Down Memory Lane: The Story of The Francisis

Families of french, Dutch, Armenian, Portuguese, German and British descent came to be referred to as Frānsīsī during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The term was in use right up to the second decade of the twentieth century when the last of the prominent Armenians died in Agra. Rāḥat Abrār's book *1857 Kā ʿAinī Shāhid* mentions one of the Frānsīsīs, George Puech, who wrote poetry under the pseudonym "Shōr." He was of French descent and the maternal grandson of Francois Koine "Farasoo," from whom he acquired his love for Urdu poetry. This fact was widely acknowledged by Puech who had a great attachment to his *nānā*.

Why were these European descendants known as Frānsīsī? The answer is that our forefathers mistakenly considered them to be inhabitants of France because of the early presence of Frenchmen at the Mughal Court (where they vied with the British for royal favors). Abrār refers to Puech's visit to Delhi just before the 1857 Uprising and the portents he noticed. In those days rumors were rife that British rule would be overthrown in 1857, one hundred years after the Battle of Plassey.

When Puech came to Delhi he met the Frānsīsī residents. Among them were the Skinners, Heatherleys, and Bensleys (all three families votaries of Urdu). They lived in the Kashmir Gate area. In the main Walled City area, the most famous man of the time was Mirzā Ghālib, whom Puech presumably met. He presumably also attended a *mushāʿira* at the haveli of Ṣadru'ṣ-Ṣudūr in Matia Mahal, where Ghālib often recited his compositions. The Urdu newspapers of Delhi were full of rumors about trouble brewing for the British. The bearers and khansamas of the Sahib-log had their own tales to tell. T̲h̲ālī-beating and chants of *naʿra-e takbīr* (at the mosques) and "Har Har Mahādēv" in Chandni Chowk could also be heard till late at night. But Daryaganj, where Indian Christians and some British lived, was comparatively peaceful. Puech rightly surmised that a storm was about to break.

The mystique attached to 1857 continued in the twentieth century as people expected a change in 1957 too, but that came a decade sooner in 1947 when Partition took place. Now let's wait for 2057 to see if that date too holds some such portent—as did 1657 when Shah Jahan fell ill and the

battle for succession began. Puech, who was born in Kol, near Aligarh, visited Agra after his Delhi sojourn. He was a frequent visitor to the city of the Taj Mahal, where he had married his first wife Maryan, daughter of an old Frānsīsī. However, she died young and is buried in the cemetery behind Akbar's Church. Puech's fame surpassed that of his maternal grandfather, even though the latter was regarded as the father of Frānsīsī poets writing in Urdu, this despite the fact that the Indo-German Navāb Ẕafaryāb Khān "Ṣāḥib" was among the pioneers, along with John Smidt "Shāʾiq." Curiously, "Farasoo" and "Shōr" were classified among the Indo-German poets by Ram Babu Saksena in his monumental book *European & Indo-European Poets of Urdu & Persian*.[1]

George Puech "Shōr" (1823–1894), whose *takhallus̤* means noise, wrote six volumes of Urdu poetry, a Persian *dīvān* and an anthology of religious poems. He also composed *horis* [*sic*], *bhajans, ṭhumrīs* and *dādras*. Puech's descendants, George Puech Jr., who married a South Asian lady, and Maurice Puech, a product of St. John's College, Agra, resided in Meerut. George died young, but Maurice continued as an authority on his family's history with the help of a large amount of material that he had collected. He used to visit Delhi and write occasionally in defense of his heritage, though these have not been seen for some years now.

Other Poets

Among the other Frānsīsī poets who made their mark in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the foremost were Alexander Heatherley "Āzād," a pupil of Ghālib's nephew Navāb Zainu'l-ʿĀbidīn ʿĀrif; Benjamin Montrose "Muẓṭar," *shāgird* of "Dāgh" Dehlvī; the Portuguese De Sylvas, "Fiṭrat" and "Maftūn"; the Fanthomes, the Lajoies, and Burvetts; the Italian Filoses, "Jān," "Ṭālib" and "Maṭlab"; the Anglo-Indian Ellena Christina Gardner (Raẓiya Sulṭān Bēgam), Sulaiman Shikoh Gardner and the Armenians "Ḥāmid" and Malika Jān and Gauhar Jān. Like George Puech "Shōr" they all had close links with Delhi and many of them were also witness to the events of 1857.

—R.V. Smith

[Gratefully reproduced from *The Hindu* (Delhi) (Internet Edition, Metro Plus Delhi Section) 18 October 2010. Edited for the *AUS*.]

