

## This Issue of the *Annual*

**P**AK TEA HOUSE (Lahore), having held on with a resilience all its own for well over fifty years as a home to countless poets and writers of all shades and political stripes, finally yielded place to the irreversible forces of commodity culture raging throughout the metropolis, dying quietly as the year 2000 was drawing to a close.

The Pak Tea House was not merely a place where writers hung out and passionately discussed literature, the arts, and politics, or where they held their literary meetings and dreamed their brave, fragile dreams, or where they stopped on their way to and from work every day for a brief chat, it was unique as a gathering place which never denied its hospitality to anyone, even those who could not afford to pay for a cup of tea. It chose to operate at a loss rather than submit to the indignity of closing its doors to the nation's destitute and chronically disenfranchised intellectuals. It was everything the society at large was not—and above all it was a place where dreams could be dreamed, where time and history could be held at bay.

The demise of such an institution calls for a proper eulogy, and who better to write it than one of its regulars, Intizar Husain, a loyal associate from its first days right up to its last. He entered it as a young man, fresh from his native Dibai (India), and as a man in his late 70s he was among the handful who gathered there in funereal silence to sip their last sad cup of tea. So when I asked him for an obituary, he graciously obliged. His piece, included in the Urdu Section, recalls the Pak Tea House with tender remembrance of its motley of well-off and penniless patrons, and their sublime and mundane concerns. It is more than an obituary notice, it is a writer's tribute to a place which provided fellowship and comfort and a home away from home.

My annual January pilgrimage to 33 Theatre Street, London, Ralph Russell's home, turned out to be especially rewarding this time around. He gave me, as he does to everyone and anyone, the comfort of unconditional friendship as well as a number of pieces for the *AUS*. These are mostly translations from Urdu abandoned at different stages and he has promised to attend to their completion

in the not too distant future. One is a translation of the first forty pages of Krishan Chandar's semi-autobiographical work *Mēri Yādōñ kē Čimār*. Another is the first installment of his translation of Bēgam Anīsa Qidvā'ī's quite exceptional memoirs of Partition and its tragic consequences for her personally, entitled *Āzādi kī Čhā'ōñ Mēñ*. The *AUS* will publish both pieces in the next issue, to be continued in subsequent issues as fresh installments become available.

The heavy printing bill on the *AUS*'s last run, plus the decision to sell it at its regular price rather than doubling the price to recover costs, put us perilously in the red. But with the help of some of our "loyal" readers the loss has become quite manageable. Special thanks to Carlo Coppola for a very generous gift, and to many others for the little extra they included with their subscription payments!

The *AUS* is also indebted to Azhar Abidi and Anis Memon. The former willingly accepted, despite a very pressing demand on his time, to translate Hasan Manzar's short story "The Old Croc" and the latter Daniela Bredi's article, "Fallen Women: A Comparison of Rusva and Manto," written for the *AUS* in Italian.

In its second incarnation the work of the *AUS* has steadily grown far beyond the capacity of its Editor to bear it ably. Perhaps it is time for someone with greater reserves of energy and imagination to think of taking it over. I'm not quitting just yet; I believe I can go on for a few more years. But perhaps it would be best for all of you who "do Urdu" to start thinking seriously about the impending succession.

See you next year. □