

## BOOK REVIEWS

INTIZAR HUSAIN. *The Seventh Door and Other Stories*. Edited and with an Introduction by MUHAMMAD UMAR MEMON. Boulder, Colorado, and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998. 250 pp. pb. \$19.95; hc. \$45.00.

ATTIA HOSAIN. *Shakista Sutūn par Dhūp*. [Sunlight on a Broken Column.] Translated by INTIZAR HUSAIN. Lahore: Mashal, 1998. 470 pp. Rs.220.

**S**LOWLY but steadfastly Intizar Husain has emerged as a writer to reckon with. The fictional territory he explores or exploits is not extensive. There are no horizontal flourishes here that might overexcite or cause bewilderment. All the same, he digs deep, exposing layer after layer of an existence steeped in nostalgia, reverie and a sense of shadowy disquiet. He is a Schliemann who has found his Troy and can spend a lifetime unearthing a hypnagogic history, half myth, half fact.

If you look at the bare bones of what he has to offer, there is not much to summarize. An idyllic childhood and boyhood, on the verge of being tainted with indecipherable longings, days of calf love, a sudden but deliberate distancing from familiar environments and repeated attempts to merge a private past into an impersonal mythologized landscape.

He is not, in fact, a realist, although his early memories, or in his personal context, his prehistoric memories, have a photographic clarity. Neither does he pay court to the cult of magic realism. He is a curator, in charge of a collection, which although single, is too vast to be properly catalogued. Trying to make sense of what he is entrusted with, he keeps adding new and misleading details and dabs of colors to his inventory. Every new item reminds him of things he has already catalogued, invests them with a fresh perspective and gloss. So he abandons the item in hand and goes back to wonder how on earth the older items should be reinterpreted. The progress is slow and the task as thankless as it is endless. The slow pace of Intizar Husain's fiction at times infuriated me. But now I can see where he is and sympathize with him and would rather not be there myself. He is in the middle of a private museum, wandering from one period of his real or imaginary life to another and has no desire whatsoever of getting out. Every museum worth its name exudes richness, and this one is no exception. The only pity is that Husain is simply not interested in exploring some of the wings or the basement.

Another distinction, of a different sort, can be noted if we read some of his earlier work, notably the novella *Din* or the cluster of stories with "The Stairway" and "The Back Room" as its focal points alongside his recent writing. There is a

very discernible decline in quality. His early prose was a rich fare, a fanfare almost, growing out of a compost of classics, poetic and prose. A strange grandeur echoed through it. It was a passionate affair with language, with its possibilities and its timbre. Instead of becoming more substantial and demanding, his prose now is a pale shadow of its former self, getting along with a minimum of words, repetitive and listless. It is as if a mood of parsimony had taken hold of him. It is a style that suits his travelogues, which are light affairs, requiring little effort on his part. These look-and-see-and-meet narratives can stay close to a journalistic beat without any hint of loss. But good fiction always tends to be exacting. It appears that Intizar Husain feels jaded now. Thankfully very little of his recent work has been included in this anthology edited by Muhammad Umar Memon.

Memon, to put the record straight, has done more than anyone else to promote Intizar Husain as a writer of quality to readers of English. There is nothing partisan about his approach. Memon is a very good judge of literature, in particular of Urdu fiction. Many Urdu writers feel indebted to his unflagging energy and unquestionable enthusiasm. *The Annual of Urdu Studies* is an eloquent testimony to this lonely man's vision and competence. Only if there were more persons like him around!

No better introduction to Husain's complex world of fiction is now available in English. There are fifteen stories in the book, preceded with a fairly long foreword, perhaps a shade too detailed than the anthology called for. Certainly the discussion of his novels seems out of context. Memon is sometimes carried away by his academic fervor. Anyway, the point is not worth quibbling about.

How these stories, some of them thoroughly grounded in Urdu or Indo-Persian literary tradition, would come over to a reader, let us say, in Cleveland or Calgary or Wellington, is impossible to predict. Even to young readers in Pakistan and India some of Husain's fiction would appear outlandish and remote. So much has changed so quickly during the last fifty years. The sleepy little towns and places of long ago, so quintessential a backdrop to Husain's best fiction, where life went on at a slow, sedate pace, have almost disappeared. Some of the stories read like news from a vanished planet. Perhaps that would make them attractive or curious to some of the readers.

