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## Humor and Satire: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial

LAUGHTER IS one of the most vital and subversive forces in our lives. Different forms of humor can be found in all cultures at all times—providing comic relief, easing tension, serving as an outlet for anger, aggression, pain and despair. Apart from common human weaknesses and follies, the all-too-powerful, arrogant or sanctimonious and self-righteous have always been favorite targets of humor, ridicule and satire. Often even the Divine is not spared. The ability to laugh at oneself reflects the inner strength, self-confidence and the capacity for self-criticism of an individual as well as a society. It makes a person more humane and a society more tolerant and balanced. Suppression of laughter, on the other hand, may lead to aggression, anxiety and hypocrisy, the latter of which is the landmark of all rigid, oppressive societies. It is needless to say that the comic urge will always find a vent. Thus closed, ideological regimes usually provoke the highest number and best quality of political jokes.

Urdu authors through the ages knew very well how to use all shades of humor to amuse their audiences, to point out human weaknesses and to attack the high and mighty. They were able to draw on the extraordinarily rich traditions of comic literature in Indic languages, Arabic and Persian and on a vibrant oral folk culture. This link remained strong until the nineteenth and early twentieth century, but seems to have become much weaker now. In the present paper the main focus will be on the linkages with popular culture and on religious topics as taken up in humor and satire. Starting off, as could be expected, with Mīr Ja‘far Za‘allī (1659?–1713?), it will not, however, deal with famous exponents of satire such as Naẓīr Akbarābādī and Akbar Ilāhābādī, but rather, present a few samples from two authors who are less known outside India and Pakistan.

Let us first turn to the late seventeenth-early eighteenth century and the *Za‘alnāma* in the critical edition compiled by Rashīd Ḥasan Khān

(Zaṭallī 2003). His selection is based on the four oldest available manuscripts he had before him which are dated between 1791–92 and 1797. No manuscript from Zaṭallī's lifetime exists, although he reportedly had compiled a collection of his work with the title *Zaṭalnāma*. Thus we cannot be certain even about the authenticity of the texts copied in the oldest manuscripts. Later manuscripts and editions printed under Zaṭallī's name (Rashīd Ḥasan Khān alone browsed ten manuscripts and four print editions while working on his edition) contain many additions which point to the fact that his enormous popularity led to imitations and to a continuation of his writing style. Some linguistic and historical evidence clearly proves that many of the additional texts are of a later date. Thus the question of authorship will be regarded as secondary; engaging with the corpus of texts will be the primary concern. The sheer number of manuscripts and print editions is ample proof of the fact that this type of text was extraordinarily popular among the educated, well-to-do classes who understood enough Persian to enjoy them and who could afford to buy manuscripts or, later, books, but in oral transmission also reached a wider, largely illiterate audience.

Zaṭallī's own *divān* is rather slim, and very little is known about his life. He is said to have been born into a Sayyid family in Nāranvāl/Narnaul (district Ludhiana), most probably during the reign of Shāhjahān (*ibid.*, 12). He probably served in the army and at the courts of Aurāṅgẓēb's sons Prince Muḥammad A'ẓam and later Prince Kām Bakhsh and took part in the Deccan expeditions. It is reported that he was dismissed from service after writing a very obscene satire on Prince Kām Bakhsh and then somehow reached Delhi (*ibid.*, 14). His death is commonly blamed on the Mughal emperor Farrukh Siyar, who is said to have gotten him killed in response to a *sikka* (verse composed on the occasion of the new coin struck by the new emperor) Zaṭallī had composed on the occasion of his ascension to the throne. Here is the verse in question as translated by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi:

He struck his coin on grains of wheat  
And on coarse pulses, and (on) peas:  
Farrukh Siyar, that garrotter of a king.

(2008, 3)

Whether this anecdote is true or not, it demonstrates how much power was attributed to the word of the poet, which immediately came into wide circulation among all strata of society, literate as well as illiterate. The year of his death can thus be determined as 1125 AH/1713 CE. Since he has mentioned his age as sixty in one of his verses, one can deduce

that he was born before 1653. Faruqi, however, tentatively determines his year of birth as 1658 (*ibid.*).

The active time of his life was dominated by Auraṅgzēb's rise, his constant wars in the Deccan against the Marathas, the Sikhs, against the rebelling Rajputs (Rāṭhōr Rebellion) and against princes aspiring for the throne. After Auraṅgzēb's death in 1707, the power struggles among his sons overshadowed decades to come, causing unrest, turmoil, bloodshed and devastation throughout North India. The reign of Bahādur Shāh I (Mu'azzam Shāh) was comparatively peaceful, but at his death in 1712 power struggles broke out again, culminating in 1713 when Jahāndār Shāh lost out against his rival, Farrukh Siyar, who had most of his enemies killed in a very cruel fashion. Zaṭallī was an admirer of Auraṅgzēb 'Ālamgīr, although he criticized his long battles in the Deccan which created a power vacuum in the north, but he had a much more critical attitude toward Auraṅgzēb's sons.

Today Zaṭallī is mostly remembered for his Rekhta verses in which Persian and Urdu/Hindavī are often mixed in different ways in one line or one poem. The linguistic form was new, but the satirical mode, and especially the well-established genre of *haju*, was not. For the present discussion we will, however, concentrate on one of the lesser-known prose texts of the *Zaṭalnāma*, the *Akbbārāt-e Siyāha-e Darbār-e Mu'allā* (Official Diary/News Account of the Exalted Court; an allusion to the imperial court diary *siyāh-e ḥuṣūl* established by Akbar)<sup>1</sup> which contains roughly seventy-five entries. The main body of the texts is Persian, following the conventional *akbbārāt* pattern, followed by the Emperor's response, resumé or verdict in Hindavī. According to their contents, they can be divided into the following groups:

1. Texts with references to historical personalities and events: 24.
2. Texts containing general wisdoms/sayings: 19.
3. Texts referring to the author/persona of the author: 5.
4. Obscene texts without any obvious reference to historical circumstances: 26.
5. Texts containing a parody of or comic allusion to religious terms and practices and popular beliefs: 4.

These categories partly overlap, with number five being more or less a subcategory of four. For the present purpose, examples will be chosen only from these two categories.<sup>2</sup> Aquil has aptly described Zaṭallī's works

<sup>1</sup>Faruqi translates the title as "Unedited Court Journal" (2008, 7).

