

**Radical Politics and the Urdu Literary World in the Era of South Asian Nationalisms  
c.1919 - 1952**

A dissertation

submitted by

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## Abstract

This dissertation is a historical study of the cultural and intellectual trends amongst Urdu intellectuals in South Asia during the decades immediately preceding and following the attainment of formal independence in 1947. I argue that linking literary radicalism in late colonial North India to a much longer history of the Urdu language and cultural milieu provides fresh insights for understanding nationalisms in South Asia. The intellectual and cultural history of the upper middle-class strata of Muslim society from cities such as Delhi and Lahore reveals that writers from Muslim backgrounds—representing a relatively small fraction of the entire anti-colonial Indian intelligentsia—came to play a very strong role in the radical, left-leaning literary landscape. I show that a minority community, ostensibly organized around a “religious” identity, became the votaries of “secular” nationalisms—not because of any neat separation between realms of “religion” and concepts of the “secular”—but because of a long-standing history of culturally informed religious social identity to which ethical sensibility (in comportment, character, and moral conduct) was central. These radical writers, known as progressive writers, challenged not only colonial rule, but also the indigenous social hierarchies in their own (Muslim) communities including conservative sexual politics, as well as the culturally exclusive nationalisms of the Indian right. Ultimately, I show that the decolonization era was characterized by a multiplicity of nationalist voices—alternative secular nationalisms—which was expressed through the cultural politics of Urdu language and literatures.

This dissertation is organized by the examination of three inter-related themes. The first theme is the influence of imperial statecraft upon Urdu poetic practice. I examine Urdu poetry over the long durée, from its ascendance under Mughal political disintegration to the early assertions of Indian nationalism, and argue that it was a relatively autonomous domain from

interference of colonial manipulation. Furthermore, in examining elite and popular modes of disseminating Urdu poetry, the continued prevalence of pre-existing Indo-Persian literary milieu in which mystical dimensions of Islam often influenced critical discourses of religious and state authorities, I show that the Urdu literary milieu was a shared social space cutting across religion, and allowing Muslims to express their individual subjectivity as well as attachment to place of origin.

The second theme explores how the field of ethics known as *adab*, which also means literature, as well as ethical conduct (*akhlāq*), was central in determining literary practice and moral conduct with specific focus on gender. I examine how *akhlāq* and *adab* were reformulated by twentieth century Urdu writers to challenge the sexually conservative politics of the Muslim upper-classes throughout the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. In examining first, the transformation of the culturally significant figure of the courtesan-prostitute, and second, how the emergence of progressive writers which was instantiated by a significant debate about obscenity and subsequent censorship, I show how both the concept of 'progressive' and the identity of 'Muslim' was variegated and diffuse from 1920s through the 1950s.

The third theme of this dissertation examines how radical and progressive writers from Muslim backgrounds of late colonial India, were critical of territorial nationalism. This theme examines more closely the relationship between minority Urdu culture, left politics, and nationalism. I show that progressive writers were critical of narrowly defined interpretations of the 'nation' as a territorially bound entity. In India, they produced an understanding of the nation as defined through urban modernism, as they migrated into the city, and played a role in both cinema and left-politics there. Also, in their commitments to international, revolutionary, and global forms of anti-colonial and anti-imperial resistance, many Urdu progressive intellectuals

articulated larger questions of social justice in supporting the demand for Pakistan. In doing so, my project not only contributes to an understanding of nationalism as a variegated phenomenon, but it also accounts for the impact that was made by those from the Urdu intellectual tradition, in the wider political arena. This dissertation is a departure from the existing literature on nationalism and Muslim identity, because it evaluates the role of both ethics and aesthetics in the fashioning of modern selfhood in South Asia.

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For my mother and father

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## **A Note on Non-English Terms**

This dissertation uses several Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, and Persian words. Except for proper nouns and place names, or terms familiar to English readers, all such terms have been italicized in the text. The meanings of all of these terms are defined either in the context, by parenthetical remarks, or footnotes. Instead of using diacritics, I have transliterated the terms such that they will be rendered phonetically understandable to American English readers.



