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OVER CHINESE FOOD

The Progressive Writers' Association¹

*Bhadka raheñ haiñ aag lab-e naghmagar se hum
Khaamosh kya rahenge zamaane ke dar se hum
Le de ke apne paas faqat ek nazar to hai
Kyon dekheñ zindagi ko kisi ki nazar se hum
Maana ke is zameeñ ko na gulzaar kar sake
Kuch khaar kam to kar diye, guzre jidhar se hum*

Here we go, stoking fire through song-laden lips
The fear of the world can never staunch the flow of our words
In all, we have just one view, our own
Why should we see the world through someone else's eyes?
It is true, we did not turn the world into a garden
But at least we lessened some thorns from the paths we travelled

– Sahir Ludhianvi

On the evening of 24 November 1934, the atmosphere at London's Nanking Hotel must have been electric. A group of young Indian intellectuals were engaged in an intense discussion over a draft document that had been circulated by the convenor of the meeting, Sajjad Zaheer. The document was audacious in its scope, for it sought to articulate a manifesto for the future of Indian literature.

Some of the faces in the meeting were to become familiar personalities. Jyotirmaya Ghosh would rise to prominence as a key figure in Bengali literature. Mulk Raj Anand had already begun to gain global prominence as an English novelist. Mohammad Din Tasir was to go on to become the founder of the magazine *Nairang-i-Khayaal* in Lahore. The British writer Ralph Fox was attending in the capacity of an adviser. The fog of history has blurred the names of other attendees, but the institution that was emerging through this meeting was destined to majestically straddle the traditions of Indian literature in general and Urdu poetry in particular for a long time.

The fact that this meeting was being held in London was no accident. Rather, it was a curious outcome of the history of the colonial experience of India. Many among the gathering were students in England, who had been sent by their affluent parents to develop professional skills in areas such as law and medicine. Yet, their experiences with colonial servitude back home were fresh in their minds, and this smouldering energy was readily spurred by the emerging anti-fascist and socialist currents all over Europe. The formation of the United Front in France, the protest against the persecution of writers like Georgi Dimitrov, and the workers' rebellion in Austria in the early 1930s², had galvanized the attendees of the Nanking meeting. In their minds, the literary manifesto that was being discussed would serve to lay the framework for the emergence of a new, emancipated identity.

This gathering had its genesis in an interesting episode that had taken place in 1932 with the publication of a book in India called *Angaare* (Embers), a set of ten short stories written by Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jahan, Mahmuduzzafar and Ahmed Ali, which had attacked a whole range of sacred cows.

The stories dealt with prevailing familial and sexual mores, the decadence and hypocrisy of social and religious life in contemporary India, and took more than one potshot at religious orthodoxy, attacking it with what Ahmed Ali later referred to as 'the absence of circumspection'. Within months of its publication, the book generated an uproar within Muslim circles, and was condemned by a variety of organizations as being 'obscene' and 'blasphemous'. The All India Shia Conference, for example, passed a resolution in 1933 sharply condemning 'the heart-rending and filthy pamphlet called *Angaare* ... which has wounded the feelings of the entire Muslim community by ridiculing God and his prophets and which is extremely objectionable from the standpoint of both religion and morality.' Responding to this outcry, the Police Department of the United Provinces promulgated an order on 15 March 1933 declaring 'forfeited to his Majesty every copy of (the book) ... on the grounds that the said book contains matter the publication of which is punishable under Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code.'

The *Angaare* authors were unrepentant. Writing in the 5 April 1933 issue of *The Leader*, an Allahabad-based newspaper, Mahmuduzzafar's article 'Shall We Submit to Gagging?' declared:

The writers of this book do not wish to make an apology for it. They leave it to float or sink of itself. They only wish to defend the right of launching it and all other vessels like it ... They have chosen (to critique) the particular field of Islam not because they bear any 'special' malice towards it, but because, being born into that particular society, they felt better qualified to speak for that alone ... Our practical purpose is the formation immediately of a league of progressive authors, which should bring forth similar

collections from time to time, both in English and the various vernaculars of our country.

Undeterred by the widespread criticism, Sajjad Zaheer, the leader of the Angaare group had set about trying to use the field of literature as a battering ram to break down the orthodox and conservative fortifications of Indian society. The Nanking Hotel gathering was a significant step in that direction.

