

Lucknow
Memories of a City

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Urdu in Lucknow/
Lucknow in Urdu

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The first flowering of what later came to be called Urdu poetry occurred in the kingdoms of Bijapur and Golkonda, followed by a second—briefer—development at Aurangabad when that city became a major outpost of the Mughal imperial power. The third phase, more sustained and glorious (at least for Urdu ghazal), occurred at Delhi and lasted roughly two generations. Then the scene moved to Lucknow. In histories of Urdu literature, Lucknow and Urdu are mentioned together only after the appearance of the independent state of Awadh and the eastward migration of the Delhi poets. However, if the primary imperative behind the formation of Urdu was the unavoidable interaction between the speakers of Persian and Turkish, on the one hand, and the speakers of various Indian vernaculars on the other, it would be safe to assume that just as what we now call *dakini* and *gujari* were being formed south of the Gangetic plain, so must have developed a few similar varieties of 'Urdu' in the plains too. In other words, some variety of Urdu must have existed in the Awadh region long before the immigration from Delhi.

This assumption about many 'Urdu's' helps explain why *dakini* could have appeared as simultaneously similar and different to the people of Delhi, whose language, in its turn, was similarly viewed in Awadh. Each group felt akin to the other and yet also felt a need to differentiate itself from it and to 'correct' the other. In other words, what each in turn encountered sounded not merely different but 'wrong'. No wonder Urdu literati have always been overly concerned with notions of 'purity of

language' and 'correctness of idiom' and the concept of *abl-e zuban*, 'people of the language'.

Like the previous two 'centres' of Urdu—Delhi and the Deccan—Lucknow became a 'centre' or *markaz* for Urdu only when it gained power and prosperity. It was only then that the local idiom came into direct contact with the idiom of Delhi and the interpenetration of the two continued the formation of what is now standard Urdu. The reasons these obvious matters should be reiterated are that (1) they are often forgotten in discussions concerning linguistic rivalry between speakers of different varieties of Urdu and (2) they underscore the fact that the history of pre-modern Urdu literature is a narrative of the rise and fall of political 'centres'—which then also came to be seen as literary centres, even as literary 'schools'.

Though a few religious poems were written in Awadh earlier, Urdu literary life in Awadh begins with the immigration of Urdu poets and scholars from Delhi, following attacks by the Irani, Afghan, Maratha and Jat armies. The newly independent state of Awadh offered generous patronage to poets, writers and scholars of Urdu and Persian. While poets like Khwaja Mir 'Dard' and his younger brother, Muhammad Mir 'Asar', remained behind, Sirajuddin Ali Khan-e-Arzu, the senior most poet in Persian and a mentor to many Urdu poets of the time, did emigrate, as did Mir Muhammad Taqi 'Mir' and Mirza Muhammad Rafi 'Sauda', two other preeminent poets in Urdu. Ali Jawad Zaidi gives a list of sixty-five such emigrant poets, including, beside Mir and Sauda, such prominent names as Soz, Fughan, Zahik, Jur'at, Insha, Rangin and Mushafi (Zaidi, 1971: 64).

It may be useful to note here that the poets who are closely identified with Delhi in literary chronicles were not necessarily originally from Delhi; many of them had come there from elsewhere to seek livelihood and left when that became extremely difficult. For example, Mir was born in Agra, moved to Delhi in his youth, spent a great deal of time in places such as Bharatpur, Kama and Digh, then permanently moved to Lucknow. Qalandar Baksh 'Jur'at' grew up in Delhi but moved to Bareilly and later to Lucknow. Even Arzu had been born and raised in Gwalior, lived most of his life in Delhi, then moved to Fyzabad and died in Lucknow. In those days poetry was a profession, and its practitioners went where their profession could obtain proper patronage. In Delhi, such patronage had been provided by nobles (both Muslim and non-Muslim) more often than by the king. In Awadh, in contrast, the first three major nawabs—Shuja-ud-Daula, Asaf-ud-Daula and Saadat Ali

Khan—were themselves keen patrons of literature. A fourth and very important patron was Mirza Sulaiman Shikoh, who was himself a Delhi prince and had sought and found shelter and financial support at Lucknow in 1789.