<sup>2</sup>A number of examples with different content are presented by Faruqi and by

as “literary articulations of ‘improper’ acts in Mughal India” (2009, 133). As we will see, his vulgarity and obscenity bring forth a most shocking—and amusing—effect when he deals with political or religious matters. See, for example, the following:

Entry number 16 consists of two parts. In the first, mention is made of the changed ratio of dicks and cunts since Shāhjahān’s times, which is then interpreted as a sign of Doomsday (*qillat al-lauṛāte va kaṣrat al-čūte min āšār al-qiyāmat*, 2003, 63).<sup>3</sup> In the second part, it is reported that there is a widespread epidemic (probably of venereal disease) in the imperial army. As a remedy/cure it is suggested that the soldiers should say the following prayer (*du‘ā*) seven times after sodomy and blow over their members, which would dispel the effects of the disease:

*yā ayyubā al-čūtu anā dḥagruka ad-dḥīngu va al-mustandā  
fī ghaččika al-ghaččiki dā'im al-qarāri hāzā dandā va landā [...]*

(64)

I will not attempt to translate this passage, but may it suffice to point out that *čūt* (pussy) and *land* (dick, cock) are used throughout the work, *dḥagruk* means lover and *dḥīng*, *mustandā* strong, robust, or gallant; *ghač* is a sound made during intercourse. Obscenity here, as in other instances, certainly is an end in itself, amusing by breaking taboos, but it also strikes in two directions: ridiculing the common practice of reciting prayers or charms to ward off disease and evil, and making fun of the imperial army.

In entry 61 the petitioner asks for a prayer which will free him from his sins. The response is that he should recite the prayer seven times after finishing intercourse with a she-donkey, followed by a verse text in mock Arabic interspersed with obscene Hindavī words, which is very similar to the one quoted above (74).

The widow Farju’s-Shaikh (Vagina of the Shaikh) complains in entry 66 that she is unable to conceive, and asks for an amulet. The situation as such is already delicate enough, given the fact that no remarriage is mentioned. Again, she is advised to recite a verse-charm consisting of the following (as patently absurd as the previous ones) until she becomes pregnant.

*ghap ghapak'l-vubi mina'l-čarračūn  
ghač ghačatu'l-ghīssati bal min mazīd*

(75)

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Aquil in their articles on Zaṭallī, and in my forthcoming contribution to the conference volume on “Indian Satire in the Period of First Modernity” to be published by Harrassowitz (Wiesbaden) in 2011.

<sup>3</sup>All references to the *Zaṭalnāma* are from the 2003 edition unless otherwise noted.

Here again we have mock Arabic forms (articles, prepositions) with the basic vocabulary in Hindavī. The Hindavī words are partly onomatopoeic and can all be related to cohabitation. *Hal* means plow, but plowing a field/the earth may also be used as a circumscription or poetic image for sexual intercourse.

Another charm full of obscenities is proposed for Kūn Shagūfa (Anus Flower) Bēg's sister who suffers from itching (entry 70, p. 76). The verse with a slight variation also appears as the opening of the *bajv* (lampoon/satire) on 'Iṣmatu'n-Nisā Bēgam (157–58).

Obscenities are spread all over the *Zaṭalnāma* and are often also connected with important personalities of the Mughal court. Only Auraṅzēb is spared such slanderous treatment, but he is made to utter verses such as those quoted above or to give his verdict in very colloquial language throughout the *Akbbārāt*. As Aquil stresses, Zaṭallī defied the rules of proper behavior,

[He] was direct, impolite and frivolous. However, it is important to remember that he was careful enough to not antagonize any guardians of Islam who could retaliate with charges of heresies. He also did not mock the Prophet and his companions [...]

(2009, 141)

One conspicuous feature of later additions is that they are less respectful as far as the Mughal court is concerned. An illustration of this disrespect or disregard is the continuous use of the phrase *zill-e shaiṭānī* (Shadow of Satan) for the Emperor, a satirical distortion of the conventional *zill-e subḥānī* (Shadow of the Almighty). Here is an example from the London manuscript of *Kulliyāt-e Ja'far Zaṭallī*:<sup>4</sup> *Yak tōla va pañj māsha rōz barāmda adrak zill-e shaiṭānī dīvān(-e) ghusalkhāna farmūdand* [...] (18th century), 25).

As is quite obvious, these texts are mock versions or parodies of the original format of newsletters. Zaṭallī (and later authors) followed the original patterns and structures, but in most entries replaced the exact date and time of the day with words from completely different contexts, such as “one *tōla* and five *māsha*” (units of weight), as in the example quoted above, or “*yak čūma va nīm siskī*” (one kiss and half a gasp; 59), “*yak gaz va čabār girab*” (one yard and four knots equals twelve fingers; 60), or “*yak būnd va čabār čhīṭ*” (one drop and four splashes; 61), and introduced characters with funny, mostly obscene, names. These are the

<sup>4</sup>This manuscript contains several later additions. It was not among the manuscripts available to Rashid Ḥasan Khān for his critical edition.

first elements of his parody. The words used for places associated with the audience, however, are realistic: *ghusal-khāna* (private chamber, private hall of audience),<sup>5</sup> *divān-e khāṣ* [-o-‘ām] (privy or cabinet council chamber [and public hall of audience]). The Hindavī verdicts of the Emperor, however, are highly unconventional or, in Aquil’s words, improper. Muzaffar Alam quotes Muḥammad Kāẓim as stating:

Aurangzeb had good knowledge of Turkish and Hindavi. But he used Hindavi only when he talked with an Indian who knew no Persian, or who had poor knowledge of the language—and even this only when it was unavoidable.