By the end of the meeting, the attendees had resolved to formalize their group as an institution, which would be called the All India Progressive Writers' Association (henceforth, the PWA). The PWA was to be based in India, and Sajjad Zaheer volunteered to give it institutional shape in the subcontinent. By the middle of 1935, the final manifesto of the PWA was ready. Zaheer returned to India with the document and circulated it among prominent Indian literary figures. The manifesto found an immediate champion in Premchand, one of the most highly respected figures in Hindustani literature, who published its Hindi translation in the October 1935 issue of his journal *Hans* (Swan). Subsequently, the English version of the manifesto was published in the February 1936 issue of London's *Left Review*. The text of the manifesto was as follows:

Radical changes are taking place in Indian society. Fixed ideas and old beliefs, social and political institutions are being challenged. Out of the present turmoil and conflict a new society is emerging. The spirit of reaction however, though moribund and doomed to ultimate decay, is still operative and is making desperate efforts to prolong itself.

It is the duty of Indian writers to give expression to the changes taking place in Indian life and to assist in the

spirit of progress in the country. Indian literature, since the breakdown of classical literature, has had the fatal tendency to escape from the actualities of life. It has tried to find a refuge from reality in spiritualism and idealism. The result has been that it has produced a rigid formalism and a banal and perverse ideology.

Witness the mystical devotional obsession of our literature, its furtive and sentimental attitude towards sex, its emotional exhibitionism and its almost total lack of rationality. Such literature was produced particularly during the past two centuries, one of the most unfortunate periods of our history, a period of disintegrating feudalism and of acute misery and degradation for the Indian people as a whole.

It is the object of our association to rescue literature and other arts from the priestly, academic and decadent classes in whose hands they have degenerated so long; to bring the arts into the closest touch with the people; and to make them the vital organs which will register the actualities of life, as well as lead us to the future.

While claiming to be the inheritors of the best traditions of Indian civilization, we shall criticize ruthlessly, in its political, economic and cultural aspects, the spirit of reaction in our country and we shall foster through interpretive and creative work (with both native and foreign resources) everything that will lead our country to the new life for which it is striving. We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today – the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation, so that it may help us to understand these problems and through such understanding help us to act.

With the above aims in view, the following resolutions have been adopted:

1. The establishment of organizations of writers to correspond to the various linguistic zones of India; the co-ordinations of these organizations by holding conferences, publishing of magazines, pamphlets, etc.
2. To cooperate with those literary organizations whose aims do not conflict with the basic aims of the association.
3. To produce and translate literature of a progressive nature and of a high technical standard; to fight cultural reaction; and in this way, to further the cause of Indian freedom and social regeneration.
4. To strive for the acceptance of a common language (Hindustani) and a common script (Indo-Roman) for India.
5. To protect the interests of authors; to help authors who require and deserve assistance for the publication of their works.
6. To fight for the right of free expression of thought and opinion.

The manifesto was unabashedly modernist and anti-religious in its tenor, and utilized a left-liberal vocabulary that was popular at that time. It sought to play an integrative role in the Indian literary landscape through the acceptance of a common language and script. It made a case for building international solidarities. Importantly, it emphasized realism, with its insistence that literature be used as a tool to display the 'actualities of life'. Finally, despite the stridency of its tone, it sought to leave the door open for coalitions with other literary groups 'whose aims do not conflict with the basic aims of the association'. The manifesto was an astute political document, and a highly ambitious one that sought to position the PWA as the harbinger of revolutionary changes in the literary landscape of India.

The publication of this manifesto had a huge impact, especially in Urdu literary circles. The ideas it espoused were, however, not entirely new. Just a year earlier, a young literary critic named Akhtar Husain Raipuri had published an essay called 'Adab aur Zindagi' (Literature and Life), in which he had attempted to analyse the entire corpus of Urdu literature, and had denounced all works of fiction and poetry that did not directly link themselves to the material conditions of the society in which they were produced. Raipuri's essay in some measure made the manifesto easier to sell to Urdu literary figures, just as Premchand's support (and subsequent endorsements by the Hindi poets Sumitranandan Pant, Maithilisharan Gupt and Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala'³) succeeded in broadening the horizon of the PWA's influence.