Intizar Husain's strength, at least in the stories included in this collection, lies in a double paradox. His plots and characters clearly imply that the less you know the more you understand. In every story depicting childhood, as lived or recalled, the child is aware of a deep integration within a family, a milieu, or a landscape, although he or she (mostly he) would be unable to explain why. On the other hand, the more you know the less you understand, and this dilemma is neatly summed up in stories like "The Shadow" or "The Legs." Perhaps knowledge is alienation. At least the Sufis have always said so.

Are we, therefore, to see Intizar Husain as a sufi manque? Not necessarily. Every work of art, creative in the true sense of the word, has a mystical under-

pinning, not the outcome of any contrivance. It just happens to be there, like the will of God. What is remarkable about good literature is its strangeness. It somehow shifts life into dimensions where we feel at home as well as excluded.

The best stories of the writer are lit up from within, a soft glow radiating from vantage points. The probable reason why his novels are disappointing is that there isn't enough wattage to illuminate them from end to end. They are like badly or unevenly lit places, plagued by predictable power failures. I also fail to understand why no one has translated his *Din* into English. Surely it is one of his most enduring and endearing achievements. There ought to be a place for it in the canon of twentieth-century literature.

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**A**TTIA HOSAIN, who passed away recently, was born in 1913. She belonged to Lucknow and the landed aristocracy, and wrote only a single novel, and that too in English. Her output as an author includes a handful of stories as well, also in English. After the partition of India she and her family migrated to England. Obviously, she didn't care to live anymore in a country where the political and social changes made little sense to her. That she chose to write in English rather than Urdu is puzzling. Her novel appeared from England in 1961, but its English readership, I suspect, must have been very limited, at least for a couple of decades. Now that the number of those who prefer to read and write in English is constantly on the increase in India, she is certain to be widely read. The novel has been republished, both in the UK and India, in recent years. It is unlikely ever to become a best-seller but, on the whole, it shouldn't fail to draw some attention to itself. What is more certain is that its Urdu translation by Intizar Husain would find more readers than the English original.

There may be a peculiar reason why Attia Hosain preferred English as her medium of expression. It can be seen as a gesture of defiance, a show of deviant behavior. She belonged to the generation of the '40s, to the group of post-purdah, enlightened young women who wanted to be properly educated, who wished to lead relatively independent lives and certainly hated to be dictated to. The author's sister, Razia, was one of the best hostesses in Lucknow, famous for her uninhibited garden parties. With so much unconventionality in the air, what is there to wonder at if Attia Hosain chose to go her own way, turning her back on her country, caring little for her mother tongue? There are far too many like her in the present century who emigrate in order to savor to the full the bitterness of self-exile.

Her novel is exemplary in the sense that it reinforces a very cogent dictum. It has been said over and over again that every literate person is capable of writing at least one novel. One can always write an autobiography disguised as fiction. Attia Hosain did just that and wrote no more. There are many writers, some of them of considerable stature, who don't know when to stop and by continuing to write ruin their reputation. Attia Hosain, at least, knew when to stop. Perhaps

she didn't see herself as a creative person. The memories of her young days must have haunted her, and what better way is there to exorcise the ghosts of one's past than to put it all down in words and be done with them?

*Shakista Sutūn par Dhūp* is essentially about the gradual breakdown of a dictatorial, feudal order and the democratization of family life. But once others stop dictating to you and you are free to pick your career, your politics, your lover, to make existential choices in fact, you are bound to make mistakes also. And you can no longer blame others for these mistakes. How full of hazards it is to be free but, in the long run, what a feeling it is to be at liberty, no matter whether you make or don't make a mess of your life. Laila, the novel's central character, narrates the story of her life as she bravely makes her own choices and sees, while gaining some precarious but personal satisfaction, the old way of life slowly fall apart. Readable but not exceptional, the novel runs out of steam long before the end. It might survive as a period piece.

Intizar Husain has done a splendid job as a translator. Here was a narrative tailor-made for him, in which every thing, every character, every incident seemed utterly familiar and renderable. How he revels being in his element and makes the novel much more exciting and closer to the spirit of the age than its English original. How about more of the same? Someone should commission Husain to translate into Urdu Vikram Seth's block buster *A Suitable Boy*. It would keep him suitably occupied for a couple of years. □

—MUHAMMAD SALIM-UR-RAHMAN  
Editor, Savera (Lahore)

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KHADIJA MASTUR. *Cool, Sweet Water: Selected Stories*. Edited by MUHAMMAD UMAR MEMON. Translated by TAHIRA NAQVI. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999. xxxvii, +188 pp. Rs.200.