(2004, 148)

It is clear that the persons addressed by the Emperor in the *Akbbārāt* were well versed in Persian. The Hindavi put into Auraṅgzēb’s mouth by Zaṭallī is a purely literary device intended to attain the strongest possible contrast and satirical effect. Most of the proverbs and sayings uttered by Auraṅgzēb are still in currency among speakers of Urdu and Hindi. Look at the following example: “*Arz namūd ke Qāzī Nazīr irāda-e baitu’l-Lāh dārad farmūdand ke sattar čūbe khā billiyā ḥaj kō ‘calī*” (It was reported that Qāzī Nazīr has mentioned his intention to go for *ḥaj*. [The Emperor] replied: Having devoured seventy mice/rats the cat went on pilgrimage) (18th century], 25). Qāzī Nazīr, denounced here as a hypocrite or as one who repents only after many misdeeds, is among the stock characters of the *Akbbārāt*. In Rashīd Ḥasan Khān’s edition he is mentioned in entries 22, 23, 36, and 68, always as the butt of—mostly obscene—jokes, thus ridiculing not only the person but also the office. In another entry, a *ḥāfiẓ* is portrayed in a most dubious fashion:

Ḥāfiẓ Kām Murād requested permission to sit beside of the Emperor. [The Emperor] replied: “You farted so strongly that the top of my dick turned blue / fart again so that my balls turn black.”

(60–61)<sup>6</sup>

The verse reply clearly suggests an intimacy other than merely sitting

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<sup>5</sup>Jādū Nāṭh Sarkār glosses this term as follows: “Ghusal-khānah—literary, ‘bath-room,’ but in Mughal history applied as the popular name to the Emperor’s hall of private audience, because in the new palace at Agra fort built by Shah Jahan this hall occupied the site of Akbar’s bath-room (now demolished)” (Khan 1947, 326).

<sup>6</sup>This time, the verse is in Persian: *Gūzī zadī ke kalla-e kīram kabūd shud / gūzī digar bezan ke shavad khāya ham siyāh*. Translations are the author’s unless otherwise indicated.

side by side, and in this case the Emperor himself is involved. As in the present example, the *Zaṭalnāma* is full of sodomites and catamites. Obscene invectives are the main device to ridicule and malign high-ranking representatives of the Mughal state, particularly princes and nobles, and certain social types or functionaries, such as the *qāẓī* (judge). Many commentators have interpreted this harsh treatment as a social critique of the debauchery and general moral decay of late Mughal society. Aquil writes: “In particular, he attacked their sexual licentiousness, mainly fascination for homosexual love, and the alleged unrestrained libido of their womenfolk, both in *purdah* and out of it” (2009, 145).

Stories about the insatiable sexual appetite of women, about their unfaithfulness and cunning, are stereotypes frequently encountered in many entertaining as well as didactic Sanskrit and Arabic works. They seem to stem as much from male wishes to have full control over women as from their erotic fantasies. Therefore, not all of it should be taken at its face value. Much has been written about homoerotic love in Persian and Urdu literature, hence there is no need to go into any detail here. The main question should rather be whether Zaṭallī attacked the persons in question mainly for their “improper” sexual behavior, or whether it was just a trope, a conventional form of criticism actually aimed at other failures or weaknesses.

An author in Zaṭallī’s position operated in the limited public sphere of the (mostly peripatetic) court as well as in the wider public spheres of military camps, bazaars, urban saloons and the countryside. Hence almost no sphere of life was alien to him. His works no doubt contain a strong element of criticism, and he has clearly formulated his political concerns in some passages which deal with the untoward results of Auraṅgzēb’s long absence from the north, the Emperor’s lack of control over the nobles and their failure to fulfill their duties toward the Emperor, the state and their soldiers. In one episode he also refers to soldiers selling their arms when they have to go without pay and supplies for a long stretch of time (entry 65, p. 75). Irresponsibility and selfishness come under strong attack in his writing. He was well aware of what happened all around him and of the stark contrast between individual behavior and social as well as religious norms. Thus the Persian saying “*khū-e bad dar ṭabī atī ke nisbast na ravad juz ba marg-e ū az dast*” (You don’t get rid of a bad habit until you die) is quite nonchalantly quoted two times with regard to reports about homosexuals who are unwilling to stop their sexual practices (entries 29 and 39, pp. 67 and 69). But it seems that the deplorable state of political affairs and its social consequences worried Zaṭallī more than unsanctioned sexual habits. Much of the obscene content in his works is highly conventional.

One should not forget that titillating erotic stories and obscene as well as scatological vocabulary had been part of entertaining literature, and certainly of animated conversation, for centuries, in Indic as well as in Islamic cultures. Breaking the strongest taboos surely resulted in great comic effects. Thus Zaṭallī's ascriptions of certain forms of sexual behavior to well-known historical characters should not be taken literally in most cases, but simply as a conventional form of making fun of somebody, and also of critique, abuse or libel. Only when new, more prudish sensibilities developed in the late nineteenth century was this type of literature pushed to the margins.

It is important to keep in mind that Zaṭallī's texts are located in an entirely precolonial milieu. They do not contain any reference to the advance of European powers on the Subcontinent. And although he was aware of the political turmoil all around him and perhaps anticipated the impending decline of Mughal rule, he did not feel the need to spare any political or religious authority or to invoke the lost glory of Islam. His satire is self-confident and does not deal with any "other." There still is no "us and them," no challenge of a different culture. The conflicts he deals with are treated as internal matters. The pressures he felt are therefore different from those of authors in the colonial period.

With a big leap we arrive in the second half of the nineteenth century, which confronted Urdu writers with totally different circumstances. The colonial situation after 1857 and the changed social conditions posed a number of new challenges. On the other hand, new forms of public discourse, new educational institutions and new career opportunities opened up new modes of expression. Naẓīr Aḥmad (1836–1912) is an excellent case in point. He is nowadays remembered mainly for his didactic stories, but, in fact, he has a lot more to offer. Unfortunately his later tales/novels, his speeches and his extensive writings on religious matters are widely neglected, although he was one of the most original and versatile thinkers of his time.

He no doubt was a writer with a mission, often highly moralistic and tendentious, but with his extraordinary gift of storytelling, he time and again succeeded in holding the reader's interest. In his public appearances his unruly sense of humor, however, often got the better of him and finally estranged him from his audience.

In Naẓīr Aḥmad's first stories the colonial presence is felt mostly indirectly—through the need for social reform and a new kind of education. Although the thematic focus differs from story to story, the topic of



religious instruction and religious identity is a constant undercurrent. Leaving out his most popular first books, we will briefly look at *Fasāna-e Mubtalā* (The Story of Mubtalā; 1885) and *Ibnu'l-Vaqt* (*Son of the Moment*; 1888).

