flogged. 'The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication,—flog each of them with a hundred stripes: let not compassion move you in their case, in a manner prescribed by God, if ye believe in God and the Last Day: and let a party of the Believers witness their punishment (24:2).' The specificity of the punishment, public witnessing, the total lack of allowance for compassion and repentance, in one case, and the exact opposite in the other, clearly suggests that preserving the stability of crucial social contracts and constructs—marriage; paternity; inheritance; honour—is of far greater concern than just punishing what is considered a lewd or sinful act. Muslim religious scholars usually refer to 4:15, then proceed—like the Judeo-Christians in their own way—to employ the Qur'anic references to Lot, Sodom and Gommorrah, and a number of Hadith to bolster their unequivocal con-

²⁴ *The Laws of Manu*, chapter XI, verse 175. See *The Laws of Manu*, trans. Georg Bühler (New York, 1969), p. 466.

²⁵ *The Holy Qur-an: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Vol. I, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (New York, 1946), p. 183. Ali convincingly argues that 4:15 deals with homosexual relationships, but then explains away the difference in punishments (notes 523 and 525) not that convincingly.

demnations of homosexuality.²⁶ Arabic and Persian literary sources, however, are not altogether blasé on the subject. They often offer a curious apologia, as explained by Adam Mez, 'The real pederasty, according to Muslim tradition, came from Khorasan with the Abbasid army. (Jahiz, d. 255/868, explains this in his "*Book of the Schoolmaster*," by the fact that Abu Muslim forbade his army, for the first time, to have anything to do with women.)'²⁷ The same sources, nevertheless, blithely indicate that homosexual acts and relationships were quite prevalent in urban and court milieus, and didn't cause the indiscreet either social disgrace or politico-economic inconvenience.²⁸

Thus, in terms of both its components, the pre-modern Indo-Muslim milieu was clearly not negative toward homosexual preferences. That is why, in that society, homosexuality never developed into 'a way of life,' or led to the adoption by homosexuals of a minority status and the stigma that went with it—as happened in the Judeo-Christian England.

Returning to Urdu poets, they, on the whole, neither celebrate homosexual love, nor do they denigrate it, to the exclusion of other passions. They seem to accept it as one outlet for erotic feelings. They certainly do not feel stigmatized.

A most curious favourite of the Uranians is the theme of 'peeping.' 'Very often, all the Uranian lover could hope for was to be able to be near boys, to teach them, to watch them playing games and, most delightful of all, to see them stripped

²⁶ For example, Mufti Muhammad Zafeeruddin of the Deoband seminary. In his book, *Nasl-kusht* (Deoband, 1972, 2nd edition, revised)—the title means 'Genocide'—he refers only to 4:16, bringing in his support Shah Waliullah, then builds his case with the Qur'anic verses that deal with the Lot story.

²⁷ Adam Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, trans. S. Khuda Bakhsh and D. S. Margoliouth (Patna, 1937), p. 358.

²⁸ See George Allgrove, *Love in the East* (London, 1962), pp. 66–76; also Richard Burton's 'Terminal Essay' to his *Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, reproduced in *Homosexuality: A Cross Cultural Approach*, ed. Donald Webster Cory (New York, 1956), pp. 207–46.

for swimming. Untouchable, the boys may yet inspire passion through the poet's eyes alone.²⁹ Arousal of passion through sight is, of course, not unknown in the Urdu ghazal; in fact, that is mostly what the ghazal lover—his beloved being so remote and neglectful—can hope for. The sexually segregated urban society of the eighteenth century Delhi provided a great many occasions for men to come together and cultivate intimacy without any fear of being stigmatised. The opportunities, as mentioned in other poetic genres, occurred in the contexts of tutoring, wrestling, games, fairs, and private conviviality. In his autobiographical(?) *masnavî*, *Bostân-i-Kayâl* (1747), Siraj of Aurangabad describes his passion for a Hindu boy, who was fourteen when they first met. Siraj came upon him in the market and was smitten by his beauty at first sight. He invited the boy to come to him with his books for instruction. The boy was more than willing, and their relationship soon became most intense. What should be noted is that when the news of the passionate attachment spread in the city and people raised objections, it was not because the relationship was between an older man and a boy, but between a Muslim and a Hindu.³⁰

