

EVENTS, INQUIRIES, NEWS, NOTICES, REPORTS

A NUMBER of Urdu writers and patrons left us in the past eighteen months, among them: (2000) Syed Hamid Husain, Jamsed Masrur, Khayal Rampuri; (2001) Anjum Rumani, Anwer Khan, Arif Abdul Matin, Khwaja Riazuddin Atash, Bano Tahira Saeed, Barjendar Sayyal, Harcharan Chawla, Jahanqadr Chughtai, Kallidas Gupta Raza, Najmul Islam, Nazir Siddiqi, Qatil Shifai, Raza Naqvi Wahi, Saeed Amrat, Salam Sagari, Shahid Pervaiz, Umme Suhaib, Zakir Azizi; (2002) Muhammad Khalid Akhtar

I

Urdu Scholarship in Transnational Perspective

In September 2001, the Center for Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin co-hosted an international three-day conference, "Urdu Scholarship in Transnational Perspective," together with Columbia University's Southern Asian Institute. The venue was the Kellogg Center at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia. The event publicly recognized Professor C.M. Naim, recently retired from the University of Chicago, and his contributions to Urdu and South Asian studies as a teacher, scholar, and translator. Prof. Naim delivered the keynote address on "Ghalib's Delhi: A Shamelessly Revisionist Look at Two Popular Metaphors." Twelve established scholars and three Ph.D. candidates from fields such as literature, religion, history, and postcolonial studies presented papers organized into four panels: "Pillars of Urdu Poetry: Revisiting the Greats," "Intertextuality in Narrative and Popular Performance," "Women Studied: Female Literacy and Authorship," and "Media and Migration: Urdu in the Metropolis." Two roundtables were also organized dealing with "Urdu in America: The Last Forty Years" and "The Future of Urdu Studies." The more than 200 participants who attended the conference came from India, Pakistan, Germany, Belgium, and the United States. Kathryn Hansen, Director of the Center for Asian Studies at UT-Austin, was chair of the organizing committee. In addition to UT-Austin and Columbia, the conference was sponsored by the Center for South Asian Studies at the University of California-Berkeley, the Berkeley Urdu Language Program in Pakistan, the Committee on Southern Asian Studies at the University of Chicago, the South Asia Program at Cornell University, and the American Institute of Pakistan Studies. Selected papers will be published in a Festschrift dedicated to Prof. Naim. (KATHRYN HANSEN)

The program of the conference included:

Panel #1: Pillars of Urdu Poetry: Revisiting the Greats

- Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (Editor and publisher, *Shabkhu*): "The Poet in the Poem or Veiling the Utterance" [paper summary prepared by Frances Pritchett, and read by Carla Petievich]
Frances Pritchett (Columbia University): "Paper Robes and Poetic Meaning: The First Verse of the Divan-e Ghalib"
Barbara Metcalf (University of California, Davis): "Iqbal's Imagined Geographies: 'The Poet of the East,' the West, the Nation, and Islam [Paper summary read by Steven Poulos]
Andrew McCord (Poet and translator): "Was Faiz Compromised in the Seventies?"
Chair: Kathryn Hansen (University of Texas, Austin)
Discussant: C.M. Naim (University of Chicago)

Roundtable #1: Urdu in America: The Last Forty Years

- Steven Poulos (University of California, Berkeley), on BULPIP
Muhammad Umar Memon (University of Wisconsin, Madison), on *The Annual of Urdu Studies*
Brian Spooner (University of Pennsylvania), on AIPS
James Nye (University of Chicago), on the Urdu Research Library in Hyderabad; and on the Digital South Asia Library
Moderator: Frances Pritchett (Columbia University)

Keynote address by Professor Naim

"Ghalib's Delhi: A Shamelessly Revisionist Look at Two Popular Metaphors"

Panel #2: Intertextuality in Narrative and Popular Performance

- Muzaffar Alam (University of Chicago): "Love, Passion, and Reason in Faizi's *Nal-Daman*"
Aditya Behl (University of Pennsylvania): "Poet of the Bazaars: Nazir Akbarabadi and the Formation of the Urdu Literary Canon"
Ramya Sreenivasan (University of Delhi): "Urdu Narratives of the Padmini Legend"
Syed Akbar Hyder (University of Texas, Austin): "To You Your Cremation, To Me My Burial: The Ideals of Inter-Communal Harmony in Premchand's *Karbala*"
Chair: Steven Poulos (University of California, Berkeley)
Discussant: Kathryn Hansen (University of Texas, Austin)

Panel #3: Women Studied: Female Literacy and Authorship

Carla Petievich (Montclair State University): “Feminine Literacy and the Urdu Tradition: *Baharistan-i Naz* vs. *Tazkirah-i Rekhti*”

Laurel Steele (United States Foreign Service): “Lost Allusions: Literary Tributaries in Qurratulain Hyder’s *River of Fire*”

Anita Anantharam (University of California, Berkeley): “Writing Women, Writing Sexualities, Writing the Body: The Poems of Fahmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed”

