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Disappearing Treasures: Public Libraries and Urdu Printed Books*

I

An increasingly disturbing fact of life in North India is that public collections of Urdu printed books are fast deteriorating, and in many instances even entirely disappearing. Take for example the situation in Lucknow and Barabanki, the two places I know well enough. Until 1950, Lucknow could boast of having three good public libraries, each with a substantial collection of Urdu books.[1] These were in addition to the libraries of the University of Lucknow and the city's major colleges and seminaries that were not open to the general public. There were also a few private collections that were open to scholars, but they are not of concern here.

Lucknow also had at least five notable Urdu bookstores that I knew of during my college days in the early fifties. One of them, the Siddiq Book Depot, was indeed a treasure trove of old printed books as I discovered while collecting data for the Urdu segment of *The National Bibliography of Indian Literature,* 1901–1953 during 1955–56. I also then came to know at first hand a remarkable lending library, called the Paisa Library, where borrowing a book originally cost only one paisa per day, and in 1955 still cost a trifle amount. It contained in abundance what the academics now fervidly seek and cherish under the label of "popular culture."

Sixty years later, the situation in Lucknow is simply awful. Of the three public libraries, the oldest—the library of the Rifāh-e ʿĀm Club—fell victim to a property dispute in the fifties. As roofs collapsed and walls cracked, its books were stolen or left to rot exposed to the elements. What was once the biggest of the three—the Amiruddaulah Public Library

*Translations from the Urdu in this paper are the author's unless otherwise noted.

[1]For more on these libraries, see Daryābādī (1978, 116).

—still exists, but its valuable collection of pre-1947 newspapers and journals was sold as scrap, and its present holdings in Urdu books are a very small fraction of what they once were. The smallest of the three—the library started by Babu Ganga Parshad Verma—somehow survives in a state of increasing neglect. As for the Paisa Library, it ended with the death of its cranky owner. His heirs, I am told, sold off most of the stock to private collectors.

Equally shameful for a city whose name is still invoked by Urduwalas with some awe—totally misplaced, in my view—Lucknow no longer has a single decent Urdu bookshop.

It is my impression that small public libraries or reading rooms had begun to appear in North Indian headquarter towns by the end of the nineteenth century. Most such places were supported by local dignitaries, and maintained in some joint fashion by municipal and state authorities. The small public library in my hometown, Barabanki, was opened in 1888 and named after the Lieutenant-Governor of the province. It was still functional as a reading room in the forties, though most people could not borrow books. By the middle fifties the library was closed. God alone knows what happened to its books, but the building was converted into a storage for government-subsidized grain, sugar, and kerosene oil.[2] Now it lies abandoned, another victim of property disputes.

Most Urdu academics in India consider the preservation of printed books of little concern; they worry only about the manuscripts. In their belief, printed books have somehow always existed, and will continue to exist without requiring any special effort. That, of course, is not the case. The vast majority of early imprints—published between 1850 and 1890—have now mostly vanished. Only a very small number were reprinted later. Almost the same is beginning to also be true for the books published between 1890 and 1940; certainly the first editions are now extremely hard to find. As we sadly know, most Urdu books never come out in large editions. Even now it is a rare book of any kind that has a print run of one thousand copies. And a great many, particularly of the non-fiction kind, never see a second printing. In recent years some effort has been made in Pakistan, and to a lesser degree in India, to bring out photo-reprints of old books, but their number is miniscule compared to what has been lost.

There is also another reason why I worry about printed Urdu books and public libraries in North India. Here I must invoke Ghālib's name. He was an avid reader, but seldom bought books. As his biographer Ḥālī tells

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[2]Information about the library in the *Bara Banki* District Gazetteer (1964, 224) is not based on reality.

us: "[Ghālib] never—or practically never—bought a book. There was a man whose trade it was to bring round books from the booksellers and hire them out on loan. Ghālib always used to get his books on loan from him, returning them when he was finished reading them" (qtd. in Russell & Islam, 38).