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[1]Saksena (Lucknow: Kishore Press, 1941) actually includes "Shōr" in the Indo-French section, pp. 228–47. —*Editor.*

KLF: A Mixed Bag

When a literary festival's headliner is author and religious thinker Karen Armstrong, one wonders whether to be amused or descend into a cloud of depression. At the second Karachi Literature Festival (KLF), watching hundreds of people pour into the hall to hear Ms. Armstrong speak at the inaugural session, the choice was made: depression. Armstrong stood on the dais and lectured Pakistanis on how we must be more compassionate, and coiffed hairdos nodded in agreement. Even the wonderful classical dance performance set to the Sufi *kalām* "Āj Rañg Hai" did little to enliven the spirit. A renowned author remarked wryly, "We love to be told that our religion is one of peace."

Others, such as writer Mohsin Hamid, though, felt that there was nothing odd about Armstrong, an author who takes her writing "seriously," being the keynote speaker at a literature festival. "Literature festivals are about writing that is provocative and inventive, and Armstrong is an important thinker," he said.

While Armstrong urged Pakistanis to adopt compassionate behavior, citing examples from multiple religions and even Greek mythology, a few hours later it was author and journalist Ahmed Rashid who hit the nail on its head about Pakistan and its relationship with compassion by highlighting the fact that Pakistan's government could not find a prosecutor for the trial of Mumtaz Qadri, the assassin of the late Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer.

In a change from last year, the KLF organizers decided to focus on nonfiction as well as fiction this year, with journalists and authors such as Ahmed Rashid, Zahid Hussain, Maleeha Lodhi and Ayesha Siddiqa in multiple sessions, which made a welcome change from the overwhelming focus in the past on English-language fiction written by Pakistani authors. Extremism and the state of Pakistan were topics that inevitably arose in many sessions. In a session titled "Reimagining Pakistan," defense analyst and author of *Military Inc.* Siddiqa asked "Do we even have the capacity to reimagine Pakistan?" Bemoaning the demise of the social sciences and the lack of political scientists, Siddiqa asked where Pakistan's next generation was. Pervez Hoodbhoy began his talk by saying, "I know people like to be reassured, and I hope other people here do that." Dubbing Pakistan a seething mass of discontent, he declared that "a clerical tsunami is heading towards us."

And while the superstars of Pakistan's literary scene, such as Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Daniyal Mueenuddin and Mohammed Hanif, who pen fiction in English, drew some of the biggest crowds, it was Intizar

Husain's session with writer Raza Rumi that was by far one of the best.

In another session, Hanif introduced a colorful variety of Punjabi and Sindhi poets and writers, whose work covered everything from terrorism to the beauty of a village in Okara. Bilal Tanweer, writer and translator, spoke about the art of translation and highlighted the lack of recognition translators receive for "transcreating" someone's work.

Though security fears are paramount in everyone's minds, considering Pakistan's fragile situation, it is puzzling why the organizers of the KLF chose the dreary and secluded Carlton Hotel as their venue. In a festival that is supposed to be for Karachi, such a venue remains largely inaccessible to those it should be targeting: Karachiites. The hotel is miles from the nearest bus stop, so for a young, flat-broke student who might have benefited greatly from attending the festival and meeting some of Pakistan's finest writers, it remained out of reach.

The organizers, however, while agreeing that the venue was not as accessible as they would have liked, nevertheless defended their choice. Raheela Baqai, the marketing director for Oxford University Press, said that "All the other hotels are in the center of the city, we couldn't risk putting 10,000 people at risk. Yes, the venue was inaccessible by public transport like buses, but we had to compromise somewhere because Carlton Hotel has a great security set up."

Another bone of contention expressed by many was how unimaginatively the organizers—the British Council and Oxford University Press—had made up the schedule. While some, such as Ms. Armstrong, were given two sessions, Alex Von Tunzelmann, author of the acclaimed *Indian Summer*, was only asked to moderate a single session. In an unusual choice, Javed Jabbar was asked to share his expertise as a filmmaker, a decision that took some by surprise. And finally, the works of prominent authors Basharat Peer and Sadia Shephard were not available at the festival bookstalls.

While it is heartening to see that Karachi is hosting an event that promotes writing and discussion and brings together authors and their fans, it is time that the event morph into one for all of Karachi, not one for a select few.

—Huma Imtiaz

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Festival: Meeting the Demigods

Twenty years from now two books written by Pakistanis in English will still be passed around from hand to hand with fire in the fingers. One is *Meatless Days* by Sara Suleri Goodyear. The second is *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin. Other readers will have other titles, and more books will eventually step up to my personal pantheon—for literary permanence is rarely immediately recognizable—but these are the only certainties to date.