Stalwarts of Indian literature like Mohammad Iqbal and Rabindranath Tagore also provided legitimacy to the PWA through their approval, and eventually Urdu poets like Hasrat Mohani, Josh Malihabadi, and Firaq Gorakhpuri also joined it, as did the Telugu poet Sri Sri, the Gujarati poet Umashankar Joshi, the Punjabi writer Gurbaksh Singh and the Marathi writer Anna Bhau Sathe. The PWA's anti-colonialist reputation was enhanced and its credentials endorsed by the fact that the British government expressed its deep suspicion of the group. On 7 September 1936, the Home Secretary of India sent a private circular⁴ to relevant authorities, which read:

I am directed to address you in connection with an organisation known as the Progressive Writers' Association ... The proclaimed aims of the association are comparatively innocent and suggest that it concerns itself solely with the organisation of journalists and writers and the promotion of interest in literature of a progressive nature. The inspiration however comes from ...

organisations and individuals who are ... advocating policies akin to those of the communists ... I am desirous to suggest therefore, that suitable opportunities may be taken to convey, preferably in conversations, friendly warnings about this association to journalists, educationists and others who may be attracted by its ostensible programmes.

It appeared that the PWA had perceptively tapped into the groundswell of a great upheaval in Indian society. The first all-India meeting of the PWA was held at Lucknow in 1936, and was presided over by Premchand, whose inaugural address *Sahitya Ka Uddeshya* (The Purpose of Literature) remains one of the most important documents of the movement⁵. The manifesto of the association was reworked to make it more inclusive of those whose politics were not avowedly socialist. Further the demand for a common language and script for Indian literature was dropped, reflecting the political realities of the country's multilingual structure.

The Hindi version of the manifesto also attempted to articulate a definition of 'Progressive' which could accommodate a wide spectrum of views and attract as many people as possible, and included the following additional paragraph:

All those things which take us toward confusion, dissension, and blind imitation are conservative; also, all that which engenders in us a critical capacity, which induces us to test our dear traditions on the touchstone of our reason and perception, which makes us healthy and produces among us the strength of unity and integration, that is what we call Progressive.

From its very inception, the PWA had a group of committed socialists at its core but its larger membership was not limited

to writers of any particular political persuasion. In fact, it was consciously opened out to include all writers who shared the manifesto's basic commitments. The PWA thus functioned as an umbrella under which progressive writers of all stripes could find a place. The PWA understood its mission to be that of constructing a 'united front' of writers against imperialism and reactionary social tendencies, and for a life-affirming art. For the longest time then, *taraqqi-pasandi* or 'progressivism' in Urdu literature was justifiably identified with the PWA. Never before had writers across India been mobilized around a single platform so effectively, and in no previous movement⁶ had a literary school so redefined the terms of its creative output and its engagement with its society and times.

While the inaugural meeting of the PWA was a huge success and included representative literary figures from many language groups, the longevity of the association and its legacy is primarily linked with Urdu literature, and particularly with Urdu poetry. Progressive poetry in Urdu already had a long tradition of progressivism and an inherited iconoclasm. The Progressives⁷ were eager to push this in newer directions while retaining the link with their past. An editorial penned by Sibte Hasan, Ali Sardar Jafri and Israr-ul-Haq Majaz for the inaugural issue of *Naya Adab* (New Literature) claimed that 'Progressive literature does not break off relations with old literature; it embodies the best traditions of the old and constructs new edifices on the foundations of these traditions. In fact, progressive literature is the most trustworthy guardian and heir of ancient literature.'

The progressive poets sought to keep the link with tradition alive, while forging fresh paths. Faiz illustrates this

mood by deploying a Ghalib couplet in his poem 'Khatm Hui Baarish-e Sang' (The Rain of Stones Ends), adding himself and the other poets of his generation to the lineage of those in whose hands Urdu poetry had flourished:

*Koo-e jaanaaṅ meṅ khula mere lahu ka parcham
Dekhiye dete haiṅ kis-kis ko sada mere baad
Kaun hota hai hareef-e mai-e mard-afgan-e ishq
Hai mukarrar lab-e saaqi pe sala mere baad'*

The bloodied flag of my love unfurls on the street of my beloved
Let us see who follows in my footsteps
'Who will now drink the hemlock of love
The question lingers on the wine bearer's lips after I have gone'