The main topics of *Fasāna-e Mubtalā* are the evil effects of an idle, extravagant lifestyle, polygamy and a lack of understanding between spouses, and also the fate of girls and women who are deprived of their legal inheritance rights by their own family members. The right moral conduct, a pious life and good management of resources are important virtues purported by the text. But I have always been intrigued by a scene in chapter 6: “Mubtalā kē Čačā kā Ḥaj sē Vāpas Ānā” (Mubtalā’s Uncle Returns from the Haj). The background to this scene is as follows:

When his father died, Mubtalā began to cultivate all kinds of bad habits (*bad kāriyāñ*), such as inviting courtesans and jesters (*bhāñds*) to his house and entertaining his friends to music and dance sessions until the morning. His paternal uncle Mīr Muttaqī (Pious, God-Fearing, Abstinent) who was unaware of his brother’s death returns to India after an absence of seven years. He reaches Delhi at night and goes straight to his brother’s house. The front door is closed, and sounds of music and dancing are wafting from the house. After spending the night in a nearby mosque, Mīr Muttaqī returns to the house in the morning and knocks at the door. The crowd assembled inside is still asleep. Muttaqī’s sudden appearance creates a serious dilemma: They cannot leave the house through the front door because Muttaqī is standing there, surrounded by some forty neighbors. The way to the back lane would lead through the women’s quarters where Mubtalā’s wife would be all too eager to stop the crowd. Everyone is running about searching for an escape route. In this situation, the troupe of jesters starts to stage a comic, dramatic scene (*naql*):

One began to run from here to there and there to here, pushing and shoving people aside: “What is this? Why so much turmoil, what is this noise about?” The other said: “Hey, you fool, haven’t you heard that the uncle of our lord has come from Medina the Blessed?” The first: “Which uncle, Abū Jahl or Abū Lahab?” The other, slapping him in the face: “Be quiet, you scoundrel, what blasphemy is this? Not the uncle of our Lord the Prophet but of our lord and master here (pointing at Mubtalā).” The first one: “God be praised, then what is the fuss about? Let’s all come and make him our uncle, too. Let’s congratulate him on performing the pilgrimage and returning safe and sound. Let’s entertain him with music and dance!” The second (slapping the first): “Shame on you, go and repent lest the roof of the house should collapse on us! Do you think a Sayyid, from the progeny of the Prophet’s family, a Ḥājī who is just returning from the house of God will watch a dance which is forbidden (*barām*), or will he

listen to music which is also forbidden? To him, dancing girls (*randīyānī*) are splinters from hell-fire, and jesters are the firewood of hell." The first: "Oh, my God, even there the dancing girls will be after the jesters? If we were only firewood, we would burn away in no time at all, and tell me, what would all these people (pointing at Muṭtalā and his companions) be?" The other: "About them it is said that they will be roasted in the oven and fried in the pan and burned in the kiln." The first (lightly slapping his cheeks and bringing fear into his eyes): "Heaven forbid, heaven forbid, may God save us from hell and turn jesters into ghosts (*bhūt*), bad spirits, or whatever He wants, but let Him not turn us into the firewood of hell! What does this Ḥajī Ṣāhib want after all?" The other: "He wants you to say your prayers, keep fasts, obey God, and to give the money spent on dancers and jesters on the poor and needy instead." The first: "My dear, this sounds appropriate. It is mere folly to spend money on dancing girls. As to jesters, who is more poor and needy than they?" Having said that, he bound his turban, raised his trousers above his ankles, pronounced "*Allāhu Akbar*" on the spot, folded his hands and started to murmur something, as if he was an imam leading a prayer. In his buffoonery he, while he has already declared his intention to pray, now turns to the side and says: "Go and open the door without further delay and let the Maulvī or Hāfiẓ or Ḥajī or Pilgrim or Preacher, or whosoever he may be, come in!" And to the other side: "Behave as pious men and line up behind me!" And then he began to murmur away. All members of the troupe lined up behind him and acted as pious Muslims. After some time, one of them left his row, went up to the imam and punched him in the back so forcefully that he fell down on his face and said: "Hey, you heretic, what kind of prayer is this, at the wrong time and in the wrong direction? If the followers of Maulvī Ismā'īl came to know, they would shower *fatvās* of *kufr* (infidelity) on us." The imam: "Hey, what do you know, this is the prayer of fear," and he returned to his former position, as if no such commotion could disrupt the prayer. After a while another person left the last line, lifted the turban from the imam's head and gave him a severe beating with his shoe. The imam ran away, stroking his head and shouting: "What will the shoe-beater say when he is declared an infidel?" "Oh, never mind, this is not a *fatvā*, but the reward for your prayer." The imam said: "If this is the reward for devotion and prayer, then all those who prayed are entitled to the same." At this, shoes started to come down on heads indiscriminately in all four directions, and even the dancing girls, their pimps, the host and the guests were not spared.

(1885, 32–33)

The jesters clearly make fun of the pious Mīr Muttaqī who otherwise is the author's mouthpiece. Here, as in several other instances, Naẓīr Aḥmad transcends the black-and-white scheme of his narrative, and even if the intention is to further expose the bad guys, we cannot but enjoy the scene

in all its gaudy excesses. Encapsulated as it is in a discourse on moral decay, in itself it presents a mockery of piety and of prayer and does not stop short of using the names of adversaries of the Prophet. The narrator explains the situation by stating that the performance was extremely opportune (*barjasta*) but nobody really enjoyed it because, due to his uncle's arrival, the jesters stood to lose their steady income from Mubtalā, and Mubtalā did not know how to face his uncle. One may argue that Nazīr Aḥmad expertly inserted such comic episodes between his long, dry sermons to make the tales interesting and entertaining enough to grip the reader, but one cannot escape the feeling that he enjoyed writing these scenes as much as we enjoy reading them.

The climax of the scene, however, is still to come. When Mubtalā asks the old, faithful servant Vafādār where to hide the troupe of jesters and dancing girls, Vafādār recommends the toilet. "Finally, he [Mubtalā] did so, and pushed all of them, one above the other, into the toilet, pressed them tightly together, locked the door and then went to open the front gate" (*ibid.*, 34).

To the narrator's mind, this is exactly where they belong. At the same time, this scene evokes vivid images of a number of comic stories around scatological themes which are contained in humorous or miscellaneous story collections of the nineteenth century, but whose sources date back to tenth century Arabic tales.

