

This Issue of the *Annual*

APPOLOGIES to our readers! Although most of the material for the present issue was ready, circumstances prevented us from bringing it out last June, as promised. The issue has grown significantly since, almost to double its usual size of 400 pages. It is being published in two parts, with no extra cost to our readers.

Two special sections are featured in this issue, one on the Urdu *dāstān*, the other on the non-fictional writings of Ismat Chughtai, a distinguished woman writer who, with characteristic intensity and directness, did more than any other writer of her generation to focus attention on women's issues.

The Urdu *dāstān*, as a narrative genre, has suffered from a habit of debase-ment and neglect among, surprisingly, the Urdu critics. Because of its origins in the oral tradition of storytelling, it was not accorded the status of literature. Unfavorable, indeed wholly gratuitous, comparison to the Western novel on the one hand, and the Urdu Progressive writers' insistence on assigning a utilitarian function to literature on the other, further doomed the *dāstān* to a continued subterranean existence. But thanks to the work of Gyān Čand Jain and, lately, the brilliant reappraisal by Urdu's finest critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, the genre of the *dāstān* has slowly started to move to a brighter area on the stage. The special section offered here has been in the making for some time. Musharraf Farooqi has single-handedly translated roughly the first one hundred pages from *Dāstān-e Amīr Ḥamza Šāhibqirān*, and has appended his own thoughts about the work in an extensive introductory essay. His approach is not that of a formal critic, but that of a creative writer, one who enjoys reading. I'm sure that you will enjoy the youthful exuberance of his imagination as much as I have.

To give the discussion of the *dāstān* a fuller and more comprehensive character—to the extent it was possible, given our means—we have also included two additional pieces. Frances W. Pritchett's "Kaukab's Magic Powers: Strategies for *Dastan* Translation," which appeared in *AUS* #6 (1987), seemed worth revisiting for its insights. The other item, Suhail Ahmad Khan's "The Symbolic Aspects of *Ṭīlism*," a chapter from his published Ph.D. dissertation on the *dāstān*, discusses

an important aspect of the genre, namely, the *ʔilism*. The *dāstān* was borrowed into Urdu from Persian and, according to Faruqi, it is precisely this element that makes the Urdu *dāstān* significantly different from its Persian counterpart. Musharraf Farooqi has also discussed this element at some length in his essay. I'm grateful to Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman for accepting to translate the chapter into English.

The three items in the Ismat Chughtai section provide ample evidence of the author's concern with women's issues not only in her writing but also in her day-to-day life. Equally importantly, they reveal some of her own inconsistencies and present a view of literature with which a contemporary Urdu reader and critic may find herself in considerable disagreement. □

M.U.M.