COOL, SWEET WATER is the Indian reprint of the Pakistani volume with the same title published by Oxford University Press, Karachi. It is the third in the Pakistani Writers Series of which the General Editor is Muhammad Umar Memon. The Series' objective is to introduce prominent Urdu writers from Pakistan to the English-speaking audience at home and abroad. The first two books of the Series, which sample the writings of Abdullah Hussein and Hasan Manzar and are translated by Memon himself, have set a rigorous standard of accurate and elegant translation with comprehensive Introductions. If the subsequent volumes keep close to this standard, we will surely have a highly readable corpus the best of Urdu fictional literature from Pakistan.

Khadija Mastur (1927-1983), one of the youngest writers of the Progressive Writers Movement, is known to Urdu readers as the writer of her justly famous novel *Āngan*. This novel, along with Anīs Qidvā'ī's *Āzādī kī Ā'wāz* and Attia Hosain's English novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, articulates the point of view of women, particularly Muslim women, in regard to the complex question of India's partition. Mastur does not pretend to engage with the eternal verities of life in her fiction. Nor does she essay the "great" moral and social dilemmas of the time. But she concerns herself with the life of the people as it is lived from day to day. She is the quintessential chronicler of the quotidian, who deftly picks up ordinary, even apparently insignificant fragments of life and brings to light the struggle of the common people, particularly those from the lower strata of society.

All this is evident in the volume under review, which offers twelve short stories and three excerpts from two of Mastur's novels. As she crafts the plots and unveils the drama of human relationships in her fiction, Mastur also chronicles the history of Pakistan, its birth pangs through the partition of India, the initial years of optimism and euphoria slowly giving way to despair and unrelieved gloom. And yet all this is done through a language which is simple and unadorned, and is as stark as the reality it seeks to uncover.

The partition of India looms large in the background of a number of stories, among them "They are Taking Me Away, Father, They are Taking Me Away," "The Miscreant" and the excerpt from *Āngan*. The aftermath of the partition in Pakistan can be seen directly in the two excerpts from the novel *Zamīn* and obliquely in a number of other stories. "They are Taking Me Away ..." (the lines from the Punjabi epic *Hir-Rāñjhā* providing a counterpoint to the gruesome event that the narrative frames) evokes the dark days of partition in all their unmitigated brutality. The failure of the unnamed young man to protect a young woman from the other community from the hooligans hounding their victims symbolizes the breakdown of all human bonds when people allow themselves to be gripped by religious and racial frenzy. "Miscreant" is also based on the same theme. Fazlu, the protagonist, cannot understand why the creation of Pakistan, an essentially political act, should instill fear in the hearts of his Sikh and Hindu neighbors. With singular courage and goodwill he provides them help and is thus able to gain their trust for a time. But all his efforts at maintaining his sanity are thwarted by the machinations of the zamindar. This fellow, who has an eye on the property of Sikhs and Hindus, foments trouble by spreading a false rumor that Fazlu's sister, whom Fazlu loves more than his own life, has been abducted by their Sikh neighbors just as they fled to India. Believing the rumor to be true, Fazlu is so shocked that he loses all power of rational thinking. He flies into a rage, which is quelled only after he has killed the very Sikh and Hindu villagers who have stayed on in Pakistan thus far on his assurance of protection and safety. The reality of the sleazy machination sets in upon him when his sister comes back in the morning; alas!, too late to make amends. He is condemned to live the

rest of his life with the burden of guilt on his conscience, while the zamindar's complicity goes unpunished. In Mastur's fictional world the high and mighty are rarely called to account or punished for their misdeeds.

The excerpt from *Āngan*, apart from hinting at the larger trauma of partition, brings to light the battle that had to be fought within the Muslim families of India at the time of partition—one part of the family seeking to migrate while the other part deciding to stay on. If the excerpt depicts the plight of those who had to tear themselves off from their roots, it also brings out, by implication if not by direct assertion, the moral courage of those who finally opted to stay. In either case, members of these families had to lead truncated lives, their former wholeness having been ruptured irrevocably.

The two excerpts from the novel *Zamīn* deal with the hopes and aspirations of people in the nascent Pakistan state. The first excerpt describes the effect of Jinnah's premature death on the people of Pakistan, who now felt rudderless in the absence of their charismatic leader. When Nazim, one of the main characters, says, "How strange that with Quaid-i-Azam's passing, many of the people see the death and destruction of this country. Why don't people realize that this country owes its existence to the struggles of a great many people. They've lost their sense of selfhood at the passing of just one leader" (p. 35), he brings out starkly the inadequacy of a democratic polity based on personality cult rather than on building institutions needed to sustain it. The second excerpt shows the vise-like grip of the feudal system/mentality that continues to throttle the aspirations of the common people and the sham religiosity deftly pressed into service for effectively muzzling their voices. The translator remarks succinctly, "*Zamīn* clearly brings not only Mastur's literary self full-circle, but also becomes a symbolic point of closure for every Pakistani who remembers Partition" (p. xiii).

