COLUMNS

The Murder of Manto

When mangoo *kochwaan* stopped to pick up an Englishman standing next to an electric pole in Saʿādat Ḥasan Manṭō's story "Nayā Qānūn" (New Constitution), he was already angry.

> "*Kahāñ jānā māñgtā hai*?" he asked sharply.
> "Heera Mandi," the Englishman responded.
> "That'll be five rupees," Mangoo shot back, his moustache bristling.

The reader knows that Mangoo was in the mood for a fight against the imperial oppressor, but who could have guessed that the Englishman's proposed destination would have other moustaches bristling until several decades later, and for entirely different reasons?

In 1993 and 1994, the Sindh Textbook Board carried out some revisions in the Urdu syllabus for Classes 11 and 12. Apart from knocking Premchand (the father of contemporary Urdu fiction) off the reading list, it was decided that Manṭō's "Nayā Qānūn" would be included, but in an edited form. In the textbook version, when Mangoo demanded to know where the client was going, the Englishman responded only with, "*Manḍī*." His character thus became more presentable, if a little obscure: he could now equally be going looking for prostitutes, goats or turnips, and that was presumably how the Board was going to ensure that the next generation knew its literature but kept its moral bearings straight.

It was this passage that came to the attention of Ajmal Kamal, Editor of the Karachi-based Urdu literary journal *Aaj*, some years ago. Upon investigation, he discovered that this was the smallest revision wrought on the story by the Textbook Board: apart from deleting the word "*hīrā*," entire passages had been removed for carrying objectionable material. A revisit of the deleted passages threw up interesting clues as to the politics of the censors. Any reference to communism or "the Russian king" was missing from the printed story; call it a Cold War hangover in a country aligned with the U.S.A. Portions that mentioned Hindu-Muslim riots had been struck off as they placed equal blame on both sides for mob violence (and also because they mentioned that Hindus and Muslims were destined to fight forever due to a saint's curse, not because—as the Two Nation

Theory said—they were practically different species). Even a paragraph on the relationship between Mangoo and his Hindu wife was gone, although there was no telling whether Mangoo himself was Muslim or Hindu.

Kamal published the detailed findings of his content analysis in *The Annual of Urdu Studies* in 1995 (read the whole paper at http://www.urdustudies.com/pdf/10/16censorship.pdf). Last Thursday evening, the topic came alive again as part of a critical reading session he conducted in partnership with T2F (previously The Second Floor), currently Karachi's most active venue for cultural and literary dialogue. And a dialogue is exactly what Kamal and T2F got. Every person in the compact audience had an opinion and a unique perspective on issues of censorship, education, nationalism and identity; not one person was afraid to voice their views. The result was a rich and layered discussion that added substantially to the speaker's initial analysis. (Later, he described the debate as "exciting.")

As one of the audience members pointed out, the extensive revisions to the story begged the question why Manṭō had to be included in the textbook at all. For someone who had formally been tried in a court of law for promoting obscenity through his work (if you've been thinking that censorship and clampdowns on freedom of expression in Pakistan were General Zia-ul-Haq's domain, think again) he made an unlikely candidate for required reading in government schools. If anything, Manṭō's ideas were the exact opposite of what the State might have wanted to promote: he was "neither a moralist nor an ideologue, neither a sermoniser nor a nationalist."[1]

The obvious answer to this would be that Manṭō's canonical status amongst Urdu writers was difficult to block out. As another audience member said, Manṭō was one of the foremost postcolonial writers whose stories held appeal for readers anywhere in the country due to their simplicity and their choice of subject. It made sense for the State to appropriate him, as it were, and show him to be a part of the nationalist project rather than an inconveniently popular voice of dissent. He was not the first writer to be put through this "posthumous circumcision," Ajmal Kamal quipped, but given his preference of character-types and plots he was certainly one of the more complicated writers to drag into the fold. And that was where the choice of story became interesting. It occurred to me that from a censor's point of view, "Nayā Qānūn" was the ideal Manṭō story to pick up.

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[1]Alok Bhalla, "The Politics of Translation: Manto's Partition Stories in English" (Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages, n.d.), n.p. [http://www.ciil-ebooks.net/html/alokbhalla/lecture2.html].

Unlike his other famous stories, which had morally problematic protagonists or references littered throughout, this piece was easily editable. Once the offending passages had been removed, there still remained a coherent narrative with a relatable, respectable hero who voiced choice opinions against the colonial establishment, albeit in a crude way and with very little credible information at hand. (As Kamal said, if Mangoo *kochwaan* had been born today, he would have been a TV anchor.) Take this paragraph, for instance:

> Ustaad Mangoo hated the English; he said because they reigned over his Hindustan and perpetrated every cruelty imaginable. But the biggest reason for his hatred was that the *gōrās* from the Cantonment gave him a lot of grief. They would treat him like a lowly cur. Apart from this, he also disliked their color. Whenever he would see the mottled pink and white complexion of a white man, he would start feeling inexplicably nauseous. He used to say that their red, wrinkled faces reminded him of a flaking corpse.[2]

Mangoo *kochwaan*, for all his righteous anger, was a racist! Yet the censors did not see fit to remove this passage from the textbook because it suited the picture of the colonial oppressor that students were supposed to internalize. This also raised interesting questions about how concepts of "right" and "wrong" were projected by the Sindh Textbook Board censors. One audience member at T2F said that some of the material that had been struck off (for example, the reference to Heera Mandi or Mangoo's conversation with his pregnant wife) would have been seen as offensive to middle-class sensibilities, particularly when this was supposed to be read in an instructional environment. Not only would the average teacher have been uncomfortable with discussing these things, there would also have been concern about a backlash from parents. This was a valid point. Given that schooling was supposed to have a civilizing effect on the young, it could have been considered inappropriate—even irrational—to reproduce Manṭō's work wholesale when he took a distinctly unclean, uncivilized approach to literature. Ajmal Kamal agreed with this, adding that Manṭō practically had to invent the requisite language to approach the topics he wrote about. Urdu literature actually had very little room for his brand of writing.