As for the act of 'peeping' itself, we do find references to it, but the act, interestingly, is imagined as common to both the lover and the beloved. Ghalib (d. 1869), for example, in his *Masnavî-i Abr-i Guharbâr*, denigrates the promised Paradise on the ground that it would not provide 'a hole in the wall' for peeping at beautiful people. While his contemporary, Zauq, (d. 1854) bemoans that 'the hole through which my love used to peep at me, // it alone is now blocked by the nest of a wasp.'³¹

The Uranian poets often recall poignantly 'their own lost youth when, without fear or guilt, possessed of the same

²⁹ Smith, *Love*, p. 169.

³⁰ Sirajuddin Siraj Aurangabadi, *Masnavî-i-Bostân-i-Kayâl*, ed. Abdul Qadir Sarvari (Hyderabad, 1969), pp. 69–70.

physical frame they now so much adore, they might openly have had boy-friends with whom they could exchange . . . sweet caresses of budding sexuality, without the hampering burden of a mature or aging body.³² Such nostalgia for a lost masculine youth does not find expression in any genre of Urdu poetry, and for a significant reason: The key word above is 'exchange'; it suggests mutual dependence and, most importantly, a lack of concern with role inversion. A truly sex-positive attitude does not differentiate between a 'subject' and an 'object' in the act of love. The Indo-Muslim society, however, insistently made that distinction at the time, and still does. No doubt, it did not frown upon homosexuality as such, but it did stigmatize 'passivity' in males. One can say that the adoring lover-poets of Urdu were basically 'macho' males. That is why even their homosexual love was essentially pederastic, and not the kind that exists between two males of equal age and experience. Even now, in Urdu/Hindi India, *launde-bâz* (pederast; lit., boy-player) is not as exclusively an emphatic term of abuse as is *gândû* (catamite, lit., anus-defined). The same is reported for contemporary Iran, another Islamicate society. 'The homosexual act in Iran is a transaction in which there is a victim and victor. The subject-victor emasculates the object-victim. From then on, the victim will be a second-class citizen in the eyes of other men which means that they will consider him to be only a half-man, i.e. a woman. Such a man in Tabriz would be called by the name of his anus; even his name becomes a hole in his bottom. They say: "That boy is an asshole."³³

The ideal boy that the Uranians fantasized about—their 'angelic vision'—did not exist in real life. The real boy, 'grubby, insolent, uncomprehending of Uranian passion and rebuffing its smallest manifestation, was a far cry from their

³¹ Ghalib: *nazar-bâzi-o-zauq-i-didâr kû // ba-firdaus rauzan ba-divâr kû*. Zauq: *jhâñkte the vo hamen jis rauzan-i-divâr se // vâ'e qismat ho usi rauzan men ghar zambûr kâ*.

³² Smith, *Love*, 172–3.

³³ Baraheni, *Crowned*, p. 60.

Ideal Comrade.³⁴ They could find their ideal boy only in dreams and visions, which became too frequent a theme with them. In these visions the boy even takes on a kind of seraphic quality—sweet and gentle and loving. In his physical attributes, the beloved of the pre-modern Urdu ghazal is no less idealized, but in the qualities of the spirit he is markedly different. He is cruel, neglectful, and wanton. He takes pleasure in hurting his lovers; he makes their blood run in the streets. It appears to me that the 'rough trade' image presented of both the male and the female beloved in the pre-modern Urdu ghazal was a compensatory device to assign 'male'—culturally the more desirable—qualities to those whom the poets loved, but who actually, in the eyes of their society, could not possibly possess those cherished attributes. In this manner, the poet could make his love for a 'weak' person more understandable to himself, and his own grovelling attitude more acceptable to his society, since a man could be submissive and humble, without feeling the society's contempt, only before another man. Andaleeb Shadani offers a different explanation for the ghazal beloved's 'blood thirst'. That, he asserts, was due to a 'real' reason, namely that the beloved was a young boy, who could not possibly have any reason to find an older man attractive as a lover, and who, more likely, would reject the advances fiercely. Naturally, Shadani argues, the love in the [pre-modern] ghazal was never mutual; it was always one-sided, and often ended in gruesome tragedy for the older lover.³⁵