The title story "Cool, Sweet Water" is about the first Indo-Pakistani war of 1965. However, more than the fact of war it shows the spontaneous enthusiasm and optimism of both the Pakistani military and the public, their pride in the newly-acquired nationhood and an abundance of goodwill for its administrators—a pride which would be gradually frittered away by the short-sighted military rulers of Pakistan.

The stories in the volume demonstrate Mastur's engagement with the marginal and the subaltern in society: old women left behind in the race of life but clinging tenaciously to some notions of honor; wives trying desperately to hold the affections of their straying husbands; and adolescent girls trying to come to grips with their nascent sexuality. They have come to be known as "Mastur's Women" and are drawn by the writer with subtle sympathy and deep compassion, for they are fated to inhabit a world that provides little scope for their aspirations.

"Suriya" is about a pretty young sweeper girl who jealously guards her honor and dignity. She works for her bread and detests doles, indeed so much that when her employer, pleased with her hard work and honesty, offers her a rupee as

a tip, she politely declines to accept. Chunni Begum of “The Hand Pump” shows a similar pride in self-reliance. Rather than spending her life as a dependant to her son and daughter-in-law, she prefers to eke out her own living, however excruciating that might be. Here is a loveable portrait of a crotchety crone who installs a hand pump to provide drinking water for the poor people but also, driven by poverty, quarrels with them about paying her a fee in order to use it.

Women’s need for love and female sexuality are the themes of “Trust,” “Harvest” and “Springtime of Life.” In “Trust,” Razia longs for “true love.” After her first marriage has gone awry she meets Safdar, who is like the hero of her dream, an ideal husband. However, the strong passion that has bound them gradually cools down and Safdar goes the way all men go. Although she is devastated by Safdar’s infidelity, she is a resilient woman and the reader knows that in the end she will be able to pull herself together. The yearnings of Kaneez for a husband and home remain unfulfilled in the short story “Harvest.” Men contract temporary marriages with her, the *mutā’* (permissible in Islam under certain circumstances), and leave her as soon as they have satisfied their needs. The story is touching in its pathos. In “Springtime of Life” Bittan cannot wait any longer for her marriage and bursts out, “Why have you kept me at home like this? Why don’t you marry me off ...?”

Among the three final stories, “In Stealth” touches quite boldly on the nature of forbidden love. Here, a married woman is driven to take the young servant as her lover because her husband is sexually impotent. “Bhooray,” on the other hand, underscores the sexual exploitation of Zahooran by her affluent employers, which ultimately leads her fiancé to reject her. “Lost and Found” is about the dehumanizing effects of poverty on Rafique and his family. If the first two hold up a mirror to society for its double standards in matters of sexual morality, the third documents the utter insensitivity of the rich to the plight of the poor and the downtrodden.

All in all the volume contains an attractive fare for fiction lovers. It also offers some insight into women writing in Pakistan. One delightful aspect of this writing is its serious engagement with issues involving minorities of all denominations—religious, regional, gender—and how they always end up with a raw deal in the dispensation of things. However, what one sometimes misses in the volume are a touch of humor and stylistic ingenuity. The writer obviously prefers “telling” to “showing.” The translation from Urdu is lucid and free flowing. The printer’s gremlins are minimal. The only serious inadequacy is the absence of a glossary which, though listed in the table of contents, is not to be found in the book. □

—M. ASADUDDIN  
*Jamia Millia Islamia*

NAIYER MASUD. *Essence of Camphor: Stories*. Translated by MUHAMMAD UMAR MEMON AND OTHERS. New York: The New Press, 2000. 188 pp. \$21.

THE startling grace of Naiyer Masud's volume of short stories, *Essence of Camphor*, emanates both from the writer's ability to give a form and a voice to rare cultural details and to the elegant originality of his prose. Indeed it is impossible to separate one from the other. Instead, as the title story suggests, the "essence" of this language is such that it must evaporate, not into mere melancholy or forlornness, but rather into an evocatively empty mystery that is simultaneously a celebration of the world of Lucknow. As perfectly distilled as camphor itself, this volume introduces the contemporary reader to a specific universe in which history and mystery are uncannily synonymous. It also reaches beyond an Urdu-speaking audience to confirm the dignity of one of the finest South Asian writers of our time.