One of the women present at the session argued in favor of moderate censorship, citing examples of distorted history in American textbooks in order to create an acceptable narrative at a national level. This led to an

[2]My translation; apologies to Manto Sahib if he is turning in his grave at this moment.

animated discussion on how history should be presented in textbooks and curricula, and how such concerns were born out of a deep sense of insecurity in the nationalist camp. The consensus was, however, that such restrictions could not be applied to literature with a clear conscience. If nothing else, a gentleman sitting in the front row said passionately, what had happened with "Nayā Qānūn" was straightforward copyright infringement and the matter ought to be taken to the courts.

This need to protect literature from being cropped and pruned at will by the self-appointed gardeners of our youth's intellectual Eden becomes all the greater when applied to Manṭō's writing. This is not light, superficial fiction. As Alok Bhalla puts it most beautifully:

> The best of his partition stories surprise one by bringing together, in darkly illuminating moments of existential understanding, terrible violence and the beauty of the human yearning for sex, children, home and community which refuses to yield its instinctual energy to the death-traps religious fanaticism and extremist politics lay for us. […] [H]is stories […] are constructed out of a complex variety of strong voices—voices of protest and anguish, mockery and nostalgia, mourning and longing—voices which clash against each other and jostle for a hearing.[3]

Saʿādat Ḥasan Manṭō, in his short life, wrote with an almost animal urgency about the horror of the world as he saw it. His prose was so steeped in social insight and so intelligently crafted that no passage could really be called spare or dispensable, except perhaps by those who did not want to understand him. To mutilate his work thus was, in fact, criminal. Stripped of some of its most potent passages, only a shell of "Nayā Qānūn" remained in the textbooks—a shell that was capable of communicating very little of what the author intended. In a way, Manṭō actually never made it into the Urdu syllabus at all. ❑

—Afia Aslam

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The Historian of the Individual

Mario vargas llosa, in his delightful little book, *Letters to a Young Nov-*

[3]Bhalla, "Politics of Translation," n.p.

elist, describes the writer as someone afflicted with a "tapeworm." The writer's own life is forfeit to this creature; whatever he does is for the sake of this grisly monster. As for his themes, the writer feeds off of himself, like the mythical "catoblepas." So, a writer is someone who writes from an inexorable inner compulsion, unlike the "graphomaniacs" Kundera has lamented about. The compulsion—well, this arises from a desire to see a different world in place of the real, with its inherited values and mores and certainties that admit of no contradiction and, worse, stifle questioning. Seen from this vantage, the fictional landscape of Urdu would appear hauntingly bleak, with only a few occasional lights shining palely in the gathering gloom, and out there, somewhere in the distance, suddenly a relentless, single spectacular starburst— Saʿādat Ḥasan Manṭō.

Yet this singular luminary has suffered all along from a reading of his stories as social documents and commentary. His fiction is held hostage to the most cynical purposes of politics, sociology, psychoanalysis and, lately, even history, by those who deny literature its inherent autonomy and consider it to be little more than an offshoot of their respective other-than-literary disciplines. (Imagine someone applying the rules of astrophysics to *gilli-danda*!)

In a humorous self-portrait, Manṭō himself says that he is a "know-nothing" who "never studied Marx nor ever set eyes on any of the works of Freud. He knows Hegel and Havelock only by name. However, amazingly, people, I mean critics, say that all these thinkers have influenced him. As far as I know, Manṭō was never influenced by anyone's ideas. He considers interpreters of the world stupid. One cannot explain the world to others; one has to understand it for oneself."

Strangely, though, Manṭō's stories do easily lend themselves to such distortions because of their striking proximity to workaday life. It is not asked, not even by the literary critic, why write stories if all you want to do is substantiate reality as it exists. Is that what stories are meant to do? Or are they supposed to explore the existential situation of the character (and discover, in Kundera's words, what the novel—read fiction—alone can discover). Is fiction not expected to create parallel worlds?

It is relatively easy to interpret a story through reference to something outside of it (say, a political or social event), but far more difficult to analyze it through an exploration of its particular mode of being, its possibility and promise. Literary critics are a sad lot, not only is their work necessarily derivative and posterior to creation, it must also formulate its criteria of success and failure from within the components of the fictional work under consideration. Political and social events are not the measure of the success or failure of a work of fiction, but rather, whether the work has lived up to its own promise.