Within the context of patrons and poets, one prominent feature of the literary milieu that emerged in Lucknow was furious public displays of rivalry between poets. Rivalry among poets was always a prominent feature of literary life in the pre-modern days. Its causes lay in the institutions of *mushaira*—etymologically, the word implies contestation—and courtly patronage as well as in the fact that pre-modern poets regarded themselves as men with a 'profession'. In Lucknow, in contrast to Delhi and the Deccan, we find such rivalry taking on the proportions of processions and street fights. Was this a matter of higher stakes, or was it some personal inclination of the patrons that encouraged the poets to display their rivalries in the streets of Lucknow? Perhaps it was a matter of both, further enhanced by a prevalent taste in public entertainment in the form of such contests or 'fights' (*larai*) as kite flying, cock fights, quail fights, and mock abusive quarrels between low-caste women.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed review of everything produced in Urdu in Lucknow; it can only highlight the specially noteworthy developments. And the most significant of such development was in the genre of *marsiya* or elegy.

In Urdu literature, the word *marsiya*, unless otherwise qualified, refers to poems commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husain, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Such elegies were also written in the Deccan and in Delhi, but short and modelled on the ghazal in having each couplet thematically independent of others. Also, they were apparently meant to be recited in chorus. What happened in Lucknow was that *marsiyas* became sustained narratives of substantial length on a particular hero or incident. Also, they came to be recited or declaimed in a distinctly dramatic fashion by the poet or by a trained reader before a gathering, or *majlis*, of believers. Certain structural features also became established, and, as if by consensus, *marsiyas* came to be written in the form of a *musaddas* or six-line stanzas (each stanza having the following rhyme scheme: aaaa bb). In these poems, the goal of the poet was not just to make his audience cry but also to exult in the bravery and devotion of the heroes of Karbala. Rather than being a simple lament, the new *marsiya* came to be a poem aiming for epic grandeur. The Shia milieu of Lucknow provided the necessary patronage to the practitioners of *marsiya* and encouraged them to innovate and elaborate. Remarkably, much of

this was accomplished by two poets—Mir Babr Ali 'Anis' (d. 1874) and Mirza Salamat Ali 'Dabir' (d. 1875)—and the members of their families and their disciples.

The innovations made at Lucknow were readily adopted by marsiya writers elsewhere. Equally significantly, because of the cultural preeminence given to the elegies of Anis and Dabir as well as their sheer excellence, musaddas itself came to be the preferred form for any kind of serious verse requiring a sustained exposition. In 1879 Altaf Husain 'Hali' (d. 1914) chose to write his famous poem, 'The Tide and Ebb of Islam', in the musaddas form. Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) also wrote many of his most popular and effective poems in this form, as did any number of lesser and more recent poets. All of them owe a great deal to the art of the great marsiya writers of Lucknow.

Another development was the revival of interest in the genre of *masnavi* (a narrative poem of some length, consisting of rhyming couplets). In the Deccan, masnavi and ghazal were equally favoured by poets and patrons, and Dakini poets produced a considerable number of lengthy masnavis on different topics, romantic, epic, historical or sufistic. At least one major masnavi was written at Aurangabad. Delhi, too, produced only a couple, and much reduced in scale. But in Lucknow several poets again turned to this genre, the two most important being Mir Ghulam Hasan 'Hasan' (d. 1786) and Pandit Daya Shankar 'Nasim' (d. 1843). Hasan's *Sibr-ul-Bayan* ('The Magic of Narration') and Nasim's *Gulzar-e Nasim* ('The Garden of Nasim') are diametrically opposite in diction and narrative style—the former is simple and direct while the latter is markedly full of artifice—but both found great favour. Both utilised tales of magic and fantasy and took delight in the supernatural. The third great master of masnavi in Lucknow was Hakim Tasadduq Husain (Nawab Mirza) 'Shauq' (d. 1871), who took inspiration from neither of his illustrious predecessors. His masnavis are highly naturalistic in both plot and language, and are closer to those of the Delhi poets, Mir and Asar. Relatively short in length and rather licentious in places, Shauq's masnavis do contain long portions of elegant and effective verse, and his *Zahr-e Ishq* is an unquestionable masterpiece. Numerous other masnavis written in Lucknow did not gain lasting fame, including a masnavi version of the *Arabian Nights* which was begun, at the request of the famous publisher Munshi Newal Kishore, by Asghar Ali Khan 'Hasrat', perhaps the last emigrant poet from Delhi, continued by Tota Ram 'Shayan' and completed by Shadi Lal 'Chaman' in 1866.

It is hard to account for this revival of interest in masnavi in Lucknow.