Most remarkable is the dramatic presence of the comic scenes, not only in this example where a *naql* is enacted, but in many other books by Nazīr Aḥmad, as well as in the writings of Ratan Nāṭh Sarshār (1846–1902). Thus, some episodes in *Ibnu'l-Vaqt* create the effect of slapstick comedy.

In *Ibnu'l-Vaqt*, Nazīr Aḥmad's satire basically works in four directions: ridiculing narrow-minded mullahs, arrogant British Sahibs, Indians, especially Indian Muslims aping the British, as well as those Indians who confound anglicism with Christianity. See the following examples:

A high-ranking British official visited the college [Delhi College] and look what respect he got! He shook hands with all the teachers. Willy-nilly the Head Maulvi too had half a handshake with him but then he held his hand aloof as if it had become an impure limb. As soon as the officer turned away, he cleaned his hand, not with English soap but by rubbing it with dust. There were a few other Muslims who, though not as reprehensible as Ibnu'l-Vaqt, were, to some extent, of the same mind. Their sons studied English in the College. If any one of those boys drank water from the pitchers placed next to where the Arabic-Persian classes were being held, the Maulvis had the pitchers broken to pieces. There was no limit to such nonsense and prejudice [...]

(2002, 1)

Nazīr Aḥmad here reports his own experience, perhaps slightly exaggerated, but his comment at the end leaves no doubt about the satirical intention.

One of the funniest scenes is Ibnu'l-Vaqt's first European meal with Noble Sahib where he does not know how to use fork and knife, smears his whole face with food, drops potatoes on the table, and finally drinks water from the finger bowl (*ibid.*, 35–37). Again he gets caught in a difficult situation when he starts to wear European style pants which do not allow him to bend his knees for prayer (*ibid.*, 113) and when Hujjatu'l-Islam comes to rescue him from his anglicism, he finds Ibnu'l-Vaqt's bungalow completely unfit for prayer.

On the other hand, those who believe that dining with an Englishman and wearing European clothes has turned Ibnu'l-Vaqt into a Christian are ridiculed (*ibid.*, 104–6). But finally things get dead serious and Ibnu'l-Vaqt is caught in the dilemma that his change of lifestyle has left him nowhere—he is deserted and rejected by his Muslim fellows and, once Noble Sahib has left, he is no longer accepted by the English. Toward the end of the book, comic elements become fewer and fewer, and sermonizing gains the upper hand.

Authors of Nazīr Aḥmad's generation were still witnesses to the comic performances of jesters and storytellers whose imprints are clearly visible in humorous and satirical writing of the nineteenth century. Their bawdy, boorish, often frivolous humor made numerous inroads into “serious” works, certainly also with a view to appeal to the public taste. Forms of popular culture were thus incorporated into new formats such as the elaborate didactic tale or novel. Reform literature, however, was thoroughly cleansed of the erotic element, let alone obscenity.

Popular forms were taken up in several projects in the wake of the independence movement and continue to be incorporated by theater groups in India and Pakistan who perform on street corners, in bazaars and villages, and occasionally also in modern settings inspired by the Western theatrical tradition (Indian People's Theatre Association [IPTA], Ḥabīb Tanvīr, Ajoka, Taḥrik-e Nisvāñ, etc.). In a completely different mood, popular or folk culture became the subject of a satirical play by Nasīm Ḥijāzī (1914–1996), who is better known for his “Islamic”/historical novels. Here the satirical mode is employed to denounce attempts by leftist urban intellectuals, called communists by the author, to establish an indigenous, local or regional folk culture in contradistinction to a culture based primarily on the notion of Islamic culture as overruling all regional traits. The

play *Śaqāfat kī Talāsh* (In Search of Culture, 2002 [1959]) was written in the context of the debate of the 1950s about the nature of Pakistani culture—a debate which is still going on, perhaps with even more hostility.

The plot of the play can be summed up as follows: Two urban youngsters are sent to the countryside by the communists/“Progressives”<sup>7</sup> on a mission to propagate folk music and dance in an attempt to reduce the villagers’ deep attachment to Islam. Due to their lack of understanding for the common people and their aspirations, they fail miserably and return to town with the firm resolve never to go to the countryside again.

At the outset, Comrade Alif, the leader of the “Progressives,” voices his concern over the lack of contact with and impact on the masses in a meeting:

[...] We have to admit that unless we refine our tactics we won’t be able to win over the masses. We will have to accept that the common people will not be ready to adopt any doctrine which seems to run counter to the tenets of Islam.

(2002 [1959], 7–8)<sup>8</sup>

As a way out he suggests to avoid mentioning communism and to speak of keeping alive cultural traditions instead. Some comrades voice reservations. Comrade 1 says: “Only yesterday you complained that we failed in creating confusion among the people by fueling racial and regional prejudices, and now you suggest that we should unite them in the name of cultural traditions!” (10).

Comrade Alif brushes this intervention aside by saying:

“Comrade! If you would utter such nonsense in Russia, they would probably send you off to Siberia right away! I do not want to see high and low united against communism, but against Islamic culture. [...] We have failed in splitting Pakistan in the name of ethnicity and regionalism, and this could happen only because the slogan of Islam is still more attractive to the masses. But when these people get hooked on dance and music, within a couple of years a flood of sensuality, debauchery, obscenity, disorientation and moral decay will arise which will carry the proponents of Islam away like straw.

(10–11)

Ḥijāzī clearly implies that the final aim of the “Progressives” is the dismantling of Pakistan. It is doubtful that there is any historical proof of such a communist/progressive agenda. On the contrary, we are here con-

<sup>7</sup>The inverted commas are used originally by Ḥijāzī (2002 [1959], 7).

<sup>8</sup>All references to *Śaqāfat kī Talāsh* are from this edition.

fronted with Ḥijāzī's own interpretation of their designs. They are portrayed as the main enemies of Pakistan's unity, and of its very existence. In the garb of satire we thus come across a very serious accusation which would fully support the official suppression of any communist/progressive activity in the country. Despite his condemnation of military dictatorship, Ḥijāzī appears as a staunch supporter of the "One Unit" ideology as opposed to federalism and more autonomy for the provinces.