Manṭō may well have intended "Toba Tek Singh" to be read as "a scathing indictment" of Partition. (I rather think Manṭō was quite taken with the image of the character he had created, and his possibilities, and wanted to follow along with him on his existential odyssey.) But should we read it as such? After all, paraphrasing Kundera, it is not the business of fiction to write the history of a society; it is very much its business to write the history of the individual. At day's end, what remains looming on the horizon is the larger-than-life image of the protagonist, Partition having shrunk back into the distance. In a paradoxical way, it is Toba Tek Singh who retroactively makes history possible, even inevitable, and not the other way around. It is he who makes Partition authentic. That is, precisely, what fiction does.

If Saha'e, Mozel, Babu Gopinaath, or Saugandhi impinge upon our consciousness with indomitable force, it is precisely because, in the balance of his major works, Manṭō saw none of them as a typical representative of his/her social or religious group or as one shaped by its determinants. More often, he saw each one in deathly opposition to the certainty of inherited values. If his characters behave contrary to conventional logic, it is because they act in consonance with fictional logic. Only in the hospitality of fictional space can polarities coexist without one trying to eliminate the other. Manṭō's genius lay in recognizing these characters as discrete entities, and history, or social and religious determinants, as merely the backdrop against which each of them stumbled through his or her particular existential trek.

Why, then, has the fashioner of such memorable characters, the writer who gave his preferred fictional medium the burning intensity of a light refracted as through a magnifying lens, remained relatively unknown outside South Asia? Why could he and his writings not—I am asked— register as a global literary phenomenon both during his life and after his death?

Several reasons might be suggested. Let's leave aside "global" for the moment and begin with the local. There is no dearth of appreciation for Manṭō's work in the South Asian subcontinent. He has remained front and center in the consciousness of Urdu and Hindi readers. Equally, reams of critical work of debatable quality have been produced on him in Urdu, but, in my estimation, except for a few pieces by Muhammad Hasan Askari, Manṭō has still not received the critical attention he deserves locally. And by critical I mean in-depth studies of his work on its own terms, as a possibility of human existence.

On the other hand, there has not been a total absence of Manṭō from the global scene, though admittedly it has not been as wide and profuse as implied in the question. Hamid Jalal and later Khalid Hasan translated

his work into English. Jalal's *Black Milk* had scarcely been released when it was withdrawn from circulation. Hasan's *Kingdom's End* was put out by the reputable British publisher Verso. There have been a number of other translations since, notably by M. Asaduddin. Even Ralph Russell, to the best of my knowledge, translated at least one Manṭō story, "The Black Shalwar." In 1997, a German collection of five Manṭō stories, with multiple translators, was published under the title *Blinder Wahn*. In 2008, Alain Désoulières brought out his French translations, by far the most exhaustive, and just this year Rocío Moriones Alonso published her Spanish translations. Most recently there is Tariq Ali's short column in *Counterpunch* (issue 13–15, 2012). And to all of these may be added the now nearly forty-year-old research monograph of Leslie Flemming, *Another Lonely Voice*. However, to truly register as a global literary phenomenon obviously requires more than this paltry capital.

All the same, more of an attempt could have been made to bring Manṭō to global attention. Unfortunately, Pakistani society is divided along linguistic lines. Few among the Urdu writers control English well enough to render Urdu works in contemporary English idiom. On the opposite side, English-wallahs, even if some of them may be assumed to command Urdu well enough, are at best indifferent to Urdu and its literary culture. Had the latter group made the effort to translate and explain, exhaustively, the narrative architecture and the underlying poetics of Manṭō's fictional world, quite possibly he would be better known across the world.

Then again, even in the West there is less appetite for the short story and the novel is considered the preferred fictional genre. Whether out of cultural hubris or not, indigenous literatures of South Asia do not, almost as a rule, engage the general public, and publishers are loath to gamble on financially risky ventures. Whatever interest there may be in such literatures scarcely goes beyond the university campus, where, too, they are yoked into the service of non-literary identities such as "Third World," "Colonial," "Postcolonial," you name it, or where there are federally-funded centers of South Asian studies.

That said, let's be realistic. Manṭō, certainly, stands head-and-shoulders above any other Urdu short-story writer. But he was writing in a borrowed form, still in its infancy. He accomplished a lot for his times, indeed he went farther than any other of his contemporaries, and even today one would scarcely find anyone with his masterly control over the short-story form. What we need above all is a concerted effort to situate him properly in the context of Urdu fiction.

Quite aside from his place in that context, Manṭō at least made sure of one thing: that he would not be turned into a "*rahmatullah alaihi*" after

he was gone. So, like Bashir (in Anour Benmalek's short story "The Penalty"), just before blowing up his suicide vest in the neighborhood mosque instead of in the soccer stadium where he was supposed to, Manṭō tried to "score one goal against infinity ... " —a fate which Iqbāl did not suffer and, if the present hullabaloo is any indication, Faiz will not suffer either, though this is the tragic but enviable fate of a writer true to his calling, the one with a wriggly tapeworm in his guts. ❑

—Muhammad Umar Memon

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A Turkish Scholar and a Great Friend of Pakistan

"A few years ago, I sent a few students of Urdu from Istanbul University to the Pakistani Consulate in Istanbul, advising them to converse with Pakistani staff there to improve their Urdu," said Prof. Halil Toker, Chair of the Urdu Language and Literature program at Istanbul University, who was recently here to attend an international conference on Urdu.

