

## This Issue of the *Annual*

Though nothing can bring back the hour  
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;  
We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
In the primal sympathy  
Which having been must ever be;  
In the soothing thoughts that spring  
Out of human suffering;  
In the faith that looks through death,  
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

**A**UGUST 2007 saw the death of one of Urdu's finest novelists, Qurratulain Hyder—or 'Ainī Āpā to her close friends. We thought it appropriate to pay her homage. A small section of mostly personal reminiscences by her friends and admirers is included in this issue, for which my sincere thanks to M. Asaduddin, Khalid Hasan, Ritu Menon, Christina Oesterheld, Salimur-Rahman, Azra Raza, and Laurel Steele, who all came to my aid on very short notice. Beyond her oft-spoken hauteur, irksome but quite endearing eccentricities, and impatience, we also meet in their memories a deeply sensitive woman, affectionate and caring. And one who was, above all, endowed with a rare sense of humor, polished wit, a zest for life, and an immense cultural memory. I have also taken the liberty to include here one of her letters and some photographs, which I personally took at different times in my long association with her. The letter is included mainly to underscore her exuberant spirit and the lighter side of her personality, some reflection of which can also be seen in the photographs that hark back to a time when thoughts of human mortality were the farthest thing from one's consciousness.

I met Qurratulain Hyder for the first time exactly half a century ago (in 1958 or 1959) in the auditorium of the new campus of Karachi Uni-

versity. She, along with Munir Niazi and some other writers, was visiting with the ostensible purpose of “enlightening” us about the newly-formed Pakistan Writers’ Guild—writer Quadratullah Shahab and Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan’s erstwhile “taming machine,” which, nonetheless, did provide some economic relief to the writer, even if it muffled her/his voice in return. Years later we were to meet many times, in Madison and in Delhi. If my own account of our association is missing, it is largely because I am still too ruffled by her departure to articulate with clarity what she has meant to me both as a writer and an affectionate older friend.

How does a person get used to someone’s absence? Perhaps such a thing is impossible. Perhaps one only learns to pretend, to push it back into the half-light of some comfortable nook several layers down in one’s consciousness. While still reeling from her departure, fate—or the proverbial *čarkh-e nīli-fām* of classical Urdu poetry—decided to deal another devastating blow. On the 12th of April this year Zeeshan Sahil died unexpectedly—unexpected only in the sense that what was feared and dreaded shocked us by becoming reality. Ironically, he had written a poem on Qurratulain Hyder’s death, little knowing that he would soon join her. This poem, sent to us by Asif Farrukhi, is included in her homage.

Zeeshan was only 47 year’s old. He had suffered much in life from kyphoscoliosis, an abnormal congenital curvature of the spine, that was going to kill him sooner or later. And the anomie to which his dear Karachi was repeatedly subjected in the past decade could have emotionally ravaged and ultimately felled even the mightiest of men several times over. But not a whiff of either crippling misfortune ever took away the child-like hope from his poetry. If anything, the outer and inner *vāridāts* gave his poetry an intensity and *ħairat* (wonder) reminiscent of a child. And yet, from the apparent gaiety and exuberance of a world born afresh yet again, and for the umpteenth time, an almost imperceptible undertone of sadness is never far away. It were as if the dewdrop delicately poised on the rose both celebrated its beauty and its transience.

As I do not wish this editorial to become a dirge, let us take some account of “what remains behind.” The *AUS* notes with great satisfaction that this past year’s Saraswati Samman has been awarded to Naiyer Masud, which he richly deserves. The Saraswati Samman, India’s prestigious non-governmental award, has now been conferred upon an Urdu writer a second time. No doubt our readers are aware by now of the *AUS*’s

unceasing efforts to introduce this remarkable writer to the world at large. I'm especially thankful to Sikandar Ahmad and B. Venkat Mani who both accepted my request to write on Naiyer Masud for this issue from perspectives hitherto unexplored.

What would life be without some awareness and mention of its difficulties?! Well, friends, the postal rates have gone up, especially for overseas. We can no longer use the cheaper "book-rate" for shipping the *AUS*. So, while we will still sell the journal to individuals at its regular price of \$18.00, a more or less equal amount will need to be added for overseas shipment.

We had vehemently resisted accepting any paid advertisements in the past, but we can no longer afford this luxury. An appropriate notice will be found on the inside back cover if any publishers would like to publicize their books in the *AUS*.

Finally, it is entirely possible that the *AUS* may be forced to cease publication within a couple of years. While the AIPS has thankfully extended its subsidy for an additional year, its future financial assistance remains uncertain. I shall, of course, try my best to avert such an eventuality. □

M.U.M.