Now the agenda is set, and comrades 9 and 10, two pampered boys from well-to-do, Westernized urban families, are sent to villages by their party elders to propagate folk music and dance with the aim to mobilize the common people against the concept of a unified Islamic culture. They set out on bicycles, armed with a drum, flutes, ankle bells and a harmonium. Already in their first encounter with a villager it becomes obvious that they are unable to effectively communicate their intentions—their language is too far removed from that of the peasant:

COMRADE 10: So this is water from the Persian Wheel which has been of central importance to our culture and civilization over the centuries.

Villager (confused): I don't understand you.

COMRADE 9: My simple-minded comrade! I am overwhelmed by your innocence. Your vision is blocked by veils of ignorance. Your lack of understanding has brought you into such a state that you have been unable to realize your position in society [...]

(15–16)

Their knowledge of folk culture is limited to romanticized images in commercial films and idealized documentaries. When they are offered the water pipe (hookah) to smoke in a village, as a form of courtesy to a guest, they are unable to stand the coarse smoke of the desi tobacco and curse their host (16–17). When asking for a glass of water they are referred to the open stream. Comrade 9 soils his collar while trying to drink with his hands. Later he gets angry when his host fails to understand the word *ṣaqāfat* (culture) (17). When asked about folk songs and dances, the farmer replies: "Imām Dīn: Listen, everybody is the guardian of his own honor, speak to me with respect! You should not take everybody for a *ḍōm*<sup>9</sup> like yourself" (18).

The boys then learn that the village *ḍōm* was expelled by the *pancāyat* (council of the village elders) because his daughter was caught dancing before a huge public during the annual festival (*mēlā*) in the neighboring village. (It should be noted that the villagers do not feel guilty at all for going to watch a dance performance in another village! These double

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<sup>9</sup>*Dōms*: caste of professional singers and dancers.

standards obviously do not bother the author.) One of the comrades reacts very strongly to this revelation:

COMRADE 10: And for that you expelled him from the village! You extinguished the last flame of the culture of Taxila, Harappa and Moenjo Daro [...]

IMAM DIN: Brother, sometimes you begin to talk like a madman. I don't understand a word.

(20)

Here the concept of the continuity of history and culture from the time of the Indus Valley Civilization up to the present is ridiculed. As his novels amply demonstrate, for Hījāzī, Pakistan's history started with the invasion of Muḥammad bin Qāsim, and he uses every opportunity to denounce "un-Islamic" elements in Pakistani culture.

The boys are also depicted as totally ignorant of agricultural matters, harvesting seasons, and the code of conduct with regard to women, etc., thus making them, in every regard, look much more foolish than the farmers whom they call ignorant and simple-minded. Thus when one of the boys approaches a girl to understand the song she is humming to herself in a very low voice, he almost gets a beating for his improper behavior, and on top of this he steps on a heap of fresh cow droppings in his confused retreat (25). At least the author has granted him the gift of self-irony: When he learns that the song was about the black *lāṭhī* of the girl's brother, he says: "Thank God that I was spared the honor of making the acquaintance of this black *lāṭhī* today!" (27).

The boys realize that the "documentaries" on village life they had seen, in which men and women sing and dance together, were all fake, but they are sure that after the village folks remain exposed to commercial cinema for a couple of years, even the bashful village girl will no longer feel ashamed to sing "Look at the brimming prime of my breasts" (*mērē jōban kī dēkhō bahār jī*) in front of Uncle Imām Dīn (28). Again, when they think that some girls are performing a strange dance in a field, a passerby informs them that they are just harvesting mustard (*ibid.*).

When they later come across a young villager who is reciting the *Hīr*, they completely confuse him with their preposterous language and their exaggerated praise (31–35). He gets angry because he suspects that they are making fun of *Hīr Rānjhā* and of his village, and to appease him the boys declare themselves to be jesters (*babrūpiyā, kalāvantī*) (35–36).

In the meantime, Comrade 9 has arrived at a quite realistic assessment of their situation and tells Comrade 10 to tread more carefully and to restrain his verbosity. He also mocks number 10 when he utters the wish to

have coffee at the tea stall of a village in the middle of nowhere. Thus the dialogues between the two of them, too, take on a comic character. When Comrade 10 ignores the warning and asks for coffee anyway, his request is misunderstood as meaning *kāfi*, a traditional Punjabi verse form. The shopkeeper replies that if they want to hear *kāfis* they will have to sing them themselves. Comrade 9, suppressing his laughter with difficulty, explains the misunderstanding, at which the shop owner replies: “Brother, I have heard people sing *kāfis*, but I have never seen anybody drink them.” Finally, Comrade 10 has to content himself with tea (40).

In the next scene the boys are mistaken for professional performers who have been invited by the village headman (*čaudhuri*) for the wedding of his son. The villagers inform them that the community (*biradari*) has decided to prohibit any singing and dancing in the village so the troupe will not be allowed even to enter the village (41). The next misunderstanding ensues:

SHOPKEEPER: Brother, I am sorry.

COMRADE 10: Why?

SHOPKEEPER: Well, brother, I wonder how you will fill your stomach when even connoisseurs such as the *čaudhuri* will stop appreciating you.

COMRADE 10: Brother, we have not come to earn money. Our job is only to serve culture (*saqāfat*).

COMRADE 9: What a fool you are, my dear, to go on repeating the word culture!

SHOPKEEPER: Magnanimity (*sakhāvat*) is a fine thing, but who can afford it in these times.

(42)

Then the actual *đoms* arrive—only to be told that they should return right away. Another funny dialogue comes up when one of the boys offers his bicycle to a member of the troupe whom the principal wants to send to the village for an explanation:

COMRADE 10: Comrade Ramzān, do you know how to ride a bicycle?

RAMZAN: I don't know what a comrade is, but I surely know how to ride a bicycle.

COMRADE 10: Take my bicycle, and when we meet again I will explain the meaning of comrade to you. Take these things down and put them here. (Ramzān begins to take the instruments down.)

JHANDU: No, Ramzān, go on foot! These people are giving us their bicycle to later demand their share from us.

COMRADE 9: Uncle Jhandū, you are wrong. We are not professional singers and dancers.

JHANDU: My son, you can't fool me! If you are not professionals, then are



the instruments on the bicycle meant for reading and writing?

COMRADE IO: Comrade Rēshmā, explain it to your father! We just want to help you. We have come from Lahore in search of our national culture, and you are culture from head to toe.