He paused for a few moments, perhaps to contain his emotions. There was an unmistakable note of pain in his voice. Staring me in the face with his piercing blue eyes, he resumed: "But when the students came back, they were flabbergasted. The response they got from the Pakistani Consulate was simply disgusting. First, when they tried to talk to Pakistani staff in Urdu, the reply came in English. Do you know what response the students got when they told them that they would like to talk to them in Urdu since they were learning Urdu? The Pakistani staff said, '*Kyā pāgal hōga'ē hō? Urdū kyūñ sīkh̲ rahē hō? Kyā dunyā mēñ tumhēñ aur kō'ī kām nahīñ?*' [Have you gone mad? Why are you learning Urdu? Don't you have anything else in the world to do?] It was very difficult for me to cool them down and persuade them to continue their studies."

He continued as I looked at him in disbelief: "Another sorry tale is about how the indifference of the Pakistani Consulate in Istanbul landed me in big trouble when I arranged an international conference on 'Allāma Iqbāl. I was assured of assistance, but when the guests began arriving and I asked them to fulfill their promises, they refused to cooperate with me. I cannot tell you what I had to do and how I collected money at the eleventh hour from different Turkish institutions to accommodate the guests. And mind you, it was a 'show' to promote Pakistan, Pakistan's national language and Pakistan's national poet."

Then he told me how the Iqbal Chair and the Urdu Department at a Turkish university were abolished because of a lack of interest on the part of the Pakistan Embassy in Turkey. Perhaps my embarrassment and resentment were writ large on my face as Dr. Toker quickly added: "Well, that was quite a few years ago, I hope now you have better people there and let's hope things have improved since." Then he informed me how proud the Iranians were of their language and how they helped any Turkish student who wanted to learn Persian.

Born in Bakirkoy, Istanbul, on 3 April 1967, Dr. Toker did his M.A. in Persian from Istanbul University in 1992. (His first name is "Khalīl," which he spells as "Halil" according to Turkish script.) His M.A. dissertation involved both Urdu and Persian as its topic was "The Life and Works of Mirzā Asadu'l-Lāh Khān Ghālib." The dissertation that earned him a Ph.D. from the same university also dealt with both Urdu and Persian since the topic of his research was "Persian and Urdu Poetry in India and the Poets of the Bahadur Shāh II Era." Joining the Persian Language and Literature Department at Istanbul University in 1990 as an assistant professor, he continued his academic pursuits and research work which earned him promotions, ultimately elevating him to the posts of senior professor and the chairperson.

"What prompted your interest in Urdu?" I asked. "As everybody knows, the Turks have a great love for Pakistan. The great affinity and love showed by the Muslims of the India-Pakistan subcontinent for the Turks and Turkey during the Balkan Wars and the Khilafat Movement earned a permanent place for the Muslims of this region, Pakistanis and Pakistan in the hearts of the Turks. So I naturally had good sentiments for Pakistan and since I was studying Persian for my B.A. at Istanbul University, I knew Urdu was Pakistan's language and it had great similarities with Persian, Arabic and even some vocabulary of Turkish.

What made me fall in love with Urdu was a Pakistani teacher, Dr. Ghulām Ḥusain Ẕulfiqār. He came from Punjab University's Oriental College to teach Urdu at our university. He was a great teacher and made learning Urdu great fun. He would teach us a lot about the history of the Subcontinent, too. While with him, Urdu seemed so sweet; it was like music to the ears."

At this point, this writer quietly thanked God for sending at least one good and devoted Pakistani to Turkey. Dr. Toker is all praise for Dr. Ẕulfiqār, who helped him not only complete his dissertation but also encouraged him to choose a topic for a doctorate that concerned Urdu as well. Another teacher for whom Dr. Toker has great love and respect is Prof. Nazeef Khwaja, the Yugoslavian-born Turk who headed the Persian

Department at Istanbul University back then and helped Dr. Toker a lot.

"Do you have any regrets about choosing Urdu as your special field of study and research?" I asked. "No, I have never regretted that. In fact, I am very happy that I chose Urdu. For those who know Persian, Urdu is easy to learn. When I don't find a word for what I want to say in Urdu, I put a Persian word there, or an Arabic word. Even some Turkish words would do sometimes," he says and laughingly adds, "And you people are rescued by English on such occasions."

What does he think about teaching Urdu in Turkey? The answer is not a pleasant one, but it somehow reflects what our national character has come to be: "Many Turkish students want to learn Urdu, they love Pakistan, but the attitude of Pakistanis discourages them. When students want to talk to Pakistanis in Urdu, they insist on using English. But the Turkish students who study Urdu do get jobs. It's not a problem; so the future of Urdu in Turkey can be brighter if only …"

Dr. Toker knows Urdu, Persian, English and Hindi, not to mention Punjabi which, according to him, is his "*susrālī zabān*" (the language of the in-laws). Having married a Pakistani from Lahore, he speaks Punjabi fluently. To his credit, there is a long list of literary and academic achievements. He has authored twenty-six books, most of which are in Urdu and include translations from Turkish into Urdu, collections of his own Urdu poetry, a Pakistan travelogue, a book on Iqbāl, translations of Iqbāl's letters and his *Javēd-Nāma* into Turkish, a book on the Kashmir issue and a book on basic Urdu grammar. He has also published more than two hundred articles and papers in Urdu, Turkish and English.