Perhaps the genre required more munificent patronage than a ghazal or a panegyric (*qasida*), and such patrons were again available in Lucknow. But that is belied by the fact that neither Hasan nor Nasim received any patronage for their pains. Another speculation would be to link this fondness for the masnavi to the presence and popularity in that region of earlier Awadhi masnavis or *premakhyans* (as they are called today), such as the *Padmavat* of Jaisi and the *Madhumalti* of Manjhan. Perhaps more to the point would be to see reflected in this liking for masnavi a burgeoning fondness for literary stories in Urdu that seems to characterise Lucknow. It may be relevant to note here that while the last Persian *dastan* in India was composed around the middle of the eighteenth century in Delhi, the first tale in Urdu was written in Lucknow only a few decades later. In Delhi, Urdu poetry had come into its own from under the supremacy of Persian poetry; in Lucknow, Urdu prose did the same.

The emergence of modern Urdu prose is generally ascribed to the efforts at the College of Fort William (where Indian classics were recast in 'simpler' language for the instruction of colonial officers), the translation projects at Delhi College (where western books on science and moral philosophy were translated for the College's syllabus) and to such individual works as the Urdu letters of Ghalib. Lucknow is left out in such histories. Most prose works produced in Lucknow during the earlier part of our period are undoubtedly in the more elaborate and ornate old style. The only exception is a single, extraordinary work of Insha, *Rani Ketki Ki Kahani* ('The Story of Rani Ketki'), which is also the earliest piece of Urdu fiction in North India. It is a simple tale of fantasy but exceptional in being narrated in a language containing no word of Perso-Arabic origin. Sadly neglected in the canon of Urdu literature—even Sharar, who claimed that Urdu prose-writing originated in Lucknow, doesn't mention it—Insha's story has been celebrated by Hindi literary historians as their first prose work (Insha calls his language *hindavi*).

Storytelling was an art greatly cultivated in pre-modern Lucknow. As Sharar described it: 'The art of telling stories is divided under five headings: "War", "Pleasure", "Beauty" and "Love", and "Deception". The raconteurs of Lucknow have shown such perfection in telling tales under these headings that one must hear them in order to realise the extent of their skill. The painting of pictures with words and the ability to make a deep and lasting impression on the minds of their audience are the special skills of these people' (Sharar: 1975: 149). The storytellers worked with an established text or framework but were totally at liberty

to extemporise to suit their mood and their audience's pleasure. Broadly speaking, the stories that the professionals told were of two kinds: (1) *qissa* or a not-too-long single tale of fantasy, and (2) *dastan* or a pointedly long and elaborate cycle of tales built around princely heroes battling against demons, magicians and other evil beings, eventually gaining victory over them by destroying their mind-boggling, magical constructs (*tilism*) while also winning the love of numerous fairies and princesses.

In addition to translations and retellings of earlier Persian tales, quite a few original *qissas* and *dastans* in Urdu were also written at Lucknow. Only the two most famous need to be mentioned here. The first was a *qissa*-like short work, *Fasana-e 'Aja'ib* ('Story of Marvels'), by Rajab Ali Beg 'Suroor' (d. 1869). It was written in 1824–25, published nineteen years later. Since then it has gone into hundreds of printings. The popularity of Suroor's work produced a number of rivals but none reached it in success or fame. Suroor himself had partially written it as a rejoinder to the claim for excellence that Mir Amman of Delhi had made for his language in his *qissa*, *Bagh-o-Bahar*. The latter, better known as *Qissia Chahar Darvesh* ('The Tale of Four Dervishes') was published in 1801 from the College of Fort William at Calcutta. As opposed to the diction adopted by both Insha and Mir Amman, Suroor chose to write in a style redolent of literary conceits. Perhaps it is that extreme quality which still makes it surprisingly popular, though far less than Mir Amman's masterpiece.

The other significant work is popularly known as the *dastan* of Amir Hamza, but there is neither a single work by that title nor is it by a single author. Woven around a historical figure—Hamza, an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad—and loosely linked to a shorter Persian *dastan*, *Rumuz-e Hamza*, it is an enormous cycle of tales that runs to forty-six volumes, averaging some 900 pages each. It was composed by Muhammad Husain 'Jah'; Ahmad Husain 'Qamar'; and Tasadduq Husain, who were commissioned by that intrepid publisher, Munshi Newal Kishore and who worked separately to produce 'the crowning glory of the Urdu *dastan* tradition' (Pritchett, 1991: 25).