Here, it seems appropriate to mention that Masud's writing is in itself sufficient refutation of Salman Rushdie's infamous claim that the most important work emerging from the Indian subcontinent is written in English. Many scholars and readers have reacted with understandable umbrage to this sweeping statement, citing the multitudinous languages and dialects in which literature has been and continues to be written. While it is hardly necessary to dignify Rushdie's specious comments with further protest, it is clear that a dissemination of works by writers such as Masud is essential to illustrate the vibrant literary tradition that he represents and embodies. On this score, the editor and translators of *Essence of Camphor* deserve a special note of respectful praise, for they have worked in collaboration with the original texts to produce a volume that meticulously replicates the subtleties and nuances of the Urdu language.

It would be insufficient to characterize Masud's use of this language with reference to the great allegorical prose of a Kafka or a Borges, or to the magic realism of Marquez's narratives. Of course such analogies may be drawn, but on one level Masud's stories are haunting simply because they defy classification. In the poignant tale, "Sheesha Ghat," for example, the reader remembers less the phantasmagoric "glass wharf" than the painful intimacy of the young narrator's stutter: "Neither [my father] nor I had expected that the people here would turn me into a sideshow, the way they do a madman. In the bazaars, people listened to my words with a curiosity greater than that displayed toward others, and whether what I said was funny or not, they always laughed" (pp. 105–6). Even when the child is banished from the town to the unreal glass wharf, the strictly unsentimental narrative is able to indicate that exile is a psychic rather than an actual condition.

Obviously such stories are in tune with the stark language of modernism and the agonized comedy of the postmodern, with its reliance on the structure of a parable that knows the parabolic idiom does not necessarily lead to a conclusion. The story, "Obscure Domains of Fear and Desire," is a case in point. On the one



hand, the sprawling intricacies of an extended family structure can appear to provide continuity and comfort; on the other, it is large enough to accommodate the possibility of a very rarefied form of incest. Masud's narrators are frequently obsessed with the idea of what may constitute a home, and yet are equally frequently represented in the act of either leaving the mysteries of a "house" or entering one. In "Obscure Domains ...," the narrator sacrifices one form of erotic longing to exile himself into another. He makes a profession out of converting abstractions into specificities, so that as an inspector of houses he can intuitively locate the domains of "fear and desire" in each home he enters. Even as he practices the art of location, he must come to terms with the startling reality that fear and desire are inextricable. That it ultimately causes him to choose silence is by no means a Romantic abjuration of language, but instead suggests wordlessness can serve as a protection in a world where homes can be predatory spaces. The allegory unfolds to demonstrate that Masud's language remains arrestingly unique: *Essence of Camphor* ironically implies that a local habitation is essential for its language to name the possibilities of an alternative.

Masud's tale-telling and his tone are indeed invariably ironic; each of his stories is quickened with an irony as compassionate as it is delicate. The art-form that comes to mind is of course the tradition of Persian and Mughal miniaturist painting, or the lucid precision of Urdu poetry as it is embodied in the *ghazal*. The first-person narrator in these stories is typically hinged between generations, both familial and historical, and yet the tone of the narrative is never confessional. It is too oblique to be read as a confession. And while the context of Lucknow may provide the specificities with which each story unfolds, it by no means suggests that such work is predominantly elegiac or simply nostalgic. The evocations of this world open instead into an anatomy of loss that both questions the elegiac and remains painfully comic. Even as the mortality of culture and human relations is represented through complex rituals of mourning, the concomitant comedy of tone gestures firmly towards the future.

Perhaps one of the most refreshing characteristics of Masud's work is its polite refusal to join the "postcolonial" caravan. The "India" of this work certainly knows all the vagaries of change, but the British Empire does not function as a defining presence against which indigenous cultures must inevitably be read. Masud seems more concerned with the complexities of psychic guilt and the burden of responsibility than with a simple reiteration of political tyranny. The poignant story, "The Myna from Peacock Garden," is a striking illustration. The tale is far more an illustration of what lengths a father will take to protect his daughter from disappointment than it is an overt narrative of the fall of Avadh. A chilling concluding paragraph mentions, as if in passing, the historical and political change that supply the context of the father's and the daughter's changed lives: "My not taking to life in the city of Lucknow again, my coming to live in Benaras within a month, the war of '57, the Badshah Sultan-e Alam's imprisonment in Calcutta, Chote Miyan's clashing with the British, the destruction of

Lucknow ... these are all other stories, and there are stories within those stories as well” (p. 257). This deft catalog is certainly more shocking and troubling than would be a more “epic” engagement with such histories. The events are hardly peripheral, but they are represented elliptically in order to make them more powerful. This narrative power allows for a remarkable ethical flexibility, which implies that the assignation of blame is too obvious a response to the subtleties of loss and the complexities of thought that such events demand.