RESHMA: Oh, I have seen many of your kind. Speak to me with more respect!

(44)

Simple village folks fail to understand why sons of respectable families sing and dance in public. But even members of the *dōm* community aspire to upward mobility and respectability and would rather change their profession, if they had a chance. The boys, on the other hand, had never expected that the dancing girl Rēshmā would prefer the life of a married woman in respectable seclusion to a dancing career.

Given Hijāzī's credentials as a staunch supporter of a predominantly Islamic identity, there is little wonder that he ridicules exponents of the opposite side. One has to concede that in certain parts he does so quite convincingly, picking out some of the main misconceptions of these representatives of an urban, Western-educated élite, highlighting and exaggerating their follies and thus catapulting them into absurd, hilarious situations. Again, many of the resulting scenes are very close to slapstick comedy. Thus, the boys start to beat their drums and dance until the villagers come and beat them up—a funeral procession was just under way in the village (60–61). Later on, they provoke heated discussions resulting in a brawl while going back to town in a bus (116–20). In the end, the boys are completely disillusioned and only yearn to be back home.

While on the one hand, Hijāzī's slapstick comedy closely resembles popular forms of *naql* and burlesque intermezzi in religious plays as well as in folk theater, which often deal with contemporary political or social issues, on the other hand, he squarely attacks all forms of popular singing and dancing, including forms such as *bhañgrā*, as un-Islamic. The concept of a very austere Islam projected here coincides with that of Hijāzī's novels. It goes without saying that there is no room for Sufi practices in his version of Islam, and no space for regional cultural diversity in his view of the Islamic state. At the same time, he draws a highly idealized, idyllic picture of rural life, completely omitting the oppressive, exploitative nature of the rural setup.

As was to be expected, Hijāzī's depiction of the representatives of leftist or liberal urban intellectuals is denunciatory throughout. The practice of giving numbers instead of personal names is telling enough in itself, though probably also a parody of groupings working clandestinely. The "Progressives" are accused of having adopted Western values and a

Western lifestyle and of having forsaken Islam. Thus, in a way his writing can be viewed as a continuation of Akbar Allahabādī's satirical verses, albeit without the self-criticism of the latter. Many of the scenes are really funny, and Ḥijāzī was right in pointing out the gulf between the urban élite and the rural masses, but it is quite doubtful that his view of Islam captured the predominant spirit of popular religiosity and that his view of rural life was more realistic than that of his ideological adversaries.

From the opposite, liberal end of the spectrum, if one may say so, Mushtāq Aḥmad Yūsufī (b. 1922) draws a picture of life in Karachi, but his liberal agenda is implied rather than overt. In his (mock) autobiography *Zargu-zasht* (The Fate of Gold/Money, 1976) he tells stories about the period immediately after Independence. Thus, the colonial presence is still strongly felt, and the reader shares the experience of the gradual disappearance of the colonial masters and their replacement by "brown sahibs" in Yūsufī's own field, which is banking. About Mr. Anderson, the General Manager of the bank, who is dismissed because of his heavy drinking, the first-person narrator nevertheless speaks very warmly. In the end he appears more like a father figure than a boss and colonizer. When Anderson leaves, shaking everybody's hand, the narrator's reaction is:

[...] I remembered the loving jests, the rebukes to make us do our work, and the feigned anger of this drunkard. Memories began to resound in my mind.

His anger is touching/moving, his rebukes are full of love  
He mercilessly showers his mercies.

And I also remembered the rudeness and the tricks we played on this gluttonous libertine (*rind-e balā-nōsb*) which were always forgiven. If I did not need my ears for holding my spectacles, I would, if nothing else [...] like the famous painter van Gogh, have cut off an ear and sent it as a souvenir to this *pīr-e mughān* [tavern keeper; literally, a Magian Elder] whose drunken words had corrupted my heart in many ways.

(1976, 313)

The use of expressions like *rind* and *pīr-e mughān*, which are widely used with positive connotations in Sufi poetry, reveal the narrator's feelings. Here, as in many other instances, human relations transcend the boundaries of class and race and acquire an individual, personal nature based on mutual respect and attachment. A similar transformation occurs in several episodes of Yūsufī's books and forms the basis for the undercurrent of human sympathy which runs through the books.

Much of Yūsufī's humor is based on wordplay—minor changes in

words or even single letters, such as in the title word *zarguzasht* (the fate of gold/money) instead of *sarguzasht* (life story, biography). Many of his wordplays require an extensive knowledge of Urdu and Persian literary sources to be understood and enjoyed, which suggests a well-educated target audience. Nevertheless, Yūsufi, too, revels in absurd, grotesque situations and grossly exaggerated follies, misfortunes and incongruities. Thus, when an overweight man steps on his colleague's suitcase, thereby breaking a whisky bottle stuffed between the clothes, the owner of the suitcase complains: "Mr. Khan has desecrated my Friday jacket!" (*ibid.*, 164).

The running undercurrents of Yūsufi's works, however, are irony and self-irony, sometimes drifting towards sarcasm. One of his characters, a very religious-minded Pathan, is addicted to dirty swearwords, but hesitates to utter them. Thus he writes them down in the Kufic script instead—a script that was commonly used for inscriptions, mostly of Qur'ānic verses, on mosques (*ibid.*, 114).

About the laundering of black money the narrator in Yūsufi's *Āb-e Gum* reports:

When we reached the steel re-rolling mill, the Seth was just about to go home. Today, as an offering to a holy man, some 150–200 *faqīrs* would be fed *pulā'o*. He believed that in this way the whole month's income would be purified. [...] We were talking about the owner of the steel mill, who for eight years had been cleansing and "whitening" his black money month after month with the incense of pious offerings and prayers. [...] The trick of turning black into white was still performed by *pīrs*, *faqīrs*, swindlers, black magic and whitewashers.

(1990, 99)

And about a man who is addicted to drinking we read:

[...] But he had a very nasty habit. When he got really tight he left all other subjects and started to talk only about Islam. Two, three times he was beaten up by his fellow-drunkards. They said that he spoiled their high/intoxication/rapture.