The last major—and somewhat controversial—development in Urdu literature that took place in Lucknow was the emergence of *rekhti* as a distinct genre of poetry. *Rekhti* is a body of verse composed by men, employing a feminine voice, and dealing with matters—sexual and/or domestic—that exclusively concern women. *Rekhti* was by no means poetry for women: it was about women, for the entertainment and titillation of men. Sa'adat Yar Khan 'Rangin' (d. 1835), an immigrant poet

in the service of another immigrant, Prince Sulaiman Shikoh, claimed to have invented it. But similar poetry had already appeared in the Deccan, and it is possible that those *rekhti*-like verses were known in some circles in Delhi, where Rangin might have got his inspiration. In his verses, Rangin merely increased the references to women's hygiene and lesbianism and coined the term *rekhti*—supposedly a feminine form of *rekhta*, 'poetry'. Rangin's *rekhti*, however, was not a 'feminized' form of *rekhta*; if anything, it was a kind of misogynistic verse 'that aimed to entertain its male audience by making gross fun of women, its enhanced appeal lying in the fact that it also pretended to be a view from the inside, in fact, the very words of the object of ridicule' (Naim, 1992). Rangin's close friend Insha (d. 1817) also wrote a substantial quantity of *rekhti* verses. Some later poets also followed their lead, the most famous among them being Jan Sahib (d. 1886). With time, however, the more salacious elements in *rekhti* were reduced, and eventually a certain degree of genuine concern for women's life in domestic confinement found expression. One lasting contribution of the development of *rekhti* was the preservation of a vast number of words, idioms, and proverbs peculiar to women's speech in the Urdu milieu.

In one sense, perhaps the most important contribution to Urdu literature and learning in the nineteenth century was not made by any poet or scholar, but by a visionary entrepreneur, Munshi Newal Kishore (d. 1895), who was born in Aligarh district but settled in Lucknow after the Mutiny. With the active support and patronage of a British officer, he set up a press in 1858 and started to publish textbooks and circulars, and soon moved on to bigger things. Lucknow at the time was full of highly talented—but penniless after the Mutiny—poets, writers, calligraphers, *dastan*-tellers and other denizens of the book trade. Newal Kishore taking full advantage of this was soon publishing an incredible number of very important books, not only in Urdu but also in Persian, Arabic, Hindi and Sanskrit. He also started a weekly journal, *Avadh Akhbar*, which launched the career of one of the most important prose fiction writers in Urdu, Pandit Ratan Nath 'Sarshar' (d. 1902). Soon there was a rival journal entitled *Avadh Punch*. Together these two Lucknow journals created and sustained a brief but deliriously rich period of humorous and satirical writings in Urdu, both in verse and in prose.

Newal Kishore's press was not the first in Lucknow: that had been set up as early as 1830 in the reign of Nasir-al-Din Haydar. It was the king's own press, the *Matba-e Sultani*, and published a number of handsome books, including a major dictionary, *Taj-ul-Lughat*, and probably

translations of scientific texts that a royal translation bureau was set up to do. Soon other presses followed, among them *Matba-e Muhammadi* and *Matba-e Mustafai*. The production values at Lucknow presses were so good that the great Ghalib on one occasion raged at the presses in Delhi for what they did in comparison. In 1849, for some reason that still remains a mystery—libelous publications, personal animosity, displeasing newspapers?—a royal order gave the publishers in Lucknow the choice of either publishing under the auspices of the royal press and with its supervisor's permission, or ceasing to publish altogether. Some closed shop, others moved to Kanpur, to Company territory; eventually they had to return and function as ordered, only to be devastated in 1857 by the ravages of the Revolt. (The vacuum thus created was successfully filled by Newal Kishore with the help of his English patrons.) It must be noted that one of the consequences of the end of the nawabi rule in 1856 was the immediate flowering of Urdu journalism in Lucknow. According to Nadir Ali Khan, there were seven notable newspapers (weeklies) in Lucknow that flourished in the period between the annexation of Awadh and the beginning of the Mutiny (Khan, 1987: 414). The first among them was *Tilism-e Lakhnau*, edited and published by Mohammad Yaqub Ansari, who belonged to the Firangi Mahal family of scholars. In view of what the Nawabs had done to the press in Lucknow, it is ironic to note that the *Tilism* was forthright in presenting the worrisome conditions of inflation, loss of property, and lack of employment in Lucknow that followed the end of the nawabi rule. It was equally bold in criticising Company rule for its reckless and unrestrained use of power.