The next feature Smith draws our attention to is the Uranian's assertion of the 'supremacy' of their kind of love. The Uranians, he writes, 'argued that their love was altogether of a higher order than heterosexual relationships and that the manly concept of true male comradeship knitted stronger bonds than any marriage-tie.'³⁶ Among Urdu poets, only Abru

³⁴ Smith, *Love*, p. 174.

³⁵ Shadani, *Tahqiqât*, pp. 225–66.

³⁶ Smith, *Love*, p. 175.

expresses some contempt for heterosexual relationships. His reasoning has two parts. Heterosexual love always implies carnality, and can become conjugal; homosexual love, on the other hand, cannot become conjugal, and it need not always be carnal. Abru's abhorrence of carnality would make his idealized homosexual love seem close to the Platonic ideal, except that it does not lead to true male comradeship. Certainly, in his above mentioned *masnavi*, Abru is no Socrates to his Alcebiades of a boy. That aside, it is not that the Urdu ghazal does not idealize the emotion of love itself, independent of anything or anybody contingent—that, indeed, is foundational to it. Mir's poetry, for one, is a *tour de force* of that idealization, as is also Dard's.³⁷ Both Mir and Dard extol the human instinct of love and its ennobling effect, but then they are rightly seen as expressing important Sufi sentiments that permeate the best of all ghazal poetry in the pre-modern period.

Though Sufi poetry never extols 'true male comradeship,' Sufi lore is replete with accounts of profound and lasting relationships between pairs of men—the most famous between Jalaluddin Rumi and Shams of Tabriz. But, as compared to the ties the Uranian's aspire for, these relationships come with a significant role-reversal—it is, for example, the lover, Rumi, who is ennobled in the progress of his love, and not Shams, his beloved. Shams is not only supremely noble already, he is the only ennobler in the relationship.

Given the pressures of their society, Smith next submits, the Uranians had to devise 'methods of expression which would, at one and the same time, give no cause for shocking the reading public and impress, by their undertones, the already initiated.'³⁸ Towards that end they employed in their verse classical legends, and translated poems from Greek and Latin,

³⁷ The best source in English on Mir is Ralph Russell and K. Islam, *Three Mughal Poets* (Cambridge, 1968); and for Dard, Annemarie Schimmel, *Pain and Grace* (Leiden, 1976).

³⁸ Smith, *Love*, p. 180.

as also from other languages, including Persian. Most daringly, they scoured the pages of the Bible and appropriated certain Christian doctrines and legends to their own purposes. Many of them, in their own light, were devout Christians, and found sympathy and opportunity in some of the autocephalous churches of that time. The Urdu poets had their own Indo-Muslim milieu, and its dominant values were derived from Arabic and Persian literary, courtly and mystical traditions. The latter provided enough covers; if any was ever needed. The Urdu poets could always fight back any detractor by declaring, in Mir's words, 'They who worship Form don't know what Meaning is.'³⁹

A most curious motif that occurs, according to Smith, only too frequently in the Uranian verse is 'the extraordinary longing for an attachment to a boy either of a far higher or; more often, of a far lower social rank.'⁴⁰ For its explanation, Smith suggests several causes: an inferiority complex and a fear of failure on the part of the poets that hindered their having an affair with an 'intellectual equal;' the alleged sexual uninhibitedness of the lower classes; the ease with which a lower class boy could be discarded if he became too demanding; and, more laudably, a desire 'to rear the boy from his menial environment into better life.' The literary result of that final desire was what Smith calls 'the Uranians' myth-making of the "Pauper" into the "Prince," the myth indeed of the boy who, thanks to a man's intervention in his life, overrides and supersedes his lower-class birthright and becomes a boy of great beauty and intellect.'⁴¹ In that regard, the Uranians favoured telegraph boys, street urchins, working lads, and Sicilian peasantry.