The Progressive Movement in Urdu poetry also thrived because it spoke to its time, its history and its politics. The anti-imperialist struggle, the Second World War, the trauma of Partition, the Telangana uprising, and the failure of the new nation to deliver on its promise of a better life for all citizens, all allowed these poets to speak in a voice that resonated with the aspirations of the people. As Sahir writes:

*Chalo ke aaj sabhi paayemaal roohoṅ se
Kaheṅ ke apne har ek zakhm ko zabaan kar deṅ
Hamaara raaz hamaara nahiṅ, sabhi ka hai
Chalo ke saare zamaane ko raazdaan kar deṅ*

Come let us ask all oppressed souls
To give voice to their wounds
Our secret is not merely ours
Let's share it with the entire world

The progressive Urdu poets, partly by accident and partly by choice, also staked a substantial claim in the realm of popular

culture, particularly in the arena of Hindi films. Several poets of the association such as Sahir Ludhianvi, Kaifi Azmi, and Majrooh Sultanpuri (and to a lesser extent, Ali Sardar Jafri and Jan Nisar Akhtar) made a name for themselves writing lyrics for films, thus occupying a prominent place in the public space. While many factors, some detailed in the rest of this book, combined to produce the ascendancy of the progressive sentiment in Urdu poetry, the incontrovertible fact, shared even by the strongest detractors of the Progressives, is that the PWA became, in Aijaz Ahmad's words the 'strongest and proximate shaping force' in Urdu literature from its very inception and very soon became ideologically hegemonic 'to the extent that it defined the parameters of the broad social agenda and cultural consensus among the generality of Urdu writers, including those who were not members of the association; those who did not subscribe to the broad consensus were relegated to the fringes of the writing-community.'⁸ This hegemony, Ahmad reminds us, obviously 'did not materialize out of thin air', being 'in its own time, part and parcel of the national movement'.

After Independence: The All India Progressive Writers' Association

The PWA, whose dominance had been established during the freedom struggle and its radicalizing compact, soon found itself under attack after the formation of the independent state. By the early 1950s, the cultural consensus that the PWA had generated had begun to wither away. There were a number of factors that contributed to this decline. The biggest of these, of course, was the partition of the nation. The promised independence arrived, but its *surkhi* (redness) was not that of the awaited socialist 'red dawn' but came from the blood of the

victims of the violence that accompanied the division of the country. And hardly had the new government found its feet when it launched a brutally repressive attack against the peasant movement of Telangana, which had held out such a high hope to the socialist aspirations of the PWA poets. Referring to the state violence that crushed the movement, Krishen Chander wrote: 'After Telangana, our dreams were singed, our hope was dead within our breasts, this was our darkest hour. Our frustration and desperation led to finger-pointing, internal fighting, literary purges, and the disintegration of our movement.'

The Progressives also had to come to terms with the growing communalization of the polity, an issue that became increasingly urgent after the Partition of the country along religious lines. An unfortunate corollary was the communalization of Urdu itself in India. Urdu suffered a debilitating blow when it became identified as the language of Pakistan, and by specious extension, the language of Muslims, resulting in, among other things, a loss of state patronage, particularly in the north, leading a bitter Sahir to comment on the centenary celebration of Ghalib's birth:

*Jin shahroñ mein goonji thi Ghalib ki nava barsoñ
Un shahroñ mein aaj Urdu be-naam-o nashaañ thahri
Aazaadi-e haamil ka ailaan hua jis din
Ma'atoob zabañ thahri, ghaddaar zabañ thahri*

*Jis ahd-e siyaasat ne ye zinda zabañ kuchli
Us ahd-e siyaasat ko marhoomoñ ka gham kyooñ hai
Ghalib jise kahte haiñ Urdu hi ka shaayar tha
Urdu pe sitam dha kar, Ghalib pe karam kyooñ hai*

The same cities where once Ghalib's voice resounded
Have now disavowed Urdu, made it homeless

The day that announced the arrival of freedom
Also declared Urdu a cursed and treacherous language

The same government that once crushed a living tongue
Now wishes to mourn and honour the dead
The man you call Ghalib was a poet of Urdu
Why praise Ghalib after suppressing his language?