The greatness of these books is why I sat through hour-long sessions with their writers with a nagging compulsion: I just wanted to go home and re-read the work. Suleri felt far away, an entity altogether separate from the mesmeric immediacy of the words on her pages.

Mueenuddin felt all too close. His bubbly-boyish voice and rat-a-tat sentences seemed to speak in a different language from the cool heat of his masterful short stories. It was as if the real author had sent his funny younger brother as a prank, like when the genius in the film *Good Will Hunting* sends his goofball friend to an élite job interview.

So why, then, asked moderator Kamila Shamsie, do writers come to literary festivals? A moment of candid naughtiness in Mueenuddin's response: "For the adulation, of course!"

This brought the audience to a collective laugh, but the biggest laughs were when the author spoke in Punjabi. Reading an extract from a story, Mueenudin paused twice to mimic the real-life dialogue which he had translated and transfigured into fiction. Author and audience seemed the most animated at these points, and for a second one wished that, rather than much-discussed presentations on the discourse of modern Pakistani writing, and whether he felt an outsider in the West or in Pakistan, and the angst and determination of the writing process, the author instead spent an hour telling Punjabi jokes. He clearly tells them well.

Indeed, to spin the moderator's question: why do readers come to literary festivals? Suleri's session, in which the short-story writer and novelist Aamer Hussein joined her, pulled a crowd evidently in awe of her presence. They had come to pay homage, to perform pilgrimage: as if the books are incomplete without shaking hands with the prophets.

Yet writers are not prophets. But they are invited, and in an unforgiving marketplace, they also have pressures to keep up appearances. Thus one wonders at the motives of readers more than writers. The books are there, as is the criticism if one wants it, so why the need for the writer made corporeal? Writers are egotistical and solitary. They work in the dark. Writers, as Mueenuddin said, spend much of their working lives thinking,

"I am a rotten, terrible person." Perhaps we readers like to demystify, to sanitize, to make them—in the democratizing parlance of the day—more accessible. Hearing these writers speak, one cannot help but think, "Well, they're just like us." Well, they're not, but only the books will tell you that.

Nevertheless Suleri was charming and graceful, sharp-tongued with the sweetest bite. Before the session started she appeared uneasy on stage but her face bloomed when she and Hussein lit a cigarette. From ten rows into the audience I think I heard Hussein mutter mischievously, "How very civilized!" Hussein lives in London, where smoking in a public place is now frowned upon as much as heckling at a literary festival.

There were moments of spark. Suleri was quick to dismiss the term "memoir" to categorize *Meatless Days*, preferring a "kaleidoscopic history" in which "shapes keep recurring." And when the subject of identity reared its much-seen head, Suleri insisted with extra vigor that she was "Pakistani, not American-Pakistani." It's not for me to disagree with her self-description; it is for me to think that for as many years as I have been alive Sara Suleri has been at American, not Pakistani, universities.

The most moving moment came with the multilingual Hussein lamenting the loss of his paternal language, Sindhi, which he had not been taught as a child and had never learned, and probably never would.

Two hours later we gathered in another room for Mueenuddin. As the audience started to pack in, my ears snooped on a group of college kids in the row behind. "No, no," said a confident man-boy. "Mohsin Hamid went to Harvard for law school. He first went to Princeton." A friend added, "Yeah, this guy coming on is the one who went to Yale." After more of the same who-went-where, and then a slight pause, a question fell on deaf ears: "Where did Mohammad Hanif go?"

I thought then of what a friend had said to me last year on discovering the festival's location. "Why is this at the Carlton and not at the National Stadium? If the stadium is safe enough for bridge tournaments and *mushāʿiras*, surely it is safe enough for this, and that location would have put it in the city for heaven's sake."

This idea of literature as guarded institution was not helped by Kamila Shamsie's introduction. She talked of first hearing about Mueenuddin from a fellow author calling her up to say, "Who is this Daniyal Mueenuddin?" after his story was published in *The New Yorker*. She was soon able to trace a connection to Mueenuddin through her father's friend's ex-colleague's … and so on. Harmless stuff, you might say, but it's indicative of an approach that suggests literature rests within the walls of an establishment, when it has never been so. Indeed, the to-ing and fro-ing between the author buddies at times suggested the title of love-in rather than lit-fest.