In *Essence of Camphor*, none of the carefully crafted narratives close without simultaneously opening another door. The story, “Interregnum,” may seem to focus on a young boy’s ignorant abuse of his father the craftsman and of the uncanny teacher that his father supplies, but the narrator’s realization of his own misreadings does not necessarily spell “enlightenment.” Instead, after the father dies and the teacher disappears, the child is left to locate reality in his dream-world: “I saw my teacher, but in my dream he appeared in the form of a young girl, and I, as often happens in dreams, wasn’t a bit surprised” (p. 74). The surprise remains the reader’s, who leaves this tale knowing that the narrator—as do all of Masud’s narrators—possesses the afflicted eye of an observer. Given the brevity of these narratives, their ability to capture the nuances of character in a sentence or a quick phrase is unfailingly arresting. No reader will leave the *Essence of Camphor* without a sense of having a universe freshly populated, and most strikingly, with compassion.

*Essence of Camphor* is one of those rare volumes that finally must speak for itself. Its audience will doubtless find itself quoting from the text time and again, most tellingly, it will probably quote the words of the character Munshi Amir Ahmad Sahib in “The Myna from Peacock Garden”: “The truth of the matter is ... your story has touched my heart” (p. 242). □

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CHRISTOPHER SHACKLE and JAVED MAJEED. *Hali’s Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997. 262 pp. Rs. 395.

**H**ISTORIANS of Urdu literature consider Khvāja Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥalī (1837–1914) to be the most influential Urdu poet of the late nineteenth century. Ḥalī’s *Musaddas* represents an unprecedented and radical melding of discourses on poetic and Islamic reform. This translation and commentary endeavors to establish a more prominent position for Ḥalī’s often overlooked masterwork in histories of South Asian literature and Islamic reform movements.

*Hali’s Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam* narrates the decline of Islam in the hopes of inspiring self-improvement among Muslims through the effects of poetry. The title of the poem, Madd-o-Jazar-e Islām, elucidates its narrative struc-

ture. The Muslim community is likened to a ship subject to cycles of ebbs and flows, decline and progress. Ḥalī begins the work by decrying the degenerated state of contemporary Islam. He then longingly recalls the achievements and triumph of Islam from the time of the Prophet until the Caliphate of Baghdad. The theme of decline then reemerges as Ḥalī describes the degeneration of Islam, especially in South Asia. Yet, a discussion of European progress and the advanced state of the Hindu community follows. Ḥalī concludes his *Musaddas* with a comparison of the glorious state of Islam during its early years with its contemporary depraved state. Ḥalī writes in his introduction that in such a state of decline “it is necessary that each man should do what he can, for we are all embarked upon the same ship, and our welfare depends upon that of the whole craft. It is true that much has been written, and continues to be written about this. But no one has yet written poetry, which makes a natural appeal to all, and has been bequeathed to the Muslims as a legacy from the Arabs, for the purpose of awakening the community” (p. 93). With footnotes and division markers, the *Musaddas* is arranged unlike a typical Urdu poem and more like a textbook intended to instruct the Muslim community and, through the inspirational effects of poetry, to facilitate its advancement.

The two most prominent sources for the *Musaddas* are the poetics of the New Movement and the ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Ḥalī participated in the influential series of *mushāʿiras* (poetry recitals) sponsored by the Anjuman-e Punjab in 1874. Members of the Anjuman, most prominently Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād (1830–1910), characterized Urdu poetry as immoral and too full of imaginary and exaggerated themes. This *mushāʿira* series, which intended to revitalize Urdu poetry by bringing it closer to natural and inspiring topics, marks the beginning of the Natural Poetry or New Movement in Urdu poetry. Ḥalī went on to write perhaps the most influential treatise on Urdu poetics, the *Muqaddima-e Sheʿr-o-Shāʿirī* (1893). In this treatise, widely considered to be the poetical manifesto of the New Movement, Ḥalī criticizes Urdu poetry for its reliance upon artificial metaphors that cultivate improper emotions. He expounds upon the necessity of basing poetry upon observation of the natural world as the proper ground of truth.