In (the study of) Urdu literature Lucknow figures most prominently in the context of a remarkable and overarching critical construct known as the Two School theory. This serves as an organising principle for surveying Urdu poetry, and it is based on an axiomatic distinction between Lucknow and Delhi. In Urdu literary histories and criticism there is much discussion of something called *Lakhnaviyyat* and its hypothesised opposite, *Dihlaviyyat*. *Lakhnaviyyat* evokes the excitement created by the combination of economic, political and cultural activity that this 'boomtown' saw under the patronage of some of the earliest nawabs, as mentioned above.

Abdul Lais Siddiqui described *Lakhnaviyyat*:

What is meant by *Lakhnaviyyat* in poetry and literature is that special quality which early poets of Lucknow adopted and established, and whose special characteristics distinguish it from traditional poetry . . . (Siddiqui, 1955: 39).

The 'special quality' is tied directly to Lucknow's wealth, which holds legendary stature in the imagination of both the British and Urdu scholars of the twentieth century:

Rivers of wealth flowed, riches rained down from the sky . . . there was a proliferation of pleasure-seeking, an excess of material wealth. This state of affairs brought about licentiousness and imbalanced thoughts and actions . . . The result was that poetry became a vehicle for coquetry, blandishments, coarse language and enumerations of feminine beauty (ibid.: 47).

In order to understand the force *Lakhnaviyyat* holds in Urdu culture, attention must be directed to two ideas expressed above. The first is that *Lakhnaviyyat*'s special characteristics 'distinguished it from traditional poetry'; and the second is that Lucknow's prosperity resulted directly in moral and aesthetic imbalance, in 'pleasure-seeking and licentiousness'. It might seem counter-intuitive for Urdu critics to simultaneously celebrate a cultural achievement and denounce it as decadent, departing from 'traditional' aesthetics. The most compelling explanation for this puzzling construction in the critical literature involves looking at Lucknow within the dual context of an intense cultural rivalry between Delhi and Lucknow, on the one hand; and considering, on the other hand, the force of a colonial discourse generated by the British in the nineteenth century.

The cultural rivalry between Lucknow and Delhi was born with the inception of Lucknow's court culture in the 1780s: both Delhi and Lucknow were seats of culture, one ascendant in the nineteenth century and the other descendant; both, at least nominally, were also rival seats of political power, with Lucknow having more wealth, and Delhi having a longer tradition of prestige, to enhance their respective claims. Their respective partisans sought recognition for each as the markaz of a single, Mughal-oriented, Indo-Muslim elite culture. Competition between them ran unabated through the nineteenth century and the birth of a critical literature in Urdu.

On the other hand, the very factors that lie at the heart of the birth of Urdu critical literature in the nineteenth century created the Two School theory: (1) it took place in the aftermath of 1857, when Mughal political power was finally eclipsed; (2) it was largely under British colonial patronage that it began to develop; (3) the British, in order to rationalise their annexation of formerly-Mughal India, had a great stake in constructing Indo-Muslim culture as flamboyant, effeminate and decadent; and (4) most of the Urdu literati either hailed from Delhi or identified with it as the cultural heart of Mughal India. These 'Dihlavis' translated the long-established cultural rivalry between Delhi and

Lucknow into a critique which suggested that whatever problematic flamboyance, effeminacy and decadence existed in Indo-Muslim culture was really a manifestation of innovation from Lakhnaviyyat. This vilification of Lucknow satisfied the cultural chauvinism of the early (Dihlavi) critics at the same time as it negotiated a relationship with the British.

Thus the Two School theory proceeds from an understanding that the Lakhnavis established their own characteristic literary voice, and that it was fundamentally distinct from the literary voice that had been developed earlier in Delhi. Witness the opening remarks from the earliest formal declaration of the Two School, found in Abdus Salam Nadvi's *She'ru'l Hind*:

Although by the time of Mushafi and Insha it had become customary to practice poetry in Lucknow, still, all the poets of rank who had established a reputation had been residents of Delhi, and considered themselves separate from the people of Lucknow (Nadvi, 1926; I: 189).¹

Once there was something called Lakhnaviyyat, the Two School theory was obliged to define and develop *Dihlaviyyat* as a critical construct, which came to embody the qualities of 'traditional' poetry as a counterpoint to Lakhnaviyyat. Nurul Hasan Hashimi, author of *Dilli ka Dabistan-i Sha'iri* ('The Delhi School of Poetry'), offers the following definition (1980: 257) of Dihlaviyyat:

Dihlaviyyat is the name of a point of view, an outlook, an intellectual simplicity, a poetic temperament, in order to comprehend which a step-by-step comparison will be made with Lakhnaviyyat. . . .