(*ibid.*, 133)

The narrator in *Zarguzasht* also digs at the worship of *pīrs*. When one of his colleagues at the age of fifty-seven becomes impotent after a very colorful unmarried life, he turns his back on women and dedicates himself to a Sufi *pīr*. The comment is: "If not cohabitation, then at least a Sufi master" (*gar vaşl nahîñ tō haz rat hī sabî*; 1976, 161), a playful variation on the Ghālib verse *gar vaşl nahîñ tō ḥasrat hī sabî* (if not cohabitation, then at least longing), which is produced by changing a single letter. In another sequence, the comical effect is produced by the double meaning

of *pīrī*—as “old age” or “status of a *pīr*”: “As far as *pīrī murīdī* is concerned, I don’t believe in *murīdī* (discipleship), but in *pīrī*. Who will not grow old?” (*ibid.*)

A fatalistic tendency to depend entirely on the Almighty and His Will is detectable in many of Yūsufī’s characters, especially in those of the lower or lower-middle class, and of course in the religious figures. In *Āb-e Gum*, the main character Bashārat resents this unconditional submission to fate, to the circumstances and to the powers that be. In one episode, he cannot stop himself from uttering his disapproval when he hears the following pronouncement:

[...] “A person who claims to be the provider of livelihood to another in fact puts up a claim to divinity. Every living being brings his provisions with him. God fulfills his promise. He is the True Provider in all circumstances.”

“No doubt! Also in the form of bribes,” Bashārat blurted out. The balance was restored. That evened out the score. Not only the Maulānā, Bashārat, too, was taken aback. What had he said? The mean, revengeful sentence a man has been holding back for years finally comes out one day. A splinter can’t be extracted by putting on a bandage, and as long as it remains inside, one will not find peace.

(1990, 141)

Yūsufī’s books deal with many more aspects of life in the early years of (West) Pakistan and especially with human relations in a variety of circumstances which are not discussed here. Suffice it to stress that his underlying attitude of “live and let live,” of respect for fellow human beings and sympathy with their predicament extends to the treatment of religious matters. There is, however, a strong satirical censure and sometimes straight condemnation of religious hypocrisy and a mild exasperation with a fatalistic mindset.

In his own way Yūsufī also deals with the life of common people and with popular culture—with aspects of everyday life such as swearing and cursing, lying, cheating, with the utter poverty and deprivation of the slum dwellers as with the greed and cunning of traders and other members of the business community. He explores the regional and linguistic diversity of Karachi’s population and draws much amusement from people’s idiosyncrasies, but he also does not spare intellectuals, writers and the like. Thus, after describing a Pathan’s very heavy breakfast, his comment is:

[...] After such a dizzying breakfast one can perhaps meditate, create an abstract painting, write a stream-of-consciousness novel or prepare an official five-year plan, but not be fit for any mental exertion or meaningful discussion.

(*ibid.*, 204)

Alluding to physical differences, Aurañgzēb Khān announces in a letter that he is building a house: “The gallery (*dālān*) will be big enough for fifty poets from Peshawar or one hundred poets from Karachi to sit on the floor” (*ibid.*, 235).

Yūsufi steers clear of obscenities, but occasionally alludes to acts and attitudes which would not be considered proper by Ḥijāzī. He, for instance, writes about some middle-aged Pathans that they recharge their batteries by drinking tea with lots of sugar and by entertaining each other with dirty jokes (*fabḥash laṭīfē*) which would make the youngsters blush (*ibid.*, 206).

Common to all works of satirical literature is the use of gross exaggeration and the exploitation of incongruities. Hence it cannot be expected to be politically correct. It draws heavily on stereotypes and clichés and often inflates them, which is the case with Ḥijāzī’s “comrades” as well as with Yūsufi’s Pathans. Thus Yūsufi dwells extensively on their militancy, their short temper and their tradition of vendetta that requires them to have enemies, because otherwise they would be unable to prove their manliness. His character Aurañgzēb Khān tells us:

“My grandfather was very short tempered. He committed six murders and went for Hajj six times. Then he renounced killing. He said: ‘Now I am old. I can’t go for Hajj every time.’ [...] He used to say that a man’s best means of locomotion are his legs. The legs of a horse are allowed only in two situations: First, on the battlefield to make a fast assault on the enemy, and second to make an escape in double speed when the attack has failed!”

(*ibid.*, 215)

The latter remark, however, is then termed a joke (*mazāq*) by him, and he goes on to recount the remarkable prowess of his grandfather. Finally, Yūsufi draws a very loving picture of his Pathan character as a truly magnanimous person with a heart of gold.

To sum up, one can say that the society described by Yūsufi is far from ideal. And yet most of his characters are drawn with a good deal of sympathy so that the prevailing mode is humorous or ironic and thoroughly humane. The two books discussed here, however, also exemplify that it is difficult to sustain a satirical or ironic mode throughout a longer prose text. Occasionally it wears thin, or the thematic content of a passage does not allow for a comic, ironic or satirical treatment. Satire usually is at its best in concrete, limited settings and situations and hence in shorter forms.

### Conclusion

As the above examples have demonstrated, Urdu humor and satire has always been firmly embedded in important discourses of a given age. In addition to “serious” forms of articulation, and very often as part and parcel of such forms, humorous modes not only provide comic relief, ease tension and repression, and provide entertainment, they also serve to express very serious concerns, to make bitter truths easier to stomach and to voice discontent, doubts and reservations. As a means of expression and also manipulation, they can be used by any individual or group for any kind of ideology, propaganda or individual thoughts, moods and feelings and hence should not be neglected while discussing public spheres, forms of communication, battles of ideas, cultural identities, etc.

In precolonial times, humor was a major means of censuring the powers that be, political as well as religious, and through laughter to provide a temporary escape from the fetters of social and religious sanctions. In the colonial period, the encounter with the West evolved as a major challenge in all fields of culture. It ushered in a new, extremely productive phase of satirical writing, cartoons, etc., targeting the colonizers as well as the colonized. After 1947, humor and satire in Pakistan started to engage with all aspects of life, predominantly the political and social, but also the religious. In the 1950s, questions of cultural and religious identity in the new country came to occupy a central place in literature and the media, and as current events show, they have not lost their relevance, since crises of identity are one of the main legacies of the colonial domination and remain a sensitive issue in postcolonial national narratives. The case studies presented here are meant only to illustrate the point—they can in no way represent the wide range and huge amount of humorous literature in Urdu, in India as well as in Pakistan. □

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