Ḥalī’s association with Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Aligarh Movement lasted for over forty years, from around 1874 until Ḥalī’s death. The Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, founded by Sir Sayyid, was intended to provide a proper education to Muslim students that incorporated scientific knowledge and Islam so that the state of Muslims and the *qaum* (nation) could be improved from its present state of decline through a process of self-help. Although literary influence is usually a difficult matter to prove, if one takes Sir Sayyid’s and Ḥalī’s portrayal of their relationship into account, little doubt remains that Sir Sayyid was a profound influential on Ḥalī’s conceptual system. Sir Sayyid acknowledged his complete responsibility for inspiring Ḥalī and claimed that if God asked him to account for his achievements, he would claim

this act alone. Ḥalī's introduction to his *Musaddas* includes a personal account of how Ḥalī was moved away from a life of youth and false poetry to a life engaged in the betterment of the *qaum* under the guidance of "a servant of the Lord, a hero ... who was treading along a difficult path," namely Sir Sayyid.

The *Musaddas*, which consists of a melding of the poetics of the Natural Poetry movement with the ideology of the Aligarh, constitutes a radical break with previous genres of Urdu poetry. The text abounds in natural imagery but expands beyond the call of the New Movement to be close to nature by incorporating a social mission of Muslim advancement. The *Musaddas* is not a typical Urdu poem; it is neither a ghazal, a *qaṣīda*, nor a *maṣnavī* but a *musaddas*, an established but less common form of poetry consisting of six half-line verses. The *musaddas* form is most strongly associated with Shī'a *marṣiyas*, which are nearly always laments recounting the battle of Karbala. The meter Ḥalī employs is also quite rare, especially for a *marṣiya*, and is found more commonly in Arabic poetry than in Urdu and Persian. The rhyme scheme is quite simple but innovative, and Ḥalī was critiqued for his rhythmic flexibility, which at times does not correspond to established rules of prosody. Subject to numerous reprints, providing a model for similar poetic works, and even inspiring dramatic reenactments, the *Musaddas* proved to be incredibly popular and influential.

This translation and commentary on Ḥalī's *Musaddas* by Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed is both an excellent introduction to the poem and a tool for those who wish to read the poem in its original Urdu. The volume begins with a comprehensive introduction that includes a biography of Ḥalī, a textual history of the *Musaddas*, a survey of responses to the poem, and a consideration of the topoi of the *Musaddas*: decline, progress, history, bodily health, natural imagery, globalization, chaos, and order. This edition is complimented by an extensive bibliography, which includes works by Ḥalī, studies of Ḥalī, an interesting section on poetical works inspired by the *Musaddas*, and general texts on Urdu literature and history.

The Urdu text presented in this volume is that of the revised Second Edition of 1886, which contains 294 stanzas as opposed to the 297 of the First Edition of 1879. An additional supplement of 162 verses added by Ḥalī to the Second Edition, which is generally regarded as inferior to the original poem, is not provided but is discussed in the introduction. Both the introductions of the First and Second edition are included, as is an appendix that notes the changes Ḥalī made in the Second Edition. All of Ḥalī's original footnotes are included. They explain references and sources in the text and are of use in understanding the genealogy of the poem.

This edition of the *Musaddas*, as part of the SOAS South Asian Texts series, is intended to revive a method of presenting Urdu texts with side-by-side English translation followed by a glossary that was common during the British colonial period. Though the translation provided is literal and intended only as an aid in understanding the Urdu text, it remains very readable on its own. The reproduc-

tion of the Urdu text is clear, and its calligraphy is quite accessible but unfortunately rather small. The glossary provided is quite extensive, including all but the most common words of the Urdu text. The glossary proves particularly useful because of Ḥālī's conscious attempt to use "Hindi words in order to avoid flights of fancy or elegance of style ... [and] seasoning of exaggeration and the flavouring of artifice" (97). A number of these "Hindi" words are rather obscure, and were subject to numerous revisions by Ḥālī and also explicated in an attached glossary.

*The Flow and Ebb of Islam* provides an excellent means of access to one of the most important and radical Urdu poems. With its application of the poetics of the New Movement to the cause of Muslim advancement, this volume will prove of interest to students and connoisseurs of Urdu literature and to historians, as well. One can only hope for similar translations and commentaries of other Urdu texts of such a high caliber. □

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*Suqūṭ-e Haidarābād*. Edited by OMAR KHALIDI and MU'INUDDIN AQEEL. Karachi: Bahadur Yar Jang Academy, 1998. 346 pp. Rs. 180.