He then proceeds over the next seventy pages with his comparison. What it all amounts to is, in fact, summarised by Hashimi earlier (1980: 13) in the following words:

In comparison with Dihlaviyyat's spirituality and melancholy (lit. 'attachment to sorrow', or *gham-pasandi*) Lucknow's superficial gaiety seems thin and cheap. Lakhnavi poets concentrated on enumerations of feminine beauty but omitted loftiness of thought. There is not that flame, that profound lamentation, that tone of longing which there is in the poetry of Delhi. . . .

Elements like spirituality, melancholy, loftiness of thought, profound lamentation and tone of longing are of course all to be found in Lakhnavi poetry—in fact, in most ghazal poetry, regardless of its place of origin.

The 'traditional' vs. 'non-traditional' polarity between Dihlavi and Lakhnavi poetry does not originate with Siddiqi, Hashimi, or even Nadvi, who identifies an 'Intermediate Era' of Urdu literature, during

which 'Lakhnavi poetry became established and Delhi's and Lucknow's two separate schools were founded' (Nadvi, 1926: 10). The importance of Nadvi's 'Intermediate Era' is that it locates the emergence of Lakhnaviyyat with poets like Nasikh and Atish, who had no experience of Delhi and for whom, therefore, Delhi need take no responsibility. Here Nadvi is making more explicit the distinctions noted in earlier works, those of Azad and Hali.

In *Ab-e Hayat* ('Water of Life'), published in 1980, Muhammad Husain Azad had treated all Lakhnavi poetry as an entity separate from the rest of Urdu poetry. Dihlavi poetry he had considered to comprise the remainder, while Lakhnavi poetry developed later than, and at variance with, earlier, more 'traditional' poetry. This distinction is clearly implicit in many of Azad's remarks, although it is nowhere articulated explicitly. It is not difficult to understand this implicit distinction as Azad giving voice to the cultural rivalry between Delhi and Lucknow, using the distinction to marginalise Lakhnavi poetry from 'traditional' literature (and, by extension, to suggest that this 'new' Lakhnavi culture altogether departed from, and was less worthy than, the Mughal tradition of which Indian Muslims were so rightly proud).

Azad's contemporary, Altaf Husain Hali, seems to have accepted this point of view, and develops it further, in his seminal work, *Muqaddma-e She'r-o-Sha'iri* ('Prolegomena to Poetics and Poetry'), first published in 1893. Hali rails against the decline of all Urdu poetry during the course of the nineteenth century, and tends to cite Lakhnavi poetry as a prime example of decline. Both critics were reformers and shared a belief that the qualities most in need of reform in Urdu poetry were to be found in the verse of Lucknow's poets. But the nature of reform envisioned by the two men differs somewhat. Azad seems to call for an *aesthetic* revisionism, a 'getting back to the basics' of the existing Perso-Arabic literary tradition, a rejection of the 'worn-out themes' that plagued the ghazal of his day and a return to the model of that inherently vigorous tradition. Hali, on the other hand, calls for literary reform as part and parcel of a widespread *moral* reform in Indian Islam. This has tied in very comfortably with the construction of Lakhnaviyyat in Urdu critical literature as essentially decadent, and, as we saw earlier, the pattern was carried forth in Abdus Salam Nadvi's *She'r-ul Hind*.

It must be observed, however, that the Two School theory is seriously flawed, and has not gone without challenge in recent years. In 1970 Ali Jawad Zaidi, in *Do Adabi Iskul* ('Two Literary Schools'), argued very persuasively that all of Nadvi's characteristics of Lakhnaviyyat were

amply represented in Dihlavi literature; and that, conversely, Dihlaviyyat could be found in abundance in Lakhnavi poetry. Zaidi's close textual examination of both Dihlavi and Lakhnavi poetic texts reveals that the 'worn-out' and 'degraded' themes decried by Azad and Hali can be found everywhere in the nineteenth century Urdu ghazal.

Whoever thought of it first, the Two School theory seems to represent a remarkable collaboration between the heirs to Mughal glory and British colonial officials in the late nineteenth century. What these two parties had in common was an admiration for the Mughal empire, especially at its cultural apogee in the seventeenth century, and a certain disdain for successor states such as Awadh insofar as they might attempt to claim for themselves the stature historically enjoyed by Delhi. Dihlavis wished to retain Delhi as the locus of Mughal glory, and to continue to place themselves within its noble traditions, at least culturally; British colonialists wished to inscribe themselves within that tradition while co-opting it for themselves. Lucknow's power and prestige invited political and discursive neutralisation in order for both these goals to be achieved.