I went home, put my feet up and started re-reading his brilliant book. The sessions, for me, had not furthered or deepened an appreciation and love of literature. Yet still, if it did for even one person, and indeed if one young mind felt closer to books to such a degree that he/she will write a great work in the years to come, then one applauds the organizers and celebrates the event. Yet still again, one felt that a trick had been missed —and, unlike in great writing, no risks had been taken.

—Imran Yusuf

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What is Manto?

Many years ago, as I was establishing my own literary credentials, a friend from my high school days asked me a rather puzzling question, as we stood eating *ḥalīm* with naans near the Punjab University's New Campus: "*Yār, yeh Manṭō kā dākhla kiyūñ band hai sharīf g̠harōñ mēñ?*" (Dude, why is Manto's entry blocked from the homes of decent folks?). Speechless, I tried to give him some probable reasons. The bottom line was that the decent folks he meant were hypocrites and Manto took it upon himself to denude the hypocrisy of our society and so on.

Over the years, from time to time, my friend's words have haunted me as they have reverberated in my mind. Just as his question was inadequate, so did my answer fail to do justice to the idea of Manto.

What was Manto? An artiste? Simply a good writer? A post-colonial writer? A thinker? A rebel? An iconoclast? A cry in the wilderness? Our collective conscience? A troublemaker? Drunkard? Stylist? Visionary? An idea? A concept? A vision?

I am sure readers can add a few more appellations to the list above. We know he had nothing to show for academic achievements, but he managed

to self-teach himself a few foreign languages and translate important literary texts from French and Russian.[1] In his fiction he could be irreverent towards figures such as Gandhi, and in his nonfiction sketches towards Jinnah and his sister. Although the madness of Partition that he captured in his stories after 1947 has overshadowed his earlier output, serious readers know the wide scope of his writing and its quality.

He worked for literary and film magazines; he wrote plays for radio and stage; he wrote screenplays and was involved with the Bombay film scene; he rubbed shoulders with literary luminaries and had actors such as Ashok Kumar as friends; he could be sarcastic towards Nehru in his letter and get away with slighting Noor Jehan. He wrote long stories in pure realism in which character development is essential, as in "Kālī Shalvār"; he wrote short, short stories only a paragraph long, such as those included in *Siyāh Ḥāshiyē*; he wrote stories which are first rate satire, such as "Ṭōba Ṭēk Siñg͟h"; he wrote stories where the central character is a dog. He was accused of obscenity and tried in court before and after Partition, though each time he was acquitted.

But the real point is this: At his anniversary it is important to ask, why does Manto matter? And if he does, at all, then which Manto? In order to be able to answer that we may perhaps look at the present state of our country, and how it got there. There is no doubt that our subservience to the U.S. interest in fighting Communism has cost pretty much everything. The visionary in Manto was able to see what no other writer could: the inevitable, logical alliance between the U.S. and the Muslim clergy. He clearly states in his quintessential Letters to Uncle Sam, (as mentioned in one of Ayesha Jalal's essays):

> Regardless of the storm India is kicking up, you must sign a military agreement with Pakistan since you are seriously concerned about the stability of the world's largest Islamic state. And why not. Our mullah is the best counter to Russian communism. Once military aid starts flowing, these mullahs are the first people you should arm. They would need American-made rosaries and prayer-mats … Cutthroat razors and scissors should be at the top of the list, and also American hair colouring formulas. That will keep these chaps happily in toe [*sic*]. I think the only purpose of military aid is to arm these mullahs. I am your Pakistani nephew and can see through all your moves. Anyone can now become too clever by half, thanks to your style of politics. […] Once these mullahs are armed with American weapons […] the Soviet Union with its communist propaganda will have to close shop in this country. […] Mullahs, their hair trimmed with

[1]There is no evidence that Manto knew either French or Russian; most likely he translated these texts from English. —*Editor*.

> American scissors, wearing pajamas stitched with American machines in conformity with the *Sharia* … and possessing American made prayer mats too. Everyone would then quickly fall into line and read only your name on their rosaries.[2]

Just as the Partition resulted from Britain's systematic colonial policies of divide and rule, and the desire to create an Islamic buffer to counter a Soviet advance, Manto saw through the imperial policies of the U.S., which viewed Islamic radicalism as a trusted weapon to fight Communism without any regard for the future of the people who would be crushed by such an alliance. If our military leadership had developed any relationship with our indigenous literary culture and respected our own writers and intellectuals, as opposed to what the Westerners advised them, we might have been a different country. In other words, Manto saw through the smoke screen of the Marshall Plan where others failed.