## ***Introduction***

I am a follower of Iqbal, the great poet of the East, and as such I have never associated myself with any sect or religious faction. I have always thought of myself as a simple Muslim, one among millions, and the fears and apprehensions I have felt about the future, I have expressed in the form of a short story. That is my way of doing it. Before the Partition of India, Iqbal reacted to the insensitivity, disunity, and sectarianism of his countrymen by warning them: 'If you fail to see the light of reason, O people of Hindustan, History will fail to record even the fact that you once existed.' Ghulam Abbas, 1967<sup>1</sup>

The Amritsar born short-story writer Ghulam Abbas (1909-1982) belonged to a generation of Urdu intellectuals who came of age during the late colonial era of the 1920s and 1930s, lived through the painful transition to independence, and migrated to Pakistan. He wrote these words in a forward to a collection of short stories, including a futuristic tale entitled 'Hotel Moenjodaro' a dark, and almost prophetic, satire set in a Pakistan undergoing an Islamic Revolution in the closing years of the twentieth century. The tale begins with a grand reception in the eponymous hotel of 71 floors, filled with elites: journalists, intellectuals, and government representatives have convened to celebrate Pakistan's achievement of becoming the first nation to land on the moon. Abbas then describes how the event is denounced by a *mullah* (religious preacher) before a congregation in a Karachi mosque miles away, decrying the astronauts as *kāfir* (non-believers) who violated divine law. The *mullah* orates that the moon-landing epitomizes disbelief and sin rampant throughout the country. The cry and the moral tenor of his speech are echoed throughout Pakistan as *mullahs* then mobilize enough popular support to oust the government from power with an Islamic Revolution: thereafter, 'modern inventions' such as technology, music, and art, are declared 'evils' of Western civilization and banned; Arabic is made the national language of Pakistan; all knowledge except that taught within the *madrasa* is deemed unacceptable; universities, schools, and libraries are destroyed; and women are strictly secluded in the home as men are appointed their guardians. Before long, the theocratic rulers of

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<sup>1</sup> Ghulam Abbas, (Ed. Trans.) Khalid Hassan, *Hotel Moenjodaro and Other Stories* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996) p. xi-xii.

the country are divided into various factions, each having their own self-righteous interpretation of correct Islam. This eventually leads to a civil war, followed by anarchic chaos and lastly, a foreign invasion from a neighboring country. The story ends with British and American tourists travelling the desert by camel led by a guide who explains to them, "This is the spot where, before the enemy struck, stood the hotel Mohenjodaro with its 71 stories"<sup>2</sup>

Written a decade before General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamicizing regime came to power in Pakistan as well as Iran's Islamic Revolution, Abbas's story is startlingly visionary. His account of the rise of theocratic rule speaks to today's public debates in South Asia about inter-sectarian conflagration in Pakistan. The name of the grand hotel is evocative, as Mohenjodaro is the country's oldest archaeological site, the largest city settlement of the ancient Indus River Valley civilization located in the Pakistani province of Sindh. Yet "Hotel Mohenjodaro" is not only a scathing account about the dangers of blind adherence to ideologues speaking in the name of Islam; it is also a tale that does not spare a critique of the Pakistani elites who fill the 71<sup>st</sup> floor of the hotel, "reclining on sofas amongst hanging gardens, being attended to by liveried waiters."<sup>3</sup> For Abbas, writing in the late 1960s, Pakistan's elites may certainly have the resources to reach the moon, but progress in the name of science is all for naught if the masses were left ignorant and thus susceptible to ideologies promulgated by extremists. Given how Hotel Mohenjodaro ends up becoming an archaeological ruin and the lore of tour-guides, Abbas's story also bears an implicit critique of the Pakistani state, which has not provided the benefits of development and progress equally for all its citizens; it is also a call to Pakistan's educated elite to question their hubris and nationalism.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid p. 28

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p. 2-3.

