

ABSTRACTS

THE following abstracts are from the “Sixteenth European Modern South Asian Studies Conference” (Center for South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 5–9 September 2000) and were sent to the *AUS* by Christina Oesterheld. Unfortunately, the material didn’t include the affiliation of paper presenters. —*Editor*

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“Transnational Identities: Sadat in South Asia.”

by Daniela Bredi

In South Asia, as in the rest of the Islamic world, the descendents of the Prophet have a special status. Usually, some of the members from these families have the role of intellectuals, exactly because they belong more or less directly to the lineage of Muhammad. In the Indian environment, they constitute a group at the top of Muslim social structure, which, according to certain sociologists, presents features that make it liable to be analyzed in terms of caste. The sociological literature in this respect indicates two views. One view is that caste organization exists in Muslim society and it is on the pattern of Hindu caste. The other view is that not caste but caste-like features exist among Indian Muslims. Ahmad considers castes among Muslims not as a cultural or structural feature but as a manifestation of the principle and feature characteristically associated with Hindu caste. In short, it can be said that, Hindu castes and Muslim social segments differ in many respects. The presence of elements of social hierarchy, endogamy and occupational specialization do not allow us to explain Muslim social structure in terms of caste, especially because the ideological and ethical justification which is provided by the Hindu cosmology to the caste system, is entirely lacking in the case of Muslim groups. Moreover, a certain amount of permeability can be observed between the boundaries of these groups, exemplified by the proverb: “Last year I was a Julaha; this year I am a Shaikh; next year if prices rise I shall be a Sayyid.” In any case, in the social structure of the Muslims in South Asia, the Sayyids are placed at the top.

Not unexpectedly to this group belong rulers, like the Sayyid dynasty of Delhi sultans and the nawabs of Awadh, sufis, jurists, thinkers and reformers, who, in the course of time provided leadership to their community. For example, in modern times, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (a Sunni) and Sayyid Amir ‘Ali (a

Shi'a). In order to see the continuity of the role of the Sayyids in contemporary times, it seems useful to present a few examples, which have necessarily to be limited. One is that of Sayyid Abu'l Hasan 'Ali Nadwi, also called 'Ali Miyan, rector of the Dar al-'Ulum Nadwat al-'Ulama, Lucknow, renowned Islamic scholar and prominent public figure. His long-standing links with several national and international organizations can be evinced from the fact that he is a founder-member of The Islamic World League, based in Saudi Arabia, and chairman of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and the Society of Islamic Literature. Another example is that of the Sayyids of Marahra, pirs of the Barkatiyya, whose influence on South Asian Muslim society can be gathered from the impressive amount of followers who attend the annual 'Urs. The pirs, whose authority remains undisputed thanks to their Sayyid ancestry, had an important part in the reformist movement and the building of a distinct Sunni identity among Indian Muslims. As far as Shi'a Sayyids are concerned an analysis of the *Tazkira-i 'Ulama Imamiyya Pakistan* reveals that 172 entries on a total of 441 are Sayyid, and their connections with Iran and Iraq are apparent from their biographical notes. Furthermore, the first leaders of the *Tarik-i Nifaz-i Fiqh Ja'fariyya* ('Arif Husaini and 'Ali Naqwi) were both Sayyids.

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“The Thick, the Thin and the Federal: The State and Language in South Asia”
by Subrata K. Mitra and Clemens Spiess

Largely for historical reasons, the role of language has remained outside mainstream research on federalism. Classic studies of federalism, particularly those based on the United States as the main empirical exemplar have concentrated on power-sharing between two sets of governments, one representing the constituent units and the other a central government, as the main issue of federalism. This principle has served well in countries where a core national identity based on language existed before the establishment of a federal state. Language, in that sense, has been a non-issue in the United States and Australia, or for that matter, in language-proud and linguistically homogeneous Germany. However, in post-colonial states like India (where the status of Hindi as the national language was contested by non-Hindi speaking people after the transfer of power by the British to the Congress party, dominated by Hindi speaking leaders), Pakistan (which subsequently split on this issue, giving rise to Bengali-speaking Bangladesh) and Ceylon (subsequently Sri Lanka, currently locked in a conflict on the issue of Tamil) where the task of creating a nation out of many distinct social groups based on their own language followed the founding of the state, language can emerge as the most severe challenge to national unity. Language, especially when it is believed to be a basis of economic discrimination, endangers the integrative capacity of the political system. In these cases, the institutional structure of feder-

alism, rather than being a sine qua non of political community, becomes a political battleground, because language plays a double role with regard to the problems of legality and legitimacy in the modern state. As a thin bond, language is the basis of communication between the institutions of the state, and the basis of the negotiation for power and resources between competing social groups. As such, the availability of a common language that minimizes uncertainty, loss of information in the course of transmission, and equalizes the chances for competing groups, considerably enhances the legality and the legitimacy of the state. As a thick system of meanings, carrying the burden of history, religion, culture, ritual and memory, language is a moral bond between the state and the individual. The issue here is not so much what the individual can get out of the state as whether the individual can identify with the state which, short of this identification, remains only a formal, distant and oppressive presence. With competing languages vying with one another for supremacy as its main focus, this paper suggests on the basis of different examples of the interaction between federalism and language in South Asia (mainly India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) that the success of a state in coping with the challenge of linguistic diversity depends on its capacity to respond through constitutional accommodation of diversity and adequate policy responses through firm and clear social, political and economic initiatives.



“From Aligarh to Wardha—Zakir Husain’s Contribution to National Education in Pre-Independence India”

by Joachim Oesterheld

The educational boycott of British institutions was one of the main items of the non-cooperation movement from 1920–1922 and the call for national education part of Gandhi’s program of constructive work. Among the various institutions which came into existence at that time in many provinces of British India were the Kashi Vidyapith at Benares, the Gujarat Vidyapith and Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapith. The overwhelming majority of those institutions did not survive because of their non-affiliation to universities and due to the lack of funds. Under dyarchy the education departments were transferred to Indian ministers responsible to provincial legislatures. While a general expansion of education took place from 1921 onwards, there was less progress in primary education in comparison to secondary and university education. Initiated by Mahatma Gandhi the Indian National Congress adopted a scheme of mass education (Wardha Scheme) in 1937.

The paper, which covers less than two decades in the life of Zakir Husain, tries to trace his development in becoming a distinguished educationist, to define his role in introducing modern educational thought and in shaping a system of

primary education on national lines before independence. In 1920, as a student and part-time lecturer, he co-founded the Jamia Millia Islamia. He became its Vice-Chancellor in 1926 and the chairman of an expert committee drafting the Wardha Scheme. What was the impact of his stay in Germany from 1922 to 1926 in turning to education while he did his doctorate in Economics? What has been his role in not only keeping the Jamia Millia Islamia alive but in gaining her international reputation as an institution adopting new educational thought to a particular surrounding? What have been issues in educational theory and practice where he differed with Gandhi and why was he skeptical about the outcome of the Wardha Scheme as being implemented by some of the provincial governments from 1937 onwards? In answering some of these questions the paper tries to contribute to the educational history of pre-independence India. While emphasizing the contribution of Zakir Husain to mass education in India the impact of the new educational movement spreading in Europe in the 1920's and 30's becomes obvious illustrating also for the field of education the links and contacts of Indian nationalism with modern European thought.



“Of Poisoned Ice-Cream and Rubber Sea-Monsters —Some Reflections About Urdu Detective Fiction and the Making of Modernist Identities Amongst the Colonial Service Stratum of Interwar Lahore”

by Markus Daechsel

Urdu crime fiction (*jasusi navelin*) was one of the most widely-read genres of popular literature in colonial Lahore in the interwar period. The recurrent theme is the adventurous confrontation of a detective (*suraghrasan*), usually with a background in college education, and a *daku*, who embodies the feudal values of bravery and *izzat*. The stories are saturated with the totems and fetishes of modern life, from electric street lighting and motorcycles to the bachelor's residence in a hotel and new forms of male-female interaction. The depiction of modernity is far from ambiguous, however, leaving plenty of space for non-modernist values and contradictions within modernism to flourish. Although it may remain open to argument whether crime stories played a crucial role in identity formation itself, they are at least powerful reflections of the way in which the members of the Urdu-literate service stratum of Lahore perceived their position in the world; in other words, *jasusi* fiction was a vehicle of political identities strongly conditioned by the presence of the colonial state. My paper seeks to link arguments derived from a sociological reading of *jasusi* literature to more general arguments about the nature of the colonial political economy in Lahore, thereby arriving at a better understanding of what it meant to be a member of the service stratum, living simultaneously in a world of discourses which strongly encouraged modernism, and a colonial political economy which was designed to arrest the social

forces associated with modernist discourse.