The process of communalization did not entirely bypass the PWA either. In his book, *Taraqqi Pasand Adab* (Progressive Literature), Ali Sardar Jafri, one of the chief ideologues of the association admits that by 1949, extremism and narrow-mindedness of a sort had entered the movement: 'The Partition and the communal riots so impaired the conditions that some progressive writers moved away from progressivism, some became partisans of communalism and fell in the pit of decadence.'

Eventually, the All India PWA did not find itself equal to the task of dealing with the changing times and the association became a shadow of its former self. It is, however, unfair to seek the reasons for this decline within the association alone. The period of the 1930s and beyond was characterized by the resistance of dominated subjectivities to the ravages of oppressive and exploitative colonialism. The mass movements engendered by the anti-colonial struggle created the conditions under which the analytical categories of socialism along with their attendant binaries – oppressor/oppressed, exploiter/exploited, capital/labour, capitalist/worker – found ready and broad acceptance.

But the exuberance of the victory of independence, dampened to a considerable degree by the horrors of Partition, slowly turned into disillusionment with the nation-state, which was increasingly seen as a puppet of monopoly capital and as a system that replicated earlier modes of exploitation, merely

replacing foreign elites with local ones. Over a period of time, this disillusionment made way for resignation under the steady onslaught of transformed politics, opportunistic leadership, and the growth and consolidation of global capital.

In this context, the decline of the PWA can be seen not so much as a defeat of the Progressives as the withering away of an ideological formation accompanied by a 'willed loss of memory'. The hope of a revolutionary transformation, kept alive for a while, faded with each blow to socialist movements in India and elsewhere, culminating with the break-up of the Soviet Union. Writing on the day the Soviet flag was replaced by the individual flags of the various republics, Ali Sardar Jafri penned a dirge, which while mourning the current moment, seemed to be an obituary of the PWA itself.

*Alvida ai surkh parcham, surkh parcham alvida
Ai nishaan-e azm-e mazloomaan-e aalam alvida
Deeda-e purnam ne kal dil se kaha tha marhaba
Aaj lekin kah rahi hai chashm-e purnam alvida
Razmgaah-e khair-o shar mein yaad aayegi teri
Haañ main ab aur lashkar-e Iblees-e Aazam alvida
Ai furaat-e tishnakaamaan-e jihaad-e zindagi
Khulzum-e tishnaalabi ki mauj-e barham alvida*

Farewell O Red Flag, Red Flag farewell
Farewell, O symbol of the dynasty of the oppressed
Till yesterday, my brimming eyes cheered you on
Today, these eyes filled with tears, bid you farewell
You will be missed in the battles between good and evil
Today I find myself alone in the fight against the Great Satan,
farewell
O, the river that slaked the thirst of the martyrs in the struggle
of life
O, eager waves that fed the parched ones, farewell

After Independence: The All Pakistan Progressive Writers' Association

Independence brought about several changes in the cultural and political landscape of the nations of India and Pakistan, many of which had significant implications for the Progressives. For one, the Partition divided the Urdu literary community into two, even if it did not rupture its shared secular character⁹. Although this community was reconstituted to the degree possible given the constraints of the new political context – writers from both sides continued to publish in each other's magazines and take part in important intellectual debates – there were fresh political challenges and new ideological divides to be dealt with.

Soon after Independence, the progressive writers of Pakistan set about producing explicit critiques of the new, and in their mind neocolonial, state, which were published in several newspapers and periodicals under the umbrella of Progressive Papers Limited (PPL), a holding company that was set up by Mian Iftikharuddin, a staunch socialist. The establishment, in turn, launched an assault on the Left through a multi-pronged strategy: discrediting the socialist vision by using the Cold War propaganda, presenting the Progressives as Fifth columnists and enemies of the Pakistani nation-state and consolidating the ideological front against them within the literary cultural sphere. These measures were backed by the coercive power of the state which was increasingly directed against progressive publications and members of the association. Meetings were regularly disrupted, publications proscribed and activists imprisoned. One of the most egregious of these repressive measures was the arrest and trial of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Sajjad Zaheer (who had been

deputed by the CPI to help with the movement in Pakistan) in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case in 1951. Faiz and Zaheer, along with some senior army officers such as Major Ishaq, were charged with conspiring to overthrow the government and spent several years in prison. These actions laid the foundation for the ultimate banning of the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) and its various fronts in 1954.