³⁹ *sūrat-parast hote nahīn ma'ni-āṣāḥā // hai 'isq se buton-ke merā mudda'ā kuch aur.* 'Form-worshippers don't know what Meaning is. // That I love idols has a very different purpose.'

⁴⁰ Smith, *Love*, p. 191.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 192.

In Urdu, in the verses of Mir and Abru, for example, reference is made to boys from all strata of society, but more often to the 'boys of the market street' [*tiflān-i-tih-bāzār*]. Mir's verse, for example, makes references to boys from musician, goldsmith, apothecary, washer-man and flower-seller families as often as it does to those from the highest ranking families of a Brahmin, Qazi, Mufti, or Sayyid. But these mentions are mostly a literary conceit and a manner of paying homage to the venerable Persian literary tradition of *ṣahr-āṣob*, where Persian poets describe the beauty and prosperity of a city by listing the charms of handsome boys from various professions and ranks.⁴²

The Urdu poets never made a fetish of market boys. Unlike the Uranians, they never consciously rebelled against their society's ethos; nor did they feel compelled to justify their passion in terms of some social good. In the eighteenth century Indo-Muslim society there was no need for either. When Siraj offered to instruct his beloved Hindu boy, it was no more than a ploy to gain his company. Abru instructed a young boy, not in the fine arts and sciences, but in the subtle ways of becoming a proper *ma'sūq* and correctly behaving in accord with that role. Urdu poets did not look for the 'Prince' under the 'Pauper's' rags either, nor did they seek to discover the 'natural' boy under the fine raiment of a 'Prince.'

No one presently denies that at least one of the presumed 'beloveds' of the pre-modern Urdu ghazal was a beautiful youth; still most scholars of Urdu literature continue to see homosexual love itself as an aberration that developed in the pre-modern Indo-Muslim society only due to the segregation of sexes at the time. The view is misguided, at best.

As we have argued above, the Indo-Muslim milieu of the eighteenth century Delhi was not blatantly sex-negative. It tolerated homosexuality and did not stigmatize a person merely for his sexual orientation—so long as that person ful-

⁴² See Ahmad Gulchīn-i Ma'āni, *Ṣahr-Āṣob dar Si'r-i Fārsi* (Teheran, 1967).

filled the more important demands of the society; namely an acceptance of, and submission to, its socio-economic hierarchies, and a willingness to perpetuate the same to some measure. In so far as that milieu was not actively sex-positive either, and in fact contained some latent threats, it encouraged, at most, only licentiousness—as seen in Dargah Quli Khan's memoirs—and not hedonism of any shape. Homosexual passion in the pre-modern Urdu ghazal remained pederastic—i.e. hierarchical, non-mutual, and controlling—because the milieu's dominant values were of the same nature; it never aspired to achieve the mutuality of an ideal gay love. Finally, as one examines the Urdu verses that are unambiguously pederastic in reference, one striking fact sticks out, they are of indifferent quality at best, indicative of the actual indifference with which male homosexuality and its many manifestations were viewed in pre-modern Delhi. Four examples from Mir and Abru should suffice to justify our assertion.

hai tira roz apnā lar̄kon̄ kī dostī mēn
is din hī ko kahe thā aksar pidar hamārā
 My friendship with boys has darkened my days.
 My father had warned me of this very day. (Mir)

lar̄ke jahānābād ke yak sahr kartē nāz
ājāte hain bagal mēn isāra jahān kiyā
 The Delhi boys are coquetish, but
 The leap to your side if you just wink. (Mir)

jab-ki aisā ho gandumī laundā
tab gunahgār kyōn na ho ādam
 With such a 'wheatish' boy around,
 How can Man avoid sinning?⁴³ (Abru)

sabza-i-kat nahīn hai jis lab par
ūs ke bose mēn kuch savād nahīn

⁴³ In the Islamicate version of the Eden story, wheat replaces apple as the forbidden food.

No pleasure lies in kissing the lip
 That has no 'verdure' of the down. (Abru)