Abbas, like many progressive Urdu intellectuals of his generation, questioned blind adherence to territorial nationalism and narrow sectarianism; he did not perceive Muslim modernity to be trapped in opposition to a rationalist worldview. As a writer for All-India Radio in the 1940s, and then editor of Radio Pakistan's journal, *Ahang*, Abbas's migration to Pakistan was not informed by any "sectarian", "communal" or "separatist" ideology (all terms which have been used to refer to Muslims as a particularly "religious" category). Many progressive and left-leaning Urdu intellectuals supported the demand for Pakistan, and migrated there given the political exigencies of two nations being carved out as the British departed the South Asian subcontinent. For Abbas, it was "the same sense of despair about our condition" that had gripped the pre-eminent anti-imperialist poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877 - 1938) - widely perceived as the intellectual architect of Muslim nationalism in the subcontinent - which led him to write the short story. The works and thought of Muhammad Iqbal, the bulk of which was articulated through Urdu poetry, had a tremendous influence upon the politics of generations of South Asia's Muslim intellectuals, most notably the Urdu progressive writers. Iqbal re-invigorated long-standing discourses of Muslim selfhood and the unmediated relationship between the individual and God, but in relation to the political challenges that confronted colonized Indian Muslims. Iqbal's assertion of the idea of *khudi* (selfhood) - that is, the power that Muslims as autonomous individuals could wield over their destiny - resonated across a wide political spectrum of the Urdu-speaking intelligentsia, from Marxists to the religious-*ulema* (scholars).

*Khudi ko kar buland itna  
Ke har taqdeer se pehle  
Khuda bande se khud puche  
Bata teri raza kya hai*

Strengthen your selflessness / selfhood to such heights

That before each plan, policy, and design,  
God himself would ask his slave  
-Tell me, what is your opinion?ø

The various forms of individual Muslim expression, in relation to such literary traditions, trajectories, and pursuits calls for probing the multiple political and intellectual currents that underlay the transition from colonial rule to national independence.

This dissertation is a modest attempt to chart a cultural and intellectual history of the Indo-Muslim milieu from mid-nineteenth colonial India, through the late colonial and early post-colonial period, with a specific focus upon Urdu literary and aesthetic spaces of urban Northern India. I contextualize the emergence of a radical literary movement in the subcontinent during the decades immediately preceding and following the attainment of formal independence in 1947. Literary radicalism of this era in North India was heavily dominated by Urdu writers from cities such as Delhi and Lahore, belonging to the Muslim bourgeoisie—the upper middle-class strata of Indian Muslim society known as the *ashraf* or *sharif*. In this dissertation, I attempt to answer the following questions: Why did writers from Muslim backgrounds, representing a relatively small fraction of the anti-colonial Indian intelligentsia, come to acquire eminent positions in the radical, left-leaning literary landscape? What was the role of Islam and Islamically informed ideas of ethics amongst left-leaning North Indian Muslims in relation to the decolonization era and ultimately, the demand for Pakistan? How were majoritarian and minoritarian politics interpreted and negotiated by Urdu intellectuals as they emphasized the ethical imperatives of anti-colonial endeavors? Underscoring the problematic distinction between secular (Indian) nationalism and religious (Muslim) communalism, anti-colonial movements of South Asia were also made up of a constellation of Muslim communists and socialists who supported the demand for Pakistan. That writers of Muslim backgrounds were disproportionately

represented in radical literature and left politics further begs the question: how and why did a minority group, defined ostensibly around "religious" identity, become the most vociferous campaigners for literary projects based upon "secular" aims? I do not take it as a given that the radical literati were "secular intellectuals." Moreover, my approach to narrating the historical processes underpinning the rise of progressive Urdu intellectuals does not conceive of the domains of religious and secular life to be oppositional forces, irrevocably at odds with one another.

I argue that the utopian projects of the Urdu literati were made possible by two processes: first, the shifting political context of nationalist movements in India, marked by various threads of anti-colonial resistance, were re-evaluated by intellectuals under the growing influence of communist, socialist, and Marxist ideas and movements; second, it was precisely because they belonged to a minority community which was perceived in official colonial discourses as "backwards", and "un-modern" perceptions which had very serious consequences for Muslim representational politics that progressive Urdu intellectuals took recourse in creatively reinterpreting their past. This creative interpretation of the past involved hitching the literary ethics of the North Indian Indo-Muslim milieu to the ethics of social justice projects pitted against not only colonial rule but also against indigenous elites of both majority and minority communities in India. Urdu literary spaces were often shared across religion and class in spite of increasing communitarian conflicts in the decades in question. The recourse to ethics was shaped by the Urdu intellectuals' religiously informed social identity, ultimately fashioning their utopian political projects. In this process, the meanings of both "progressive" and "Muslim" were variegated and diffuse.