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“Urdu Tales and Anecdotes in the 19th Century: A Case Study of Intertextuality”

by Christina Oesterheld

One of the most variegated and widespread cases of intertextuality is the field of tales, fables and anecdotes which were part of different written as well as oral traditions and traveled freely through space and time. Sanskrit tales, partly based on older narratives like the Buddhist Jatakas, their various Persian adaptations, anecdotes about the Prophet of Islam and his companions, about legendary kings, about famous poets and philosophers, witticisms and parables, all these formed a rich fabric of often interwoven tales. It is almost impossible to trace the oral transmission of this material, but fortunately the spread of printing in India in the 19th century resulted in the publication of quite a high number of collections containing different types of short narratives in Urdu. The first collections were published at the Fort William College in Calcutta as material for language instruction, along with longer tales, grammar books, etc. Short moral or humorous tales became one of the staples of Urdu textbooks and are to be found in contemporary Urdu readers as well. Apart from textbooks and readers, collections of all kinds of short prose narratives began to be published outside the field of education. Judging from the number of impressions listed in catalogs, some of these collections seem to have been very popular. They are a rich source for linguistic analysis and for the study of narrative techniques, but also provide an insight into the cultural context, the tastes and choices which led to the selection of particular stories out of the vast reservoir available to the compiler.

The paper will present a study of four collections published between 1846 and 1925 (“Jami ‘u’l-Hikayat-i Hindi” by Usmani, 1825; “Nau Ratan” by Mahjur, 1846; “Lata’ifu’z-Zara’if” by Salih Shahjahanpuri, 1849; and “Lata’if-i Hindi” by Lala Debi Prashad, 1925) which differ remarkably in their selection and their treatment of the stories. Moreover, tales and anecdotes provide rich material for the study of processes of marginalization. While collections like those described above, with a few exceptions, formed a part of “respectable” literature in the 19th century, they were pushed to the margin in the early 20th century. The literary canon formed from the late 19th century onwards right from the outset discarded this material. Many of the “Indic” elements present in the stories (motives, characters, linguistic material) were excluded from the Urdu canon. This phenomenon will be studied in the second part of the paper, along with attempts by writers like Intizar Husain to retrieve parts of the narrative tradition.

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“Barahmasas in Hindi and Urdu”

by Francesca Orsini

The genre of Barahmasas or Twelve Months is an almost ubiquitous one in north Indian literatures: Vaudeville’s pioneering survey includes examples from early Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Rajasthani and Avadhi (Vaudeville 1986). Originally a folk form, and as such present in most north Indian dialects, it was taken up also by Hindi and Urdu poets either as a self-standing form (such as Muhammad Afzal’s *Bikat Kahani*) or as part of longer compositions: A Twelve Months appears for example as part of Jayasi’s *Padmavat*. Barahmasa was also one of the most popular themes for miniatures or wall paintings to adorn palaces, and several existing sets feature verses by the Hindi poet Keshavdas (Dwivedi 1980). Finally, Barahmasas feature prominently among the genres of commercial publishing in the nineteenth century, both by well-known literati, such as Kazim Ali Jawan and Bhartendu Harishchandra, and by lesser known poets. Clearly, it was a very popular and practiced genre. How far intertextuality was at stake it will be perhaps difficult to document. This paper will be concerned with the different spaces Barahmasas occupied; it will address questions of popularity and taste and will try to ascertain what Hindi and Urdu poets wanted to do when they chose such a genre.

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“The Beloved (Re)Presented”

by Amina Yaqin

How does the modern woman poet contend with the classical resonances of Urdu poetry in modern times? The classical form which presents the greatest challenge is that of the ghazal (love lyric). Ghazal (literally meaning talking to women), a form reproduced from Persian poetry, has as its main preoccupation, the theme of love. The love is of many kinds ranging from sexual to mystical. In the classical period there was also a deviation in the ghazal referred to as *rekhti*. *Rekhti* mimicked the language of the *kothas* (brothels) and reproduced a particular feminine idiom designed to titillate a male audience. Audience brings in a reference to the *mushaira* (gathering of poets), an integral part of the ghazal universe. The *mushaira* was and is an interactive space where orality and textuality are interspersed with musicality. *Umrao Jan Ada* written by Mirza Rusva and first published in 1905, recaptures the world of courtesans and the courtly culture of Lucknow. This world is immortalized in the form of the ghazal and its performance by the tawaif (courtesan) who mimes the textual ghazal to classical music. Titillation, sexuality, erotic love are essential tools of the trade for Umrao Jan and the ghazal, a perfect accompaniment to an alluring profession. Ninety years later

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women poets continue to be haunted by the success of Umrao Jan brought closer to public memory by Bollywood's highly successful cinematic adaptation. The visibility of women writers exploded with the Progressive Writers Movement and prose queens rose to the top of Urdu literature, namely Ismat Chughtai, Rashid Jahan and the queen mother, Qurratulain Hyder. However, it would take another two decades for women poets to make their presence known. This paper seeks to address first the intertextualities in modern Urdu poetry which kept pushing women to the peripheries, preferring women's involvement as singers and performers rather than poets composing verse. And secondly to trace the nuances in women's post-partition poetic voices which led to a discontent with aesthetics and an experimentation and appropriation of political feminism, the shift in attitude from Ada Jafri to Kishwar Naheed.