THIS book is a continuation of the two editors' project to put into print informative Urdu writings on the erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad. The present book is an anthology of excerpts and essays on the critical days in the third quarter of 1948 when Hyderabad "fell" (the editors' version)—when Hyderabad "acceded" to India after an Indian "police action" (the official Indian version). All the authors included are Muslim except for Gen. J. N. Chowdhri, who conducted the Indian military action that September. His account is from an Urdu translation published in Pakistan. The other selections were also previously published, though no longer easily available. (See below about the Indian edition.)

The selections are organized under the following headings: "Hyderabad Society. Indian Military Attack and the Fall of Hyderabad. The Consequences of the Indian Attack. The Social and Economic Consequences of the Fall. The Navigators of the Sinking Ship: What happened to them? The Perspective on the Fall in Creative Writings." Included in the latter are excerpts from novels by Aziz Ahmad, Vajida Tabassum and Jilani Bano—also Ibrahim Jalis, in the Indian edition—and a number of poems of indifferent quality.

The editors are concerned with the "Deccan," which presumably means the territories included in the former Hyderabad state. According to them, from 1347 (Bahmani kings) to 1948 (end of the Asafjahs), "Muslims had total political control over the [Deccan]." Further, September 1948 brought an end to "the independent and sovereign Muslim Asafjahi kingdom of Hyderabad." They regard

the latter event as “the most severe and tragic in the collective life and the ‘national’ history of the Muslims of the Indo-Pak subcontinent.” The editors indicate their purpose thusly in the dedication: “To those generations who have had some link with the ‘realm’ of Hyderabad, who did not see the tragic event of Hyderabad’s ‘fall’—but who might feel its consequences and effects.” They also hope that by reading this anthology “the youth and other future generations will be able to understand the Hindu mind and character and the ambitions and aims of Bharat.”

The selections themselves are quite revealing and informative, but the editorial comments will make sense only to those who comfortably believe in something called “the Hindu mind and character,” who can talk of democracy and feudal fun and games in the same breath, who view the demise of Hyderabad state as a greater tragedy than the violence and upheaval caused by the Partition in 1947 and by the Pakistani army action in erstwhile East Pakistan in 1971, and who think that in the context of South Asia what happens in urban centers and in upper and middle classes is of the greatest import but what goes on in rural areas and in the lower economic classes is of no concern.

Most of the rulers of Hyderabad state, which gladly lost its sovereignty to the British way back in the 18th century, were decent and enlightened men. (How many of their nobles behaved was another matter.) The last two Nizams also generously contributed to the enhancement of education among the Muslims of North India and to miscellaneous philanthropic work elsewhere. The decision to make Urdu the language of the state and the establishment of Osmania University where Urdu was the sole medium of instruction were also momentous events in the history of Urdu language and literature. But Urdu was not the original language of most of the people of Hyderabad state, and the conditions in the hinterlands were not the same as in the glittering capital. The editors have made no attempt to present the views of the vast non-Muslim population of the erstwhile Hyderabad state. (According to Ibrahim Jalis, quoted in the Indian edition, the Muslims totaled 2.5 million, the non-Muslims 15 million.) The editors’ language of choice is Urdu; they have not tried to find out what was written in Telugu and Marathi, the other two major languages of Hyderabad state.

In the editors’ view, the Telengana peasant movement was a “despicable” Marxist conspiracy. And they seem to rejoice with Khalilullah Husaini of Majlis Ittehad al-Muslimin that “the Muslims of Hyderabad fully rejected the condemnable goals of the Communists.” As for the “brave,” presumably “Islamic” deeds of the Majlis and the Razakars, read the essay by Ibrahim Jalis, excluded in the Pakistani edition under review but included, together with Mr. Husaini’s comments, in the Indian edition (Hyderabad: Majlis Ta’mir-e Millat, 1998) which I actually received from the editors almost a year later.

The Indian edition also includes excerpts from an investigative report written by Pundit Sundar Lal and Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, who toured Hyderabad state in November and December, 1948. These excerpts bring out the horror of the

criminal persecution of innocent Muslims in the aftermath of the action by the Indian army, just as Ibrahim Jalis's essay (excerpted from his book, *Dō Mulk ʿek Kabānī*) tells the equally tragic story of how innocent non-Muslims suffered before the Indian action. The Indian edition, thus, presents a more balanced story.

Unlike Mr. Khalidi's other publications, this book is full of typographical errors. □

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