Asma Rasheed (M.S. University, Baroda): “At Second-Hand: Najma Nikhat and a Critique of Colonial Modernity”

Chair: Karen Leonard (University of California, Irvine)

Discussant: Christina Oesterheld (Heidelberg University)

Panel #4: Media and Migration: Urdu in the Metropolis

Michael H. Fisher (Oberlin College): “England in the Urdu Tongue: Accounts by Early 19th Century Visitors”

Gail Minault (University of Texas, Austin): “From *Akhbar* to News: The Development of the Urdu Press in Early 19th Century Delhi”

Karni Pal Bhati (Furman University): “From *Watan* and *Qaum* to the Cosmopolis: The South Asian Intellectual as Voyager”

Chair: Philip Oldenburg (Columbia University)

Discussant: David Lelyveld (Cornell University)

Roundtable #2: The Future of Urdu Studies

Aditya Behl (University of Pennsylvania)

Syed Akbar Hyder (University of Texas, Austin)

David Magier (Columbia University)

Omar Qureshi (The Brearley School)

Asma Rasheed (M.S. University, Baroda)

Theodore Wright (SUNY-Albany)

Moderator: Carla Petievich (Montclair State University)

II

The following is an inventory of scholars and the papers which they presented at conferences, seminars, and symposia:

Laurel Steele (United States Foreign Service) gave a paper “An Imperial Education: Urdu Poets Voyage from Colonial India to Pakistan and Beyond” at a workshop on Imperialism and Colonialism held at George Washington University on 16 November 2001.

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30th Annual Conference on South Asia (Madison, 18–21 October 2001)

Syed Akbar Hyder (University of Texas, Austin): “Ghalib in the Progressive Idiom.”

Ali Mir (Monmouth University): “Seeking the ‘Progressive’ in the Progressive Writers’ Movement.”

Raza Mir (Monmouth University): “Aesthetic Experiment or Aesthetic Failure? The Plebian Poetry of Sahir Ludhianvi.”

III

Sunil Sharma would like the following message about the destruction of the tomb of the Urdu poet Vali [Dakani] in Ahmedabad, India circulated.

THE DESTRUCTION OF VALI’S TOMB AT AHMEDABAD: AN ACT THAT DESERVES TO BE CONDEMNED BY ALL LOVERS OF ARTS AND LETTERS

A wonder among cities, full of light,
Doubtless, the world was created for the sake
Of this city; it goes by the name of Surat:
Its sight cleanses the heart of the dust of malice.

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The creeds and faiths of the people here
Are countless; children of Adam are they all
And yet are of numerous colors:
The men are paragons of beauty here,
But the women are fairer still, their every step
Is like a dance at the Indra Sabha. In fact
The Indra Sabha hides itself in shame
Because of them.

These lines are from Vali Gujarati (1665/7–1708/9), the great Urdu poet whose grave in Ahmedabad was like a place of pilgrimage for Indian poets and writers of all languages. Vali was the first poet who put Urdu poetry on the literary map of the wider world when his poems were translated into French by Garcin de Tassy and published in two volumes from Paris in 1833. Vali’s reputation as the poet who created a whole new style of Urdu poetry by amalgamating the Indian and the Persian trends of thought and feeling has remained secure for nearly three centuries now. Tanveer Aijaz, a modern Urdu poet who is a special correspondent with the Indian Express at Ahmedabad has reported that Vali’s tomb and grave were destroyed during the orgy of violence and murder that has recently enwrapped Gujarat in its dark blanket. Not content with destroying a national heritage, the vandals have also

erected a “Hanuman Temple” upon the gravesite. And all this happened during curfew hours almost within sight of the office of the Police Commissioner of Ahmedabad. Desecration and mutilation of graves and dead bodies has been universally regarded as among the most heinous of crimes against human dignity in all cultures and at all times. When this involves the destruction of literary and cultural heritage as it does in this case, it becomes a collective crime against the whole nation, for it destroys a part of the nation’s past. A people without a past puts its own future in severe jeopardy. We appeal to all Indians everywhere to choose love and peace before everything else and do all that they can to heal the horrible wounds caused to the soul of our country at Godhra, Ahmedabad, Vadodra, Surat, and all such places that have become innocent victims of the vicious religio-political power frenzy that seems to grip most of our politicians today. India’s pride is in its friendly colorfulness, its cheerful openness, its ocean-like tolerance, its river-like flow, unpolluted by false pride and evil fundamentalism. Let that pride not be blackened by the acid-poison of hate, for this hatred has the very fabric of our democratic society as its chief target. We condemn the vandalization and destruction of Vali’s tomb and deplore the erection of a “temple” in its place. We demand that the Government of Gujarat immediately restore the site to its prior status. (SHAMSUR RAHMAN FARUQI, Allahabad, 3 March 2002)

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N O T E : If you have read a paper or published an item or know of a piece of information of interest to Urdu-wallahs, please do not hesitate to send it to us for inclusion in the next issue of the *AUS*. —*Ed.*