Toker Sahib has contributed a number of articles on Urdu poetry and classical Urdu poets in several Turkish encyclopedias. As if this were not enough, he is also the editor of an Urdu quarterly, *Irtibāt*, published from Istanbul. In recognition of his services many organizations have conferred awards upon him, but one feels that this friend of Pakistan and a great admirer of Pakistan's national poet and its national language does merit a national award from the people and government of Pakistan. ❑

—Rauf Parekh

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Essay: Milestones

Early this summer I went to the library in Tooting Broadway, an hour's

journey from where I live in London, in search of Urdu books that have survived the test of time. I had been reading about vintage novels—by Nancy Mitford, P. G. Wodehouse, Agatha Christie—which people read again and again when they need an escape. My own favorite bedside books are *Ḥimāqatēñ* and *Mazīd Ḥimāqatēñ* by Shafīqu'r-Raḥmān, the comic genius of Urdu literature. The former is an exuberant mixture of comedy, romance and stories of youthful pleasures, set in Lahore and the hill stations of North India in the years between the world wars. The second is a playfully intellectual series of parodies of Urdu literary genres: historical chronicle, modernist poem, *dāstāngō'ī*. It also includes an autobiographical travelogue, pastiches of self-help manuals, and the kind of formal letters semi-educated women used to write. My copies, which I discovered seventeen years ago among my mother's old cookbooks, are worn out with rereading, but I was hoping to find other works by this favorite author who had, over the course of several decades, produced many volumes of fiction, some of which I had read but never owned.

I discovered two shining rows of Shafīqu'r-Raḥmān titles at the library. His entire backlist was reprinted about a decade ago by Sang-e-Meel Publications. (Sang-e-Meel has a long list of reprints, from Naẕīr Aḥmad and Rusvā to Ḥijāb Imtiyāz ʿAlī, which gives a new resonance to the milestones their name brings to mind. Not all of these rediscovered books can be termed classics in the conventional literary sense—for example, the populist romances of Raẓiya Baṭ. But most of them are certainly milestones of their genre, worth preserving for posterity.)

I picked two: Raḥmān's first collection, *Lehrēñ*, and the much later *Pačẖtāvē*. Reading the former, I could not believe that this teenaged writer of tender, melancholy tales of lost loves, with a poetic gift for description, would grow up into the mischievous, robust writer of *Ḥimāqatēñ*. Promising though it is, *Lehrēñ* barely signals the huge and brilliant originality of his later work.

Reading *Pačẖtāvē* is a very different experience. Written in the aftermath of World War II, it gives voice to war veterans and soldiers from every part of the world on their way to battle. At the center of the book is "Jenny," a dark novella about the narrator's encounter in a Bombay nightspot with a Eurasian woman, once his lover. After a series of broken relationships with vagabond intellectuals, and an abandoned career as an artist, she seems to have found happiness with an unlikely partner. Somehow the story seems to evoke, in its beautiful, haunting prose style, the existential conflicts of an entire postwar generation.

Shafīqu'r-Raḥmān as a humorist is unique in Urdu literature, but untranslateable as his pact with his readers depends on a play of words deeply

rooted in a common language. In his tragic stories, however, punning humor is replaced with an irony and a compassion that transcend linguistic barriers. He has been categorized as a "light" writer, and his prose is often absolutely weightless. However, joyful or tragic, this versatile genius is one of the best short-story writers of his or any other time. (I have since discovered that Sang-e-Meel has produced omnibus volumes of his work, which I cannot wait to acquire.)

Back in Tooting after a gap of a couple of months, I came across another Sang-e-Meel reprint by Fāṯima Mubīn, a writer I had never heard of though I'm told she was very popular in the 1960s. Packaged as a flashy romance for a new generation, it had the intriguing title of *Īrānī*.

A biographical note by the author's son informs us that Mubīn was born in 1910 in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and later moved to Lahore. A great-niece of the pioneering scholar and publisher Mumtāz ʿAlī, she wrote her first book in 1950 and her last in 1985. I expected *Īrānī*, with dialogue set out like a play in the style of old Urdu fiction, to be a domestic novel in the conventional mode. But in marked contrast to the entirely feminine and often claustrophobic interiors of those family stories, it is, in fact, a modern fairy tale. Its heroes and heroines move in the cities of Bombay and London, in luxury liners, hotels, Indian palaces and English country houses during the last days of the Raj, when the Indian upper classes (Muslim, Hindu and Parsi) and the colonial gentry interacted socially and yet maintained invisible boundaries of cultural, religious and moral values.

Nīlōfar, the young daughter of a rich Bombay merchant, stranded in a winter storm with her retinue on their way to Agra, stops a car and asks for a lift. The car's chauffeur, who calls himself Īrānī, says he works for a prince; he is handsome, personable, and seems sophisticated beyond his station. He also shows them the Mughal heritage sites. When they part, Nīlōfar has feelings for him which she represses, considering him her social inferior. Later, he saves her from a runaway horse. Then, at a grand party, in the manner of the fairy tales Mubīn reworks, Īrānī the chauffeur is revealed to be Murād, a prince in disguise.

Traditional fairy tales usually end when identities are revealed, or continue with the prince punishing the proud heroine for treating him with arrogance. But revelation is the point of departure for Mubīn's modern retelling: here it is the heroine who is set on punishing the prince. She considers him a deceiver and a misogynist; and also, on the evidence of gossip columns and chattering friends, a philandering, decadent aristocrat. How she teaches him a lesson takes up the rest of the story, which involves the heroine's painting of a seagull and a seascape that Murād sees displayed on a London wall, encounters at hunting, shooting and fishing expeditions,

a ball or two, a polo match and a disastrous near alliance with a bigamist.