One must, therefore, ask: what were the books available on loan to Ghālib and his peers in Delhi? How common was the practice described above across North India? What shared universe of thought came into existence through that process, and did it differ from the time when only manuscripts made such rounds? Recall that in 1835 it became legal for anyone to establish a printing press, which fortuitously coincided with the introduction of litho printing in India, a godsend for Urdu. The new technology was simple, accommodated the readily available talent of scribes or *khushnavīs*, and required little investment. Authors and publishers all across North India were soon issuing small print runs of Urdu books to meet the preferences of prospective readers.

The question—what was Ghālib reading in the 1840s and 1850s?—can also be pulled forward in time. We need to know, for example, what was being read by Urdu readers, or at least was available to them, between the 1890s and the 1920s. Bear in mind that Urdu writings in those early years seldom had footnotes and bibliographies. Writers mostly quoted authors by name alone, rarely mentioning the name of the book, or their actual source. We know that Ḥālī used John Milton as an authority in the famous *Muqaddama*, but it is still not known how he learned about Milton in the first place. Additionally, a great many authors in those years never bothered to separate the exact words of a quotation from what they added or paraphrased on their own, making it more difficult to identify their source.

A different but related issue came home to me recently when I came across a book called *Ḥavāshī-e Abu'l-Kalām Āzād* published in 1988. Its editor, Sayyid Masīḥu'l-Ḥasan, had worked at the National Archives of India and had organized the books that the Archive obtained from the private collection of Maulānā Abu'l-Kalām Āzād after his death. The book brings together the casual comments that Āzād jotted down on the margins of the books as he read them. Some of the comments—for example, on some books by his mentor Shiblī—are quite surprising and should be of significance to any student of Āzād's intellectual development. In a similar fashion, a study of the graffiti or marginal comments in old books in existing public libraries would allow us to obtain some sense of how those books were received by contemporary readers.

II

It is my habit now, when I visit a new city in India, to find out if it has an old public library. So it was last year in Shimla, where much to my good fortune a venerable gentleman took me to an obscure little branch of the Himachal Pradesh State Library. It is presently housed in an abandoned church, but contains all the books of the original Shimla Municipal Library. The dimly lit nave of the small church has been partitioned into several small rooms that contain rickety cabinets and shelves loaded with books. A small staff of two women and one man, however, keeps the place remarkably clean and functioning. Thanks to my aged guide, I was given special access: I was allowed to take down, on my own but one at a time, every Urdu book on the fifty-six shelves devoted to the language, so that I could examine it to my satisfaction, then put it back in its original place.

I need not describe the delight and excitement I experienced for eight days, but I would like to share a portion of my notes on some of the 175 books that were of special interest to me. I particularly highlight here the translations I found, for they brought new themes and thought into Urdu. They also forced significant changes in the language, expanding and modifying its literary and scholarly vocabularies.[3] The thematic range of these publications should confirm my own conviction that if we wish to see a day when Urdu studies mean much more than literary history and criticism, we must make every effort to discover and preserve similar collections of printed Urdu books that once existed in most cities across North India.

III

1. Sir John Lubbock, *The Use of Life* (New York: Macmillan 1894; reprinted in 1913). Urdu title: *Maʿāsharat*. Translator: Mīr Asad ʿAlī Khān of Baigan Palli, Hyderabad (n.p.: n.p., 1930).

The book discusses ethical issues that arise in social interactions and politics. Its Urdu was "improved" by ʿAbdu'l-Ḥalīm Sharar, the famous author and journalist, who is also mentioned as its publisher. Apparently the book received a fair degree of attention, for the library copy is a second printing; it is dated 1930, but the publisher and place of publication are not indicated.

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[3]This is also a way to pay homage to the extraordinary work of translation done by Professor Memon over four decades.

2. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869). Urdu title: *Maḥkūmiyat-e Nisvāñ*. Translator: Maulvī Muʿīnu'd-Dīn Anṣārī (Lahore: Maktaba Punjab, 1939).