## Muslim Identity and Secularization in South Asian Historiography

Ayesha Jalal's *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* is the most comprehensive historical analysis of the formation of Muslim political and social identities in modern South Asia. Highlighting the politics of Muslim leaders, officials, and writers from the Northern and Northwestern Indian regions of Punjab, Kashmir, and Sind during the mid nineteenth century through to the end of colonial rule in 1947, she dismantles long-held assumptions within the historical scholarship of modern South Asia which depict "Muslim" identity as a united, singular constituency on an inevitable path to a "separatist" national polity (Pakistan) often conceived as communal bigotry. "Rather than assuming the prior existence of a community of Muslims," and thereby disrupting heretofore binaristic narratives of a purportedly secular Indian "nationalism" as contrasted to a religious Muslim "communalism" she shows how the entire idea of "community" was shaped in relation to the changing politics of late colonialism: community meant very different things at different times for Indian Muslims. Jalal details how the colonial state defined the arenas of politics available for Indian Muslims— from enumeration schemes to educational reforms— which led to Muslims' "articulation of a discourse based on the colonial state's privileging of religious distinctions in Indian society."<sup>4</sup> However, as opposed to asserting that Muslims constituted an "imagined community" issuing from colonial processes of classifying colonized subjects based on religious difference, Jalal shows how narratives of nationalism conceived of by both Hindus and Muslims were variegated along regional, class, and linguistic lines; meanwhile Muslim voices "sought location within the emerging discourse on the Indian nation while trying to find accommodation

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<sup>4</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000). p. xii



for their sense of cultural difference.<sup>5</sup> By arguing that Muslims had long distinguished between Islam as faith and Islam as a demarcator of social difference, Jalal demonstrates competing visions of Muslim nationhood existed right up until the eve of independence. In examining the articulation of Muslim politics in the regions of Punjab, Kashmir, and Sind, she has shown how multiple conceptions of the nation were evinced through the production of particular regional Muslim identities formed as much by larger South Asian Muslim universalisms as by local religiously informed cultural identities. Jalal challenges the tendency to read back from the telos of the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent and revisits the history of the making of the nation, thereby delinking "religiously informed cultural identity from the politics of cultural nationalism."<sup>6</sup>

Most importantly for this dissertation, it is Jalal's strand of argumentation within *Self and Sovereignty* about the Muslim as individual<sup>7</sup> that is, as having an unmediated relationship with the Divine (Allah) to whom alone the Muslim submits<sup>8</sup> and concurrently, the Islamic worldview that emphasizes a balance between individual and community (as opposed to the duality of individual and community) which has implications for how to understand the "secular" preoccupations of the historical actors of this story. Islam, more accurately described as a way of life rather than a religion, values the autonomy of the Muslim as individual in relation to his Creator. As Jalal puts it, "a demand for total submission and accent on responsibility to the community has been interpreted as the lack of an inadequate conception of individual rights in Islam. Yet it is the fact of the individual's right to an unmediated relationship with Allah that explains the series of Islamic injunctions on personal responsibility to the community."<sup>7</sup> It is this balance between individual and community, in which responsibility to the community justifies

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. xiv

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. xii

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 7

the individual's right to an autonomy curtailed only by complete submission to the will of Allah, which has been open to different appropriations in various spatial and temporal contexts in Muslim communities. This is, as is argued throughout this dissertation, what also explains the ethical imperatives of socialist and left-leaning Urdu intellectuals of the decolonization era, who demanded equity, justice, and freedom within the political struggles of their time.