The progressive critique of the Muslim League government and the class interests it represented began almost as soon as Pakistan was formally established. The line taken by the Pakistani Left was strident in tone and aggressive in its demands¹⁰. With the ascendancy of the new Ranadive doctrine within the CPI, the old 'united front' policy of class collaboration against imperialism was abandoned in favour of an explicitly anti-capitalist line¹¹. Since the CPP was not established till the Second Communist Party of India Congress in 1948, the Progressive Writers' Association was the only organized platform for ideological work available to Pakistani leftists and thus acquired great significance.

Although the All Pakistani Progressive Writers' Association (APPWA) did not technically exist until its formal establishment during the 1949 conference, individual branches of the association had started functioning immediately after the Partition in both Lahore and Karachi, while newer branches continued to be established in other towns and cities of the new state. The PPL provided an institutional platform for the Pakistani Left, particularly for its progressive writers. The staff list of PPL newspapers and periodicals read like a membership list of the PWA. Faiz Ahmad Faiz was the editor-in-chief, Mazhar Ali Khan was appointed as the editor of the *Pakistan Times*, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi edited *Imroze*, while *Lail-o-Nihaar* was Sibte Hasan's domain. The crucial role

played by PPL as a platform for the Pakistani Left, especially after the ban on the CPP and the APPWA, is evident from the fact that one of General Ayub Khan's first acts after the October 1958 coup was to take over the company and establish its publications into organs of the *sarkari* (official) voice.

The Ranadive line found expression in the rhetoric and tactics of the progressive writers even before APPWA was formally consolidated into one all-Pakistan association in November 1949. The progressive critique of the Pakistani state, and its call for a literature of a socialist revolution became more and more explicit, especially in the articles published in the major progressive magazines of this period – *Savera*, *Naqush*, *Sang-e Meel* and *Adab-e Latif*. The more radical members of the APPWA – Safdar Mir, Sibte Hasan, Hajra Masroor, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Abdullah Malik, Arif Abdul Mateen, Zaheer Kashmiri, Mumtaz Hussain, Khadija Mastoor, among others – came to be known as the 'Savera group'.

The new 'take no prisoners' stance of the Communist Party was a significant departure from the earlier strategy of the United Front, which was now seen as a form of collaboration. While this move has been often read by critics as the reason for the 'isolation' of the communists in Pakistan and for the ban placed on the APPWA, the Pakistani Progressives took what they believed was the only possible principled stance within the new neocolonial context. The fact that they ultimately could not hold out against the state power, at least in the organizational context, should not be understood as a 'failure' on their part. Given the domestic and international political re-alignments which followed Independence, it is worth noting that the Progressives were the only ones who consistently articulated a significant critique of the elitist establishment.

Although the loss of organizational and institutional platforms was clearly a severe blow to the Left, it is incorrect to assume that the ban marks the 'death' of the Progressive Movement in Pakistani literature. This has clearly not been the case, as several generations of Pakistani writers and poets have demonstrated, from Habib Jalib and Ahmad Faraz in the 1960s and 1970s to the feminist poets such as Kishwar Naheed and Fehmida Riyaz in the 1980s and later. Besides, arguments about the 'decline' of the Progressive Movement in Pakistan are tenable only if one looks in the wrong places. By all accounts, progressive poetry in Pakistan is alive and well – it's just not where people expect it to be (or only there). For example, the progressive voice in Pakistan is increasingly to be found in non-Urdu literary spaces such as Sindhi, Punjabi and Hindko. Just as importantly, the progressive voice in Urdu literature can no longer be identified with one literary group or faction. Although socialism may no longer be the frame of reference, the progressive sentiment infuses, informs, and some would say, dominates a significant part of Urdu literary production in Pakistan even today. This is the legacy of a generation of writers, who against all odds, stood up to the state and the establishment, often paying a heavy personal price in the process.

In December 1980 the Karachi Press Club, directly flouting the orders of the Zia-ul-Haq government, organized a gathering under the stewardship of Sibte Hasan to felicitate Habib Jalib. Jalib had a long-standing and hard-earned reputation as a firebrand who had opposed military dictatorships for years. After all, this was the same courageous poet whose verses had defined the anger of the people at Ayub Khan's constitution in 1962. Jalib's words, simple and ringing, had framed the dissent against dictatorship in Pakistan thus:

*Deep jis ka mahallaat hi mein jale
Chand logoñ ki khushiyon ko le kar chale
Voh jo saaye mein har maslehat ke pale
Aise dastoor ko, subh-e benoor ko
Main nahiñ maanta! Main nahiñ jaanta!*

A lamp that sheds light only on palaces
That caters to the whims of a chosen few
That flourishes in the shadow of compromise
This system, this light-starved morning
I do not accept!

Jalib who was imprisoned several times, including during the Zia regime, had only recently been released from jail. Far from being tempered by his punishment, the Avaami Shaayar (Poet of the People) began with a characteristically hard-hitting *nazm* that attacked the dictator through a clever but obvious parody that played on the word *zia* (Light), contrasting it with *zulmat* (Darkness):

*Zulmat ko 'Zia', sarsar ko saba, bande ko khuda kya likhna? Kya likhna?
Patthar ko gohar, deewaar ko dar, jugnu ko diya kya likhna? Kya likhna?
Ek hashr bapa hai ghar ghar mein, dum ghuñ-ta hai gumbad-e be-dar mein
Ek shaqs ke haathon muddat se rusva hai vatan duniya bhar mein
Ai deedawaro, is zillat ko, qismat ka likha kya likhna? Kya likhna?*

Why refer to Darkness as Light, write of a rustle as if it is the wind,
Or of a man as if he is God? Why?
Why call a stone a diamond, a door a wall
Why write that a firefly is a lamp? Why?
A cry of grief rises in every house, we are smothered in this airless tomb
One man's actions have shamed our country all over the world
We who can see, why should we consider this humiliation
Is but our written fate? Why?

All that remains of that December 1980 meeting is a scratchy audiotape, but the recording still resounds with the voice of resistance and the determination of struggle. Jalib's

characteristic sarcasm is on ample display in his poem skewering the rulers of Pakistan and their subservience to the new imperialist order:

*Firangi ka jo main darbaan hota
To jeena kis qadar aasaan hota
Mere bachche bhi Amreeka mein padte
Main har garmi mein Inglistaan hota
Meri English bala ki chust hoti
Bala se jo na Urdudaan hota
Jhuka ke sar ko ho jaata jo Sir main
To leader bhi azeem-ush shaan hota
Zameeneñ meri har soobe mein hoti
Main wallaah sadr-e Pakistaan hota*

Had I too been a courtier of the imperialists
Life would have been a piece of cake
My children too would have studied in America
And every summer would have been spent in England
My English would be devilishly clever
Had I not been a lowly Urdu waala
Had I bowed my head for a knighthood
I too would have been called an exalted leader
I would have owned lands in every region
By God! I could have been the President of Pakistan!

Another poet who has kept the progressive sentiment blazing is Ahmad Faraz, who despite being imprisoned and exiled during Zia's regime continued to compose poems about the importance of freedom, dignity and struggle. Using the aesthetic popularized by the earlier Progressives, Faraz writes:

*Raat ke jaañ-guzaar zulmat mein
Azm ki mash'aleñ jalaae hue
Dil mein lekar baghaavatoñ ke sharaar
Vahshatoñ ke muheeb saaye mein
Sar-bakaf, jaañ-balab, nigaah-ba-qasr*

*Surkh-o khoodnee alam uthhaaye hue
Badh rahe haiñ junooñ ke aalam mein
Chand naadaan, chand deevaane*

In the murderous darkness
Having lit the torches of their determination
Carrying the sparks of rebellion in their hearts
In the intimidating shadows of danger
Heads high, lives on their lips, and eyes on the palace
Carrying red, bloodstained banners
They march with frenzy
Those foolish ones, those mad ones

Despite the opposition they faced from the establishment, the Progressives made a deep impact on the people of Pakistan, particularly its workers and peasants. When the APPWA held its first All Pakistan Conference in Lahore in 1949, it faced significant harassment by the state and its allies within the 'civil society'. Goons and stooges led by Sarosh Kashmiri (the editor of the weekly *Chataan*, and a diehard opponent of the progressive writers) tried to disrupt the proceedings. Hameed Akhtar recalls that, unfortunately for the hirelings, the gathering was attended by a large number of peasants carrying their traditional lathis. Since the gatecrashers were not prepared for this opposition, they were easily routed. The conference ended with the speakers and the guests escorted down the Mall Road accompanied by their impromptu guards!