I have no information concerning the learned translator, nor about the context in which the book became available to Urdu readers. Was it originally published much earlier, and read, for example, by Akbar Allāhabādī, who often mentions Mill in his satirical verse and was highly critical of those who opposed the purdah?

3. Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931), *La Psychologie des Foules* (Paris: Alcan, 1895); English translation, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896). Urdu title: *Rūḥa'l-Ijtimāʿ*. Translator: Maulānā Muḥammad Yūnus Anṣārī of Firangi Mahal (Azamgarh: Dāru'l-Muṣannifīn, 1937). 3rd printing, 233 pages.

The subtitle describes the book as "the Urdu translation of Dr. Le Bon's French book, the '*The Psychological Principles of Human Groups*,'" (*Jamāʿathā-e Insānī kē Uṣūl-e Nafsiyya*). The preface informs us that three other books of the French scholar, namely *Tamaddun-e ʿArab*, *Tamaddun-e Hind*, and *Inqilābu'l-Umam* had already been translated into Urdu, and that the book in hand was the fourth. The preface also explains that the book was first translated from the Arabic translation done by Fatḥī Pāshā Zāghlōl, but later, on the advice of Maulānā ʿAbdu'l-Mājid Daryābādī the translation was much improved by using the English translation. In fact, the book was to be considered "a translation of the English version." Le Bon's influence in the circle of scholars we now associate with Shiblī Nuʿmānī, ʿAbdu'l-Ḥalīm Sharar, and the Nadvatu'l-ʿUlamā has not been studied but much deserves our attention. He was widely perceived as an admirer of Islam and the Arabs, but the authoritarian and racist aspects of his thought seem also to have gained much acceptance. His books on the Arab and the Indian civilizations were translated into Urdu as *Tamaddun-e ʿArab* (1896) and *Tamaddun-e Hind* (1913), respectively, by Sayyid ʿAlī Bilgrāmī, and have recently been reprinted in Pakistan.[4] I have not been able to locate any copy of the third Urdu translation, *Inqilābu'l-Umam,* mentioned above. It must be of Le Bon's book entitled *La Révolution Française et la Psychologie des Révolutions* (Paris: Flammarion, 1912), translated into English as *The Psychology of Revolution* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1913).

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[4]For details, see my article, "Interrogating 'The East,' 'Culture,' and 'Loss' in Abdul Halim Sharar's 'The Lucknow of the Past,'" in a forthcoming book edited by Karen Leonard and Alka Patel.

4. Sir Henry Thomas Buckle (1821–1862), *History of Civilization in England*, 2 volumes. Volume 1 appeared in 1857; Volume II in 1861 (London: J.W. Parker). Urdu title: *Tārīkh-e Tamaddun*, 2 volumes. Translator: Munshī Aḥad ʿAlī, completed by ʿAbdu'l-Mājid Daryābādī (Aurangabad: Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdū, n.d.). Publication number 21.

Aḥad ʿAlī died before he could translate the final chapter so the task was completed by ʿAbdu'l-Mājid. The Shimla library has only the second volume. Both volumes are now available on the Internet from the Center for Research Libraries, Chicago [http://dds.crl.edu/CRLdelivery.asp?TID=1246]. The digitized text is a copy of the second printing (Lucknow, Al-Naẕīr Press, 1917), with a preface by Shiblī Nuʿmānī.

Buckle's book was a major hit with general readers and scholars across Europe when it first came out in 1857. A somewhat abridged, and unsigned, translation of its opening chapter was published by Sir Syed in his journal *Tahẕību'l-Akhlāq*, Vol. 5, No. 13 (1 Shavvāl 1291 AH/1875 AD). It appeared with an appreciative note, in which Sir Syed expressed his agreement with Buckle's main propositions—as he understood them—except for Buckle's adverse view of religion's role in the growth of any civilization.[5]

5. Louis Gallet, libretto for Jules Massenet's opera *Thaïs* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1898). Urdu title: *Miṣr kī Raqqāṣa*. Translator: Aḥmad Shāh Bukhārī "Paṯras," M.A. (Cantab.) (Lahore: Hāshmī Book Depot, n.d.).

The book was first checked out in April 1941, but not very often later. It contains an introduction by Faiẓ Aḥmad Faiẓ, who had studied under Bukhārī at Lahore. Faiẓ later wrote:

> Writing introductions or prefaces is not my field; I do it only as a labor of love. And it began this way. I had just finished my studies and started teaching in Amritsar when my friend Muḥīu'd-Dīn came to see me. He told me he had started a publishing business, and the first book was going to be a French play, *Thaïs*, translated by Professor Paṯras Bukhārī. He had brought along the manuscript since he wished me to write its introduction. […] I said, "Show some fear of God. How can I write the introduction to Bukhārī Ṣāḥib's book?" But he persisted […] and I finally agreed. For days, however, I kept worrying about his reaction. It so happened that Bukhārī Ṣāḥib soon moved to Delhi to take up the job at All India Radio, and so I could relax again. When I met him a year later, he most pleasantly said to me, "*Bẖā'ī*, thanks for the Introduction. I was delighted. It is so well written.
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> (qtd. in Ẓafaru'l-Ḥasan 1987, 400)

[5]Reprinted in Panipati (1962, 3–37).

Another translation in the library that has an introduction by Faiẓ is *Lenin* by D. S. Mirsky, originally published in 1931 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company) in the Makers of the Modern Age series. The translator is the well-known Communist leader and historian, Dr. Muḥammad Ashraf. The translation was published by Maktaba-e Urdū, Lahore, but no date is given.

It may be worth noting here that several years earlier Maulvī Enāyatu'l-Lāh, the talented son of the illustrious Maulvī Ẕakāu'l-Lāh, had published a translation of Anatole France's classic, *Thaïs*, with the original name. The Shimla library has a copy of its second, revised edition, published by Ṣāqī Book Depot, Delhi, (n.d., 247 pages). Unfortunately, the introduction by Mirzā Muḥammad Saʿīd has been ripped out.

6. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Urdu title: *"Ḍenmārk" kā Shahzāda, "Hamlet."* Translator: Enāyatu'l-Lāh Dihlavī, former director of Dāru't-Tarjuma, Hyderabad (Delhi: Ṣāqī Book Depot, n.d.). 198 pages.

The book also contains an advertisement for *Najmu's-Saḥar*, Enāyatu'l-Lāh's translation of Flaubert's *Salambo*. Enāyatu'l-Lāh was a remarkable and prolific translator, whose talent was first recognized and used to advantage by none other than Sir Syed. The library contains only the second part of *Najmu's-Saḥar*.

7. John Galsworthy, *Strife: A Drama in Three Acts* (London: Duckworth, 1909). Urdu title: *Paikār*. Translator: Bārī (ʿAlīg.) (Lyallpore: Urdu Circle, n.d). 138 pages, plus an introduction of twelve pages.

A note at the end of the book contains the date: 7 November 1935. Bārī (ʿAlīg.), as he always named himself in his books, was one of the earliest left-wing intellectuals and writers, and a mentor of Saʿādat Ḥasan Manṭō. His most cited work was a critique of British rule in India entitled *Kampanī kī Ḥukūmat*. The book contains an advertisement for *Vīrā*, described as a play by Oscar Wilde, translated by "Janāb Saʿādat Ḥasan and Khvāja Ḥasan ʿAbbās." Apparently Saʿādat Ḥasan had not yet started using Manṭō as his surname, or, more likely, he was rejecting it at the time as a part of his identity.

8. Oscar Wilde, *Vera; or, The Nihilists: A Drama in Four Acts* (London: Ranken & Company, 1880). Urdu title: *Vīrā*. Translators: Saʿādat Ḥasan and Ḥasan ʿAbbās (Amritsar: Dāru'l-Aḥmar, 1934). 150 pages.