Īrānī, which combines eastern romance with a Jane Austen-style comedy of manners, is probably the most delicate and exotic of Mubīn's luminous novels. Her later, longer books weave historical, social and religious motifs into their marriage-oriented plots: all seven of these were made available again in two handsome omnibus editions in 2007. (But may we request the publishers to include full biographical details as well as the original dates of publication in future reprints?)

What do readers enjoy today in such fiction? Lush romance, records of a long-vanished, pre-independence world that even at the time of writing had all but disappeared, or both? (It is worth remembering, too, that Mubīn probably wrote *Īrānī* just a decade or so after the period in which it is set.)

I asked my mother, who regularly rereads Charles Dickens and George Eliot: "What takes us back to certain writers? Nostalgia? And if it is nostalgia, are we missing the period their books portray, or the joy with which we first read them?" "Familiarity and identification," she said. So I loaned her *Īrānī*. Though she is a generation younger than Mubīn, she could verify almost every last detail of the novel. She vividly remembers the forties (and more vaguely the thirties) when she was growing up in "princely" India, was not restricted by purdah, hunted and fished with her brothers, met colonial officials and their families for tea, picnicked on palace grounds, spent holidays in Bombay, and, just like the novel's heroine, stayed at the Savoy—though more than a decade later. She went with my father to stay at the Ritz. She can even spot Mubīn's inaccuracies: "No narcissi in Agra in the winter," she said, "and we wore those '*khann*' blouses after the forties, not in the prewar period, which is this book's period."

I agree with my mother's point about identification and familiarity. Mubīn's reimagined world is familiar to me not only from my parents' memories, but from my own. In my childhood, traces of the princely past and the colonial legacy still persisted in Bombay, Delhi, Agra and other places I visited on holiday, and even in Karachi; traces I found slightly old-fashioned but not remotely exotic. In the 1980s I accepted their gradual disappearance as inevitable.

I often read to see what books gave pleasure to readers decades ago, how writers imagined their readers' pleasures, and which of these books we must keep alive today. And I took great pleasure in these rediscovered milestones of Urdu, light or profound, comic or tragic, which preserve for posterity our worlds of memory and imagination. ❑

—Aamer Hussein

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In First Person: Urdu and I

Man is memory, and memory is sound. The first sound that resonates in my heart is the Urdu word "*shīrīn*," meaning sweet—the name of my mother who was by birth a Shīʿa Muslim and remained one till the end of her days.

Shadowing that sweet memory is a bitter one. My mother could not marry my Hindu father because my father could not go against the wishes of his staunch Brahmin family in post-Partition India. She concealed her Muslim identity in the predominantly Hindu area of Mumbai's Shivaji Park where we lived because, in spite of the Nehruvian vision of India as a plural and diverse nation, the rising Hindu fundamentalist movement looked upon the minority Muslim community as the enemy within. So, to arm herself against a possible Hindu backlash, she tried her best to fit in by submerging her true identity. "Do not call me by my Muslim name," she would caution us in private. "I do not want the world to know about my Muslim identity."

Suspect Loyalties

Those were the days when Urdu was looked upon as the language of those who partitioned India. The Indian Muslim's loyalty was always suspect; he had to regularly reaffirm his Indianness and patriotism to quell the nationalist anxieties of the majority, whose Partition-inflicted wounds had not healed.

Is it any wonder then that this Shīʿa woman who was "living in sin" with a Brahmin filmmaker gave all her children Hindu names, hurled us into Christian schools run by Italian priests where we learned good English and absurd nursery rhymes, and brought us up as Hindus?

At the same time, this same Shīʿa woman who masqueraded as a Hindu, ushered me into the magical world of the Hindu mythology of Shiva, Ganesh and Parvati, Ram, Sita and Hanuman, as well as the great epic of the Mahabharata. "You are the son of a *nagar* Brahmin … you belong to the Bhargav gotra" she would say. And in the next breath, in chaste Urdu, give me a Kalima while telling me to chant "*Yā ʿAlī Madad*" if confronted with an adversary! What a paradox!

A memory bubble bursts.... The year is 1958. I am barely nine years old. The atmosphere in our house is somber. One of the finest flowers of the Indian renaissance, Maulana Azad, is dead. My mother is listening to a live relay of his funeral procession on the All India Radio Urdu service.

Suddenly my father, who is equally upset by the death of this great nationalist, storms into the house. On hearing the Urdu relay, he angrily says, "Put this Radio Pakistan off! I want to hear this news in Hindi, not in Urdu!" My mother meekly does so, but I can see that she is deeply hurt.

Personal is Political

They say the personal is the political. This incident explains the tremendous odds that lay in the path of Urdu, just as the first decade of independent India was coming to an end. My father, who was a secular Brahmin, taught me a lesson through that action: That "tolerance" implies superiority ... where the majority community, very condescendingly, "puts up with" the very existence of the minority. But it is always "thus far and no further" … an implied limit on their so-called tolerance.