Elsewhere, most recently in her book *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*, Jalal has elaborated upon the question of religiously informed cultural identity and politics for the subcontinent's Muslims with specific focus upon the concept of *jihad* as an ethical notion. In popular as well as scholarly accounts, *jihad* has often mistakenly been taken to unequivocally translate as religiously formed ideological warfare against non-Muslims. By attending to the internal debates about *jihad* between Muslims within varying social and political contexts, Jalal makes a plea for historicizing the concept of *jihad* in South Asia by turning her attention to the much understudied interplay of ethics and politics in the unfolding of Muslim history. Of specific relevance to my own project, the book highlights the problems of asserting a stark distinction between Islam and concepts of the secular. By foregrounding how the ethical impetus of *jihad* informed anti-colonial nationalism, for instance, Jalal asserts that Muslim identity and politics in modern South Asia must not be seen as oppositional to the process of 'secularization.' That Islam is somehow opposed to secular modes of life has been the impetus of several studies about Muslim society and politics. Jalal differentiates between 'secularism' as an ideology and project associated with the building of the modern nation-state, 'projecting its values as superior, final, and absolute,' as opposed to 'secularization,' an open-ended historical process in which human beings 'abandon otherworldly concerns and focus on the here and now.'<sup>8</sup> In doing so, she argues for a historicization of the 'subtle overlap between the spiritual and secular in Islam,'

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<sup>8</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) p. 12

with specific consideration of Muslim political actors who framed anti-colonial resistance in South Asia in terms of temporal exigencies, over spiritual concerns.

This dissertation complements Jalal's scholarship in various ways. While I focus upon urban regions in Northern India that have already been the subject of several historical monographs, I shift my attention to the interplay between ethics and politics of Urdu writers. Progressive intellectuals writing in Urdu saw both India and Islam to be pertinent aspects of their identities. Furthermore, this dissertation focuses upon *the open-ended historical process of 'secularization' within Indo-Muslim intellectual milieu* from the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth. In examining the writings of progressive Urdu intellectuals, I show how Muslims in South Asia did not escape the historical process of secularization. By closely studying the interplay between South Asian nationalisms and Muslim modernities in South Asia, I suggest that alternative visions of secular nationalism were articulated by Muslims at the peak of the decolonization era. Urdu intellectuals from Muslim backgrounds responded in diverse ways to all-India nationalist politics at the center—a politics that often did not accommodate minority political sensibilities struggling against imperial rule. Many Muslims were disenchanted by dominant strands of nationalist politics represented by the All-India Congress Party; simultaneously, Muslims were not a united community, but fractured along regional, linguistic, and socio-economic lines. Urdu literature, poetry, and art evinced the creative use of Islamic ethical concepts to frame socialist, communist, and radical humanitarian ideals that sat in conjunction with culturally defined notions of religious Muslim selfhood. At the same time, Urdu was a shared social space between Hindus and Muslims (in spite of communitarian elements claiming otherwise). The vocabularies of social justice and ethics which emerge from the writings of progressive Urdu intellectuals speak to universal notions of humanism, while

drawing from a rich repository of Islamic and Indian ethical concepts. As a final caveat and lest this dissertation be somehow mistakenly interpreted as re-deploying troubling binaries such as “secular” “modern” Muslim as opposed to “traditional” “religious” Muslim, I want to again emphasize that Urdu progressive intellectuals epitomized how the process of secularization was very much the story of Muslim society within the era of South Asian nationalisms. These Urdu intellectuals resisted the hegemonic imperatives of colonial rule which emphasized India as a polity of discrete religious identities, as well as the cultural exclusivism of nationalist politics (in both their Indian and Pakistani variants). In order to understand how they did so, I examine Urdu literary spaces from the eighteenth century onwards, so as to demonstrate the intellectual traditions to which they owed their allegiances, and furthermore, how realms within Indian Islam had long existed in which there was ample room for expression of individual identity alongside attachments to community.