Zaidi's work is also noteworthy for its attempt to focus closely on poetic texts, and to take a 'scientific' approach. He is no more successful than any of his predecessors in defining what constituted 'traditional' poetry, but that is largely because the tradition did not identify itself in the 'scientific' terms called for by Zaidi. Indeed, the notion of tradition is ephemeral and evocative rather than concrete and easily identifiable in literary terms.

There is another argument that could be made to complement Zaidi's work, and it has to do with the structure of the ghazal itself. Because ghazal is determined by its form, metre and rhyme scheme (*zamin*) rather than by theme,² it makes a great deal of sense to look to how the form tends to give rise to various themes. If there were different Dihlavi and Lakhnavi approaches to poetry overall, one would expect to see Dihlaviyyat and/or Lakhnaviyyat reflected in how poets in each markaz evoked various associations suggested by the same word in *qafiya*-position (that is, in the end-rhyme). A detailed analysis (Petievich 1992: 100-43) demonstrated that in some instances a particular word in *qafiya*-position would tend to give rise to verse displaying more characteristics associated with Lakhnaviyyat; while certain other *qafiya* words tended to give rise to verses which more closely resemble what has been called Dihlaviyyat. In general, most verses were seen to manifest a mixture of both characteristics, and no particular Delhi-type or Lucknow-type patterns of choice could be identified. The reason is simply that all ghazal poets subscribe to the same essential literary values and aesthetics, and all are

bound by the very tight structure of the genre itself. While choices in diction or tone are of course possible, they tend to be exercised in connection with the associations suggested by the *qafiya* word in conjunction with the particular whim or mood of the composing poet at the moment of composition. But an exhaustive examination of Lakhnavi and Dihlavi ghazals in the same *zamin* did nothing to advance the hypothesis that a poet's approach to the ghazal is determined by the markaz in which he or she resides. In other words, markaz ('centre') and *dabistan* ('school') are two distinct concepts which have been erroneously conflated in the Two School theory. As to why this conflation occurred so successfully, and refuses to be dislodged even in light of serious scholarly challenge, we must return to the discursive realm, to the realm of what poetry signifies culturally.

With the important role played by Urdu poetry in Indo-Muslim cultural identification, the role of poets and critics is also tremendously important, for they are the creators and guardians of poetry as a cultural signifier. A close look has been given elsewhere (Pritchett, 1993; Petievich, 1992) to Azad and Hali, the two pioneering critics mentioned above, and the role they played in the establishment of critical standards for Urdu literature, cannot be recounted in full here. However, it is worth reiterating that both these literary giants identified themselves as cultural Dihlavis and were employed by the British at about the time they wrote their monumental works. In both works we hear the refrain of the crisis of Indo-Muslim culture, and laments on fallen standards. Given the fact that standards and trends in both markaz are far more similar than distinct from one another if judged by examining poetic texts, we can assert with some confidence that Azad, Hali and the British all had some stake *other than literary* in isolating Lakhnaviyyat from 'traditional' Mughal culture. What were these stakes?

The Urdu elite, though co-opted to a certain extent by employment in the British colonial system, never went so far as to accept the totalising denigration of Indo-Muslim culture in which post-1857 colonial discourse engaged. Indeed, it is important to recognise the limited utility of critiquing colonial discourse, tempting though it remains as an explanation for much of what transpired in the negotiation of a post-1857 Indo-Muslim ethos. It must be remembered that Urdu literature—if not its critical tradition—has a history predating by far colonial domination of Hindustan, and it developed at a far remove from the British and their discourses. The force of the Two School theory must be understood as satisfying internal values as well as colonial. Hali surely mourned the

decline of culture in his own times. But of its inherent worth he expresses no doubt at all. Similarly, Azad clung with loyalty and dignity to the notion of Delhi as a noble and worthy Mughal markaz, while suggesting that the move to Lucknow had been the occasion of cultural decline. Azad notes that, being timely, the 'new' Lakhnavi style had brought acclaim to newer poets, but that 'those first excellent poets of Lucknow were the destroyers of Delhi', flouting its authority, especially in the all-important realm of language usage (Azad, 1980: 339).