My mother's language was dying, and there was nothing that I could do as a child to keep it alive! As the years deepened, the only place I heard Urdu being spoken was on the sets of my father's films. My father used to make enchanting Muslim fantasy movies like "The Thief of Baghdad" or "Sinbad the Sailor." Or during secret visits with my mother to the *majlis* during Muḥarram, where the blood-soaked history of Karbala was enacted with passion. Or, in the dark comfort of the cinema hall, watching "Mughal-e-Azam" or "Chaudhvin Ka Chand" ... and at the home of my actress aunt Poornima who, unlike my mother, was a successful actress. Poornima Aunty felt no need to hide her Muslim identity. And I loved her for being brave and audaciously speaking Urdu.

By the time I became a teenager, I realized that Urdu was the language of the "other"; and it also dawned on me that, in spite of all her attempts, my Muslim mother continued to remain an outsider in her own homeland. She would shoot down my rebellious attempts to unveil her real identity by saying, "It's their country, and we have to get along with them." But I could never seem to see it her way.

Emotional Syntax

I felt Urdu and Islam were a part of my heritage and, as the years went by, I felt this burning surge within me to express who I really was. I could not be myself by denying a part of me. My consciousness resonated with the chants of *Ḥasan Ḥusain* during Muḥarram, the bells of *Mangal Murti Mauriya* during the Ganesh Utsav, and the memories of *Ave Maria* from my Christian school. The only language that could give expression to a paradox like me was Urdu. And though I do not have an arsenal of words in my vocabulary, the emotional syntax of Urdu is my inner melody.

Since the passage of the Ninety-Third Amendment to the Constitution

of India, the right of Urdu-speakers to receive education in their mother tongue has to be recognized as a fundamental right. Therefore, to promote the teaching and learning of Urdu at the primary and secondary levels of education is the responsibility of the State. I feel that all Urdu lovers must compel the State to act with a sense of urgency and make this fundamental right a reality.

I wonder when it will dawn on our nation that Urdu is the language of India. I wonder what it will take for those who oppose Urdu to see that this fight to preserve Urdu is a fight for India! ❑

—Mahesh Bhatt

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The Uncelebrated Master—Muhammad Khalid Akhtar

For a period of thirteen months between December 2009 and December 2010 I was the Urdu publisher at Oxford University Press, Pakistan. Of the books selected for publication during this time, some works held, beyond their literary importance, a personal significance for me and I considered it a private honor to be involved in their publication. The collected works of modern Urdu literature's great master Muḥammad Khālid Akhtar (1920–2002) was one such project.

Muḥammad Khālid Akhtar was a novelist, short-story writer, essayist, critic, letter writer and author of travelogues. He was also one of Urdu's most sophisticated humorists and a masterful translator whose renderings of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are important additions to Urdu literature. Greats such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Ibn-e Inshā held his work in high regard: Faiz famously called his *Čakīvaṛa mein Viṣāl* the best novel written in Urdu. During his lifetime, Khālid Ṣāḥib did not receive the recognition that was his due—a collective misfortune for many readers of Urdu literature who could have been introduced to his work sooner. But this work is now available in a standard text for which the OUP Series Editor Ajmal Kamal's work deserves credit, and readers can now engage with this diverse and rich body of work.

I wrote the following piece in 2002 when I learned of Khālid Ṣāḥib's passing. In his last days I was not in Pakistan and had lost contact with him. This essay was never published. Now that his works have been launched, I would like to share it as a small personal introduction to Khālid Ṣāḥib, my friend.

*

Essay: Khalid Sahib Has Run Away! Again

Around the same time that I was blacklisted by the British Council Library for deviant behavior in returning books, Muḥammad Khālid Akhtar yet again made an unsuccessful attempt at running away from home. I was 24 then. He was 72. My behavior stemmed from a native apathy to orderliness. He had run away just from sheer ennui or, perhaps, to keep in practice. In his younger days he would run farther away—the disparate geography of undivided India offering an interesting choice of vistas for such escapades. But this time he had made it only to a dingy hotel near the Cantonment railway station—a few blocks from his home in Karachi. Perhaps he had run out of steam, or maybe, he wanted to be found. When we first met, he was still writing, but persisted in the claim that he was "more of a reader." I had yet to write a thing but always introduced myself as a writer. He had retired after a long, uneventful career with the government as an electrical engineer. I had taken a preemptive retirement from such an eventuality by dropping out from the local university's electrical engineering program. But I think that more than anything it was our love of fruitcake that cemented our friendship. Miss Jean Brodie, too, played a part.

When I was introduced to Khālid Akhtar, I had not read any of his books. In fact, I had not even heard his name. I recall that I read his collection of short stories *Ḵẖōyā huā Ufaq* before I read his novel *Čakīvaṛa mēñ Viṣāl*—the books that would make me his fan forever. Shortly afterwards, one day while we were sipping coffee in a restaurant and I was wondering if it would be all right to finish off the last slice of cake, I asked him what he was writing those days. After repeating his familiar refrain that he was more into reading, he looked away for a moment, and then said, "My writing days are long past! Now young people like you should be doing all the writing!" It greatly flattered my ego to be spoken of as someone on whom the country's literary activity now depended, but I suddenly remembered something I had recently read. And finally picking up the cake slice in a feigned act of abstraction, I said, "Don't say that your writing days are over. According to a certain Miss Jean Brodie, the prime of one's life could start at any age!"

"So, you are reading Muriel Spark!" he said, and his eyes immediately lit up. "Isn't she a wonderful writer!"

"Yes, I have read all her books!" I lied brazenly to make an impression.