Bol, Ke Lab Azaad Hain Tere

The PWA went through a life cycle of birth, rapid growth, and eventual decline and an examination of this process reveals a lot about Urdu and its engagement with issues of nationalism, class, religion and social justice. The association's insistence on a progressive social sensibility was so powerful that it created a

near-consensus in the field of Urdu literary production for several decades, dominating the literary agenda of its times despite the obstacles it faced. The Progressives fashioned a new poetic tradition, turning the conventional metaphors of *shama-parwaana* (flame-moth), *firaaq-visaal* (separation-union) and *husn-ishq* (beauty-love) on their heads in the service of a new aesthetic of social change. Instead of writing ghazals about pining lovers, they penned popular poems to celebrate progress and modernity. Instead of elegies to Majnoon and Farhad, they composed dirges about martyred revolutionaries like Patrice Lumumba and Martin Luther King. The rival in love (*raaqeb*) was recast not as a hated figure but as a fellow combatant in a revolutionary cause. The playful iconoclasm of the godless was transformed into a no-holds barred attack on the orthodoxy and conservatism of religious practices.

The only serious literary (and ultimately political, since the absence of politics is a kind of politics in itself) opposition to it was the literary tendency known as *jadidiyat* (a more or less direct and self-conscious translation of 'modernism' – as an aesthetic and formal/stylistic movement/preoccupation). The Jadidiyat Movement in Urdu literature that came to the fore after independence was represented by the Halqa-e Arbaab-e Zauq – the Association of the Aesthetes – which was established in opposition to the PWA's demand that writers use their works to fulfil a social responsibility. Notwithstanding this difference, there was a considerable overlap between the PWA and the Halqa, both in terms of membership and ideology, especially on the issues of nationalism and secularism.

Even though the Progressive Writers' Association eventually collapsed, the Progressive Movement it fostered and the ideals it espoused dominated literary production for most of the century and remain popular to this day. The Progressives

actively engaged in the process of creating a community of writers and poets which saw itself not merely as a group that produced art for art's sake but as one that engaged with the issues of the times in order to make an intervention in the cause of egalitarianism and justice. It was a community that was not based on an inherited or imposed identity, but one that was founded on the basis of ideologies and praxis, one that believed in the possibility of a just society, and one that consistently and courageously spoke truth to power; sentiments that find voice in Faiz's poem 'Bol' (Speak):

*Bol ke lab aazaad haiñ tere
Bol zabaan ab tak teri hai
Tera sutvaan jism hai tera
Bol ke jaañ ab tak teri hai*

*Dekh ke aahangar ki dukaañ meiñ
Tund haiñ sholay, surkh hai aahan
Khulne lage qufloñ ke dahaane
Phaila har ek zanjeer ka daaman*

*Bol ye thoda waqt bahut hai
Jism-o zabaan ki maüt se pehle
Bol ke sach zinda hai ab tak
Bol jo kuch kahna hai, kah le*

Speak, for your lips are still free
Speak, for your tongue is still yours
Your body, though frail, is still yours
Speak, for your life is still yours

Look, in the blacksmith's workshop
The flames are hot, the steel is red
The mouths of the locks are beginning to open
The links of chains are coming undone

Speak, for the little time you have is enough
Before your body and tongue die
Speak, for truth still lives
Speak up, say that which you must!

بھڑکار ہے ہیں آگ لبِ نغمہ گر سے ہم
خاموش کیا رہیں گے زمانے کے ڈر سے ہم
لے دے کے اپنے پاس فقط اک نظر تو ہے
کیوں دیکھیں زندگی کو کسی نئی نظر سے ہم
مانا کہ اس جہاں کو نہ گلزار کر کے
کچھ خسار کم تو کر دینے گزرے جدھر سے ہم

متاعِ لوح و قلم چھن گئی تو کیا غم ہے
کہ خونِ دل میں ڈبولی ہیں انگلیاں میں نے
زباں پہ ہنسر لگی ہے تو کیا کہ رکھ دی ہے
ہر ایک حلقہ زنجیر میں زباں میں نے

دیپ جس کا محلات ہی میں جسلے
چند لوگوں کی خوشیوں کو لے کر چلے
وہ جو سائے میں ہر مصلحت کے تلے
ایسے دستور کو صبح بے نور کو
میں نہیں مانتا میں نہیں جانتا