In other words, the success of colonial discourse may be attributed to a gratuitous, inadvertent tapping into the cultural rivalry between Delhi and Lucknow. This rivalry, in turn, remained potent for those of the cultural elite under such serious constraint to negotiate a place in British India. Members of this elite, literary critics, by acknowledging 'problems' with Urdu literature, accomplished the following purpose: they fulfilled the mandate of a colonial discourse about the moral (and, by extension, political) capacity of Indians to rule themselves. At the same time, by distinguishing the literature of Lucknow from that of Delhi, they suggested that the site of Indo-Muslim cultural decline was localised in Lucknow. This served to protect and preserve the literature (thus, by extension, the culture) of Delhi in moral and aesthetic terms while acknowledging that it had suffered political reverses for which it was not morally culpable.

Moral authority has played a significant part in literary criticism, informed equally, it might be argued, by reformist Islamic principles and those of Victorian England. Hali wished to reform Urdu literature, especially the ghazal, basing it on high moral principles (*akhlaqi mazamin*) and 'admitted' that it might be difficult to incorporate and popularise such themes in a genre whose essence was 'erotic' (*ishqiya*). Azad, too, offers the following lament:

It is unfortunate that our poetry has become trapped in the net of those themes such as eroticism, drunkenness, and the manufacture of fantastic fragrance in the absence of the flowers or even a flower garden . . . (Azad, 1980: 81).

Here Azad is paying dual lip service to the tenets of 'natural' poetry à la English Romanticism (all the rage in northern India in the late nineteenth century) while at the same time decrying the loss of the Urdu ghazal's essential nobility. His outlook was compatible with that of India's Victorian overlords in key respects. Both shared an emphasis on chasteness, austerity and authority. Both Victorian Englishmen and *sharif* Indian Muslims deplored sensuality and licentiousness; and both

groups saw these deplorable elements in nineteenth century Urdu poetry, especially that of Lucknow. Just as the British considered Indian rulers unfit on account of their moral laxness and sensual self-indulgence, so too did they find Urdu poetry distasteful and objectionable for the eroticism and sensuality which they saw in it.

Azad's literary criticism can be seen as reflective of the Mughal ruling elite's values; reformist literary criticism of the time—such as Hali's *Muqaddama*—reflects, in turn, a changing definition of who constituted the ruling class in India a hundred years ago. The ruling elite was beginning to expand, and it was no longer necessarily the feudal elites and their retinue in whom power would be solely invested. On the contrary, the most virulent colonial discourse on Indian moral turpitude was directed toward them. Hali and Azad were obliged to defend themselves and their class against the attacks of an essentially middle-class British administration, which was more favourably inclined toward the emerging, English-educated, Indian middle-class than the former Mughal nobility with which Azad identified so greatly.

One cannot say whether the Muslims who called for thematic reforms in the ghazal found a convenient ally in Victorian morals or whether they were responding to the cries of 'Shame!' emanating from British mouths. In either case Indian Muslims who ascribed the cause for final Mughal defeat to the same morally suspect conditions that were enumerated by champions of British rule were content, even eager, to back their own opinions with the authority carried by British opinion on Indian moral decline. The characterisation of Lakhnavi poetry within this particular framework served the defensive strategies of reformist critics like Azad and Hali. If the deplored state of the Urdu ghazal could be pinned on the morally-suspect influences of the Lucknow court—a court which the British had overthrown for alleged moral laxness and administrative incompetence—then the literature of Urdu's other markaz (Delhi) could be promoted with relative impunity. The only recently-bygone Indo-Muslim tradition could then be stored and honoured with a reverence available solely to the past. The emergent middle class employed by the British could hark back to that one-generation-removed cultural glory and identify themselves with it. Meanwhile, they could reconcile themselves with the advent of a modern era where different values pertained but did not necessarily compete.

NOTES

1. Nadvi's great contribution to the Two School theory is that, in addition to formally announcing it, he attempted to define eight characteristics of distinction: (1) Lakhnavi effeminacy; Dihlavi fondness for Persian *tarakib* constructions; (3) longer ghazals in Lucknow, resulting in ridiculous qafiyas (rhymes) and degraded themes; (4) enumeration of the beloved's physical attributes by Lakhnavis instead of expression of more spiritual emotions; (5) *ri'ayat-e lafzi* (word-play) in Lucknow; (6) Lakhnavi degeneracy (*ibtizal*); (7) Lakhnavi *mu'amala-bandi* (amorous banter); (8) Lakhnavi *nazuk-khayali*, or excessive delicacy of simile and metaphor/abstruseness of thought.
2. This point is made with the caveat that, of course, the theme of the entire genre is *'ishq* (love).

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