The fact that the madness of Partition broke Manto's heart is to reduce his fiction to the literal level. When he wrote about prostitutes and pimps and engaged with issues of greed, lust and hatred, he was almost always aware of the socio-economic dynamic. He understood that economic inequity caused misery and tragedy for people. What was it that made him fearless in his critique of his society, his country, and his compatriots? It's perhaps better that he drank himself to death because, if the state machinery did not get rid of him, the mullah madness would have put a bullet through his head. But even after his death so many decades ago, he refuses to die.

What makes him live on? His art? His empathy for the downtrodden? His hatred for mullahs and imperialism in his stories? The tenor of his craft? The register of his prose? I am tempted to say that more than anything else, his courage in seeing what it is necessary for a writer to see in the society he lives in and write it down in whatever form suits him. His intellect and moral clarity with regards to where he positions himself. Though the noted Hindi writer Rajendra Yadav has claimed that no other twentieth-century writer comes close to Manto when it comes to writing about marginal people, the best reason, perhaps, why Manto refuses to die is that he is not just a writer who wrote stories and satires, he had a vision that we overlooked at our own peril. Maybe we can still atone for our negligence!

—Moazzam Sheikh

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[2]"A Letter to India: In Manto's Spirit," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(44/45) (2–15 Nov. 2002):4526–29 [http://www.jstor.org/stable/4412808]. —*Editor*.

[Gratefully reproduced from *The News International* (Karachi) (Internet Edition, Literati Section) 23 January 2011. Edited for the *AUS*.]

Urdu Literature: A Treasure Found

Nearly a hundred years after it was written in 1908, *Nashēb-o-Farāz* has been pulled out of some dusty attic and published for the first time. This is a story in itself. Who was the author? Why did she keep this novel under wraps and how has it managed to see the light of day now when the novelist and the period she described are both firmly in the past?

Even after nearly a hundred years, the author is veiled behind her adopted name. When Bint-e Fāṭima Naqvīya took up the pen in her early years, she assumed her mother's name and added her father's family name to it, simply indicating that she was their daughter. In the fascinating author's note, titled "How I learned to write stories," she explains to her readers that she started writing with letters to her cousins to inquire about the well-being of the dolls whose weddings she had arranged.

Letters to friends, many of which she destroyed until her brother told her that they might be valuable some day, led to stories and even novels, but without any thought given to publication. Her circle of readers was limited to family and friends, but there is nevertheless hope, expressed in the author's note, that her work would outlive her.

After she got married, Bint-e Fāṭima wrote *Nashēb-o-Farāz* to instruct her younger sisters in "the art of marriage." The publishers of the book say that this is the first in a series of "lost writings" from the nineteenth and early twentieth century which they are hoping to publish. This novel is a fair representation of the women's writing which emerged during that period. Bint-e Fāṭima has a flair for language which is evident from her descriptions and dialogue, though she did not consider herself a writer.

Her novel offers unique insight into how women viewed the world and how the conventions of the popular novel were utilized to express this view. A number of periodicals targeting a female audience had begun appearing around that time and with their increasing readership they offered women the possibility of literary expression which few could have dreamt of earlier.

In this novel we are introduced to Maimūna's father, Ḥaidar ʿAlī William, and we are duly informed that he is the descendant of "European lords" who traded in diamonds. During a visit to India, he converted to Islam and married into a nawab's family, uniting two aristocratic strains and making his children doubly noble. As is befitting their progeny, they

spend their days in Paris and Istanbul, the latter symbolizing the fascination a declining caliphate continued to hold for Indian Muslims.

Household intrigues are abundant and keep the women of the family busy. We are told about their tricks, ranging from handkerchiefs which can make a person lose consciousness to men disguised as women. As the plot twists and turns, leading towards the inevitable happy ending, the novel makes for interesting reading.

I read it with great pleasure and it reminded me of long afternoons during sultry summers spent watching old black and white movies, a bygone era unfolding on the screen as people swayed to rhythms from the days of yore. It was as if a whiff from the past had come back with the novel.

In her introduction, eminent fictionalist Zaheda Hina has not only highlighted the literary qualities of this book, she has also placed it within the context of women's writing, which was coming into its own. She quotes from Qurratulain Hyder who often complained about the critic's neglect of the body of work produced by the seemingly simple but inspired women of the day to instruct and entertain. *Nashēb-o-Farāz* also belongs to this category and the publishers deserve our congratulations for salvaging it from oblivion.

Bint-e Fāṭima Naqvīya. *Nashēb-o-Farāz*
Karachi: Ushba Publishing International, 2007
282 pp. $15.00. Rs. 500. ISBN 978-969-8588-94-6

—Asif Farrukhi

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