It bears repeating here that within the historiographical scholarship, there has been an insufficient examination of the formation of modern Muslim selfhood in the late colonial and post-colonial period. The complexity of modern South Asia has been overshadowed by a disproportionate emphasis on an understanding of nationalism through the category of religion or the machinations of the state. My project, by contrast, begins *by examining the role of ethics—as the intertwined relationship of individual moral character and the striving for social justice—in the political and cultural life of Urdu intellectuals*. The politico-literary projects of radical writers drew from a corpus of Indo-Persian ethical traditions and idioms, and were then applied to questions of social justice and emancipation on the eve of independence. From the 1930s onwards, rich strands of leftist, Marxist, and counter-Marxist thought informed Urdu literary practice. Writers from predominantly North Indian Muslim backgrounds concerned themselves

with anti-colonial politics of social justice, and adapted existing notions of ethics within the Urdu milieu. In examining how writers from a Muslim social milieu in colonial India and post-colonial India and Pakistan engaged with ethics in political life, my project is a counter to histories which have focused almost exclusively upon Hindu majoritarian political communities determining the trajectory of national life in South Asia.

### **Nationalism, History, and Literature: Urdu Language & Literary Spaces**

Without delving into the long and rather complicated history of the Urdu language, which is described in chapter one, a brief clarification about the relationship between Urdu and Hindi is warranted here. Today, the Urdu language is written as it has been for at least three centuries in the Perso-Arabic script and is exclusively identified with Muslims in South Asia, in spite of the fact that Hindi and Urdu in their spoken and grammatical variants are identical. Those claiming to speak Urdu in Pakistan (and North India) versus those who claim to be Hindi speakers in India and writing in the Devanagiri script borrowed from Sanskrit have, in point of fact, a shared language, regional colloquialism notwithstanding, where speakers of one can communicate freely with speakers of the other. However, at the level of the high literary register (novels, short-stories, and poetry) and official and print media (news broadcasts, state bureaucracy), Urdu today contains many more loan words from Arabic and Persian, whereas Hindi contains more words from Sanskrit. These distinctions within the colloquially shared language of Hindi-Urdu, were politically and historically produced from the nineteenth century onwards. This is when the shared linguistic landscape began to undergo a long, protracted vivisection, introduced initially through colonial imperatives having to do with the historical consequences of slaying Persian as the language of central state administration, and replacing it with English; the subsequent

votaries of Sanskritization from Hindu revivalists and reformers who sought to remove the Perso-Arabic script from the lower courts; and then becoming a full-fledged controversy between proponents calling for Hindi for Hindus, and Muslim reformers calling for Urdu as the language of all Muslims. The vernaculars were the very ground upon which community histories were contested, with political figures such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, throwing themselves into heated debates about Hindi versus Urdu in the twentieth century. The language we today know as Hindi is of rather recent origin, attributed in popular accounts with the reverberating myths so typical of nationalist histories, the most extreme being those that trace Hindi directly to the arc of ancient languages of a purportedly united Hindu India: up until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, what we today call Hindi, was called Urdu or Hindustani and written in the Perso-Arabic script. That is, it was not until the late nineteenth century that Urdu began to have a symbolic ascription as a Muslim language specifically. Throughout the late nineteenth century, the Hindi-Urdu controversy flared up and died down several times. As I show in chapter three and four of this dissertation, Hindus continued to write in the Perso-Arabic script well into the 1940s, and considered themselves to be speakers of Urdu. The notion that one was not considered truly cultivated and refined until they knew Urdu, resonated amongst elite classes of North Indian Hindus even in the years approaching Partition, which saw the most violent Hindu and Muslim strife. Thus the distinction between Hindi and Urdu to mean Hindu and Muslim respectively is a historically produced and politically contrived distinction, which this dissertation attempts to address. This shared culture persisted in spite of contemporary nationalist renderings which have severed a shared language into two distinct and separate pathways designated by differences in script, by a process of arbitrary bowdlerizing words deemed to be the sole provenance of the other community.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Christopher King, *One Language Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century Colonial India*