The fact was that I had picked up the book from an old books sale in Sadar some time before, thinking, very naturally, that it would be all about the saucy adventures of some lustful wench called Jean Brodie. Although

these expectations met disappointment, I found the book a good read and remembered the one message that had most appealed to me. I thought then that the saying would make a good wall hanging when I reached my dotage if I was still a virgin or an unpublished writer. What had made Khālid Ṣāḥib happy was not so much my veiled suggestion that he should produce another novel, but the discovery that I was reading the books he loved. Sensing his drift, I dropped the names of all the writers I remembered, only some of whom I had actually read, and with this mixture of charlatanism and half-truth, convinced him of my erudition.

One day upon my asking how he started writing, he told me that in the beginning he had mainly written parodies. At that point, dreams of writing aside, I did not know if I would ever write a thing, or what manner of animal it would turn out to be.

Nor was I conscious that I would finally choose to write in English. Set upon proving to him that I was also a word master in the making, I decided to write a parody in Urdu. In the end the piece turned out to be something unquotably scandalous and never saw the light of day. But it won his approval. I remember the big foolish grin that was plastered all over my face that day as I returned home after hearing words that had, in effect, endorsed my existence. From that day, Khālid Ṣāḥib started lending me an assortment of books from his own collection: the yellowing editions of *Tarka the Otter*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, *Life of Johnson*, *Under the Volcano*, *Watership Down*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and old, old issues of *Punch,* which his friend Shafīqu'r-Raḥmān, another of my favorite Urdu writers, used to send him.

Khālid Ṣāḥib never asked for them back. But while he encouraged me to write, he also felt responsible for me in a paternal way. He would say that he envied my daring to run away from my boring engineering studies (something he confessed to thinking about many times in his student days but never actually carrying out for fear of upsetting his family) while wondering loudly what kind of an end I might meet as a writer. Going by the wayward, ad hoc nature of my existence, things did not look too promising. But in his heart the scales were weighed too heavily in my favor for him to ever bring himself to reprimand me. And knowing a misfit's destiny first hand, he left me alone, except for the few times when he suggested half-heartedly that perhaps it would be best to complete my engineering degree to ensure a secure future. But he always said it without conviction, almost guiltily, like one truant to another. I remember he was very happy when I finally found a job at a newspaper. He thought that apart from providing me with a livelihood, it would also give me a good grounding as a writer.

By then I had started writing in English and had written a few poems

and a couple of children's stories. My friends and I naturally finding our writings most excellent, decided to publish them in our very own small literary magazine. It was then that I found out that many years ago, Khālid Ṣāḥib had written his earliest parodies and stories in English. When I went to see him to ask his opinion of our magazine, he mentioned to me that some well-meaning people who had read my Urdu prose, and knowing of his influence with me, had suggested to him that he should persuade me to write in Urdu. I told him that I had decided to write in English because most of the fiction I read was either originally written in English, or was translated into it, and when I thought of writing something it became difficult not to think in the language I read all the time.

He knew the problem and told me that his first writings were in English too, but persuaded by friends to write in Urdu, he gave up writing in English. He said that he sometimes regretted his decision and would advise me to stick with the language I felt most comfortable writing in.

Years later, when I phoned to give him the news that my novel had been accepted for publication he was overjoyed. He said to me, "Musharraf, my son, it is my triumph!" Knowing myself that my novel was no such remarkable thing that was worthy of making him proud, I think I know why he said those words. He felt that his confidence in my ability to write and the encouragement he had given me had finally been vindicated, and I had lived up to his expectations. However, my first novel owed to him much more than that.

Everyone has heard of the ideal reader for whom every novel is supposedly written. But behind every piece of writing there is also one or more ideal writing(s) from which it derives its legitimacy. In my case, that ideal reader was Khālid Ṣāḥib, and the ideal novel I drew on was *Čakīvaṛa mēñ Viṣāl*. The world of Purana Shehr in my novel was loosely structured around the city of Hyderabad, Pakistan, where I was born. The picaresque world in *Čakīvaṛa mēñ Viṣāl* was drawn from Khālid Ṣāḥib's sojourn in that neighborhood in his younger days. There was a world of difference in time and geography between the two locales, but when I sat down to create the world of my childhood, I fell back on the model of the world created by the master. And I always had it at the back of my mind that if the world in my novel conformed somewhat to the world in his novel, it would validate it in my own eyes. I could never have equaled the master's feat, but my novel got written in the first place because of *Čakīvaṛa mēñ Viṣāl*.

As a writer, Khālid Ṣāḥib forever remained in his "prime of life." His last piece—passages of a travel diary to Iran, Turkey and Greece—was published in the literary magazine *Teḥrīr* not too long ago. But despite

having people like Kanahiyā Lāl Kapūr and Faiz Ahmed Faiz as his declared admirers, to the end of his days this wonderful writer remained unknown outside a small group of readers, and not many in my generation have even heard his name. It was mainly due to the fact that while he desired to be acknowledged and read, he never had the stomach for the usual antics needed to promote oneself in the seedy world of letters, and he kept his renegade's outlook to the last. He did not give up running away either. I heard that the last time he absconded by way of a minibus to pick up some more books from the old books sale in Sadar. And I am sure the expedition was punctuated with breaks for fruitcake and tea. ❑

—Musharraf Ali Farooqi

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