A rare first edition. It is an odd-looking book, badly printed on poor paper, and must have badly disappointed Manṭō, who was quite fastidious in such matters. The book was printed in Lahore and the entire pro-

ject was probably handled by Manṭō's mentor, Bārī (ʿAlīg.). The last page carries the following note from the publisher: "Because the book was very hastily published it could not be properly calligraphed or printed. We hope the readers will overlook these shortcomings. All faults will be removed in the second edition." The book was borrowed only once—eleven years after its publication!

A translation of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, done by Anṣār Nāṣirī and entitled *Salmā* (Delhi: Ṣāqī Book Depot, 1931, 71 pages), is also in the library. It contains a good introduction by the publisher, Shāhid Aḥmad.

9. Moliere, *Misanthrope*. Urdu title: *Bigṛē Dil*. Translators: Nūr Alahī and Muḥammad ʿUmar (Lahore: Shaikh Mubārak ʿAlī, n.d.).

The preface is dated August 1923. The translators did two versions: one full length for the reading public, and the other, with abridged speeches, for stage production. The library copy is the full version. The book contains an advertisement for the duo's other translations: *Rūḥ-e Siyāsat*, a play about Abraham Lincoln; *Jān-e Ẓarāfat*, another play by Moliere—the translation is dedicated to Iqbāl; *Qazzāq*, a play by Schiller entitled *The Robbers*; and *Ẓafar kī Maut*, a play by Maeterlinck entitled *The Death of Tintagiles*. (The name of Nūr Alahī is consistently spelled *Alahī*, not *Ilāhī* as is the present practice in the histories of Urdu drama.)

10. Maurice Maeterlinck, *Joyzelle: Pièce en Cinq Actes* (Paris: Charpentier, 1903). Urdu title: *Nargis-e Jamāl* (The Narcissus of Beauty). Translator: Shāhid Aḥmad (Delhi: Ṣāqī Book Depot, 1933). 159 pages.

It contains an introduction by the translator, the founder-editor of the famous journal *Ṣāqī*, which for three decades consistently published the best new writers and translators in Urdu.

11. Alfred Neumann (1895–1952), *Der Patriot* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1925); English translation, Ashley Dukes, *Such Men are Dangerous: A Play in Eight Scenes* (London: Gollancz, 1928). Urdu title: *Muḥibb-e Vaṭan*. Translator: Sirāju'd-Dīn Aḥmad Niẓāmī (Lahore: Gīlānī Book Depot, 1930). 107 pages.

According to the translator, his work was based on a piece of historical fiction by the German author, Alfred Neumann, which deals with the assassination of Emperor Paul of Russia in 1801. Neumann was forced into exile by the Nazis and eventually ended his days in Hollywood.

It is an unusual literary translation. The *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature* (1947, 569) describes the relevant work as a story titled "*Der Patriot*," published in 1925 and translated into English in 1928.

The same year a dramatic version by the British author, Ashley Dukes, was staged in London under the title *Such Men are Dangerous*. It seems that the title was changed to *The Patriot* when the play was staged in New York the same year, with John Gielgud making his Broadway debut. The following year, the great director Ernst Lubitsch made it into a silent masterpiece, starring the legendary Emil Jennings. Niẓāmī mentions both the play and the film in his introduction, and claims to have used both to expand the original with two additional chapters.

12. George Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play* (London: Constable & Company, 1923). Urdu title: *Maẓlūm Dōshīza*. Translator: Burzojee Firozshah Tarapuri (Hyderabad: Nafīs Academy, 1945). 263 pages.

The cover tells us that Tarapuri also translated Dale Carnegie's famous book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1937). Urdu title: *Taʿmīr-e Ḥayāt*. This was not found at Shimla.

13. Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), *The Pillars of Society* (i.e., *Samfundets Stotter*, Copenhagen: Gyldendahl, 1877). Urdu title: *Samāj kē Sutūn*. Translator: Qaisī Rāmpūrī (Bombay: Kitābistān, n.d.). 102 pages.

Qaisī Rāmpūrī (d. 1974), now barely mentioned in literary histories, was a popular and prolific fiction writer and translator for at least three decades. His translation is an "Indianized" version of the original and was most likely based on the English translation by William Archer (London: Scott, 1888).

14. Mary Wood-Allen (1841–1908), *What A Young Girl Ought to Know* (Philadelphia: Vir, 1897). Urdu title: *Baччīyōñ sē Dō Dō Bātēñ*. Translator: Mumtāz Bashīr Bēgam (Agra: Shamsī Press, 1923). 182 pages.

Mumtāz Bashīr Bēgam was the wife of Bashīru'd-Dīn Aḥmad, the son of the eminent writer Naẓīr Aḥmad. About her work, she explains in the introduction:

> I already knew Urdu well enough to read and write. By the fourth year of my marriage, I had learned sufficient English to read easy books, and could also write simple English. Then my husband made this huge request [that I translate the book]. I flatly said No, but he kept insisting. Subsequently, I read the book with him as lessons, and would write down in translation what I read, always seeking his corrections.
>
> (29)

The book instructs young girls about the female body and feminine

health issues. But it is not a strict translation; it recasts the original into a book reflecting the milieu of the translator's targeted readers: *sharīf* Muslim women. From that perspective, it is a remarkable achievement, and also an unusual example of literary collaboration between a husband and wife. The library copy is of the book's second printing (one thousand copies). As explained by the translator, the first printing in 1917 was of five hundred copies, of which one hundred were gifted to friends and the remaining four hundred were sold in six years.

Dr. Mary Wood-Allen was the World Superintendent of the Purity Department of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union. A recommendatory note by Frances E. Willard in the English book (first published in 1897) partly reads as follows:

> Among the many indications of the age that are full of encouragement to the reformer, none outranks the quickened interest of our people in teaching the young those sacred "origins" which, above everything, they ought to know, and because of their ignorance of which thousands are marred in their moral being who might have been strong, pure, and happy. I do earnestly hope that this book, founded on a strictly scientific, but not forgetting a strong ethical basis, may be well known and widely read by the dear girls in their teens and the young women in their homes.
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> ([2])

15. Sylvanus Stall, D.D. (1840–1915), *What a Young Man Ought to Know* (Philadelphia: Vir, 1904). Urdu title: *Nashāt-e ʿUmr*. Translator: Bashīru'd-Dīn Aḥmad (Delhi: The Translator, 1920). Second printing, 1000 copies. First published in 1911.

Apparently, Bashīru'd-Dīn Aḥmad, the illustrious son of an illustrious father, was quite taken by the writings of the Lutheran pastor Sylvanus Stall—described as *Amrīkā kē mashhūr pādrī*—and the work of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, in particular their publications in the series titled Self and Sex, or Pure Books on Avoided Subjects. He translated, with Dr. Stall's permission, three of his four didactic books: *What a Young Boy Ought to Know* (Urdu title: *Ḥirz-e Ṭiflān*; not found at Shimla); the above book; and *What a Man of Forty-Five Ought to Know* (Urdu title: *ʿAṣā-e Pīrī*; found at Shimla. First printing 1913. The library has the second printing of 1925, one thousand copies). The fourth book in that series, *What a Young Husband Ought to Know*, was translated into Urdu by Sayyid ʿAlī Aṣghar Bilgrāmī, under the title, *Falsafa-e Izdivāj*, and published by Bashīru'd-Dīn Aḥmad. A similar series of four books were prepared for the instruction of women, of which apparently only one, described above, was made available in the translation by Mrs. Bashīru'd-

Dīn Aḥmad. It is important to note that Urdu verses, quotations from the Qurʾān, and names of notable Muslims are incorporated within the translation, giving it the appearance and texture of an original Urdu book. ❑

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