Despite its status as the shared spoken vernacular of North India, the Urdu language was increasingly seen as a “Muslim” one, by both the colonial state and Indian nationalists during a period of intensifying majoritarian (Hindu) and minoritarian (Muslim) politics in the twentieth century. Yet, the Urdu literary and cultural milieu linked two worlds. The first was an Indo-Persian cultural universe, which allowed for a conceptualization of selfhood in which religious identity could be accommodated alongside cultural difference. The second was a set of anti-colonial politics, which were shaped by leftwing ideology as well as internationalist and transnational movements that de-stabilized existing visions of unitary, national projects. The writers’ struggles went beyond a two-dimensional contest between the colonizer and the colonized: they included resistance against a wide range of issues, such as fascism, exclusionary communalism, and the conservative sexual politics of their societies. The radical literati’s understanding of nationalism and Indian society challenged colonial rule as well as mainstream nationalist politics. It was from within the intertwined discourses of ethics, moral conduct, and social justice that categories such as “moderate,” “liberal,” and “progressive” Muslims became enduring features of contemporary debates about modernity in South Asia. Viewing nationalism in light of these struggles reveals the diversity of secular, nationalist political projects that existed at the peak of the Indian nationalist movement.

In writing this dissertation, I faced numerous challenges associated with specific questions within South Asian historiography and postcolonial literatures. Is it possible to write an intellectual history that links literary genres to broader political contexts, without falling into the trap of reproducing a literary history? How is literature to be treated in historical narratives? I

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(New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation, and the Transition to Independence* (London: Routledge Press, 2005)

have attempted in this dissertation to understand the emergence of literary genres and the intellectual traditions with which they were linked, by showing how specific historical actors negotiated ideas of ethics with literary and political institutions, and what this ultimately signifies about wider shifting political contexts. In doing so, I argue that nationalism in late colonial India was not a homogenous project, nor were Muslim political actors necessarily either associated with the purportedly 'secular' project of India, nor with the ostensibly 'religiously' informed ideology of Pakistan. These are the assumptions, unfortunately, which have long underlain scholarship about nationalism in the making of modern South Asia.

In his highly influential work, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, political theorist Partha Chatterjee attempted to write an intellectual history of 'nationalist thought,' which for him is represented by a triumvirate of Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru. These nationalist figures represent specific 'moments' in the Indian history of nationalism (moments of departure, manoeuvre, and arrival, respectively). Chatterjee argues that he is attempting to fashion a theory of nationalism in a colonial context as opposed to proffering a historical argument about Indian nationalism. In doing so, however, he ultimately sidelines a great deal of Indian history. Chatterjee claims that all Indian nationalist thought 'here epitomized by individuals who have long been viewed as leading personalities within Indian nationalist histories' is trapped in 'post-Enlightenment rationalism.' This 'gift' from European colonizers to their Indian subjects, for Chatterjee, is a phenomenon that necessarily results in a homogenous nation-form, finding its final end in the modern post-colonial nation-state. By tracing a neat chart of moments represented by the said nationalists chosen, Chatterjee ultimately narrates Indian intellectual history according to a pre-determined framework, one that does not necessarily allow for the multiplicity of nationalist



voices in the decades approaching independence and Partition. Ultimately, for Chatterjee, all nationalist thought, in spite of the diversity of nationalist voices throughout modern South Asian history is a formulation against the liberal Enlightenment paradigm of reason. Such a view tends to reinforce the notion that the only Reason that exists, is that associated with Enlightenment Europe.

In another work, Chatterjee elaborates upon this thesis, by claiming Indian bourgeois elites resolved questions of tradition and modernity under colonial rule, by putting into motion a nationalist discourse. Chatterjee argues that this resolution involved invoking a set of binary oppositions: material/spiritual, public/private, and outer/inner, as Indian elites sought to preserve their cultural authenticity against the invasiveness of European colonial rule. However, this understanding of nationalism, one which again sees nationalism as a unifying homogenizing process, ultimately reifies the very Enlightenment categories of religious and secular that Chatterjee purports to challenge. Furthermore, his theoretical, rather than historical, interventions, excludes as much as it subsumes leaving out the question of Muslim identity formation and politics. In turning to the works of such writers as Muhammad Iqbal, Saadat Hasan Manto, Ghulam Abbas, Sajjad Zaheer, and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, it is impossible to see such neatly ordered distinctions. It would be just as difficult to note such a separation in the writings of an earlier set of Urdu litterateurs associated with the Muslim reform movements of the nineteenth century.

There have been a few historical works which have focused upon the lettered *sharif* milieu of Northern India, its associated Urdu aesthetics, and what specifically the relationship between aesthetics and claims about community had to do with the formation of Muslim nationalism. One notable dissertation has been Faisal Devji's, *Muslim Nationalism: A Founding*

Identity.ö Aiming to disrupt the statist narratives of Indian nationalism by examining the  
 öproblem of differenceö that Muslims posed, Devji embarks on narrating a history of Muslim  
 identity by reading claims to national identity within the nineteenth century literature of North  
 Indian Muslim salaried gentry. According to Devji, the emergence of Muslim nationhood is to be  
 located within the late nineteenth century for the most important definition of the öMuslim  
 communityö is öthat of the ömodernistö or öreformistö lettered men who gathered in the Aligarh  
 movementö made up of the *ashraf* working in the colonial administrationö calling themselves a  
*qaum* or nation.<sup>10</sup> He asserts that this Muslim nationalism, ösoon managed to set the terms of all  
 öIslamicöpolitics to this day,ö and further that this önationö was öpainted in the colors of colonial  
 violation.ö

To claim that Muslim nationalism was formulated through the reformist endeavors set  
 forth by the Aligarh movement is highly troubling given the multiple articulations of belonging  
 (*millat, watan, ummat, mulk*) that existed besides *qaum* throughout the nineteenth century. Nor  
 did *qaum* itself always translate into nation, but could also refer to tribe or clan. Furthermore, in  
 strictly focusing on the late nineteenth century, and in reading back from 1947 the öidea of the  
 Indian nation,ö thus seeing, the önationö in *all* literary endeavors, Devji winds up unwittingly  
 reifying standard historical accounts in which Muslim nationalism appears as homogenous and  
 undifferentiated. Lastly, since Devji's history does not approach the shifting politics of the

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<sup>10</sup> According to Devji, öIndian Islam is founded as a national identity, which is to say a polity based on the affiliation  
 of abstract Muslim individualsí [which] emerges during the second half of the nineteenth century among the  
 salaried gentry, (mostly working with the colonial administration) in north India. . öThe Aligarh Movement, as this  
 nationalism was calledí soon managed to set the terms for all öIslamicöpolitics down to this dayö not necessarily  
 through an active process of ideological expansion, but by privileging a totalizing vision of Muslimhood that was  
 appropriated by othersí from its inception, this national Muslimhood put into question the structuring of  
 subjectivity in terms of a nation-state, entertained little feeling for territory as country, and definite nationality very  
 ambiguously for those who fell outside its genteel milieuí Rather Muslimhood was created as a nationality that did  
 not deny the state but refused to participate in its definition of subjecthood as something divided between a  
 universal public citizenship and particular private community life.ö See Devji, Faisal. *Muslim Nationalism:  
 Founding Identity in Colonial India*. Diss. University of Chicago, 1993. p.19.

twentieth century, and the multiplicity of Muslim nationalisms that existed during the peak of anti-colonial movements in the subcontinent, he loses sight of the fact that it is not until the twentieth century that Muslims begin to conceptually work out understandings of their role within Indian nationalism. In not broaching the twentieth century, Devji charts a history from Aligarh reformists to Muslim League politics which completely ignores the numerous nationalist voices existing during the peak of the decolonization era.<sup>11</sup> These included the voices of progressive writers themselves anti-colonial nationalists who often did not subscribe to any one or the other political platform who very often, through their Urdu literary works, questioned their reformist forebears without a simplistic turn to all-India nationalist politics.

A recent historical monograph which has engaged much more closely with pertinent questions of history, collective self-fashioning (identity), and aesthetics, has been Markus Daechsel's *The Politics of Self-Expression: The Urdu Middle-Class Milieu in Mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan*. Daechsel argues that histories which feature Muslim separatist politics in the Punjab and United provinces in the decades approaching Partition, have focused in the main upon the politics of self-interest that is, politics about representative structures formulated by the colonial state, in which local elites have stood in for the interests of caste or religion, thereby underplaying issues of socio-economic class structures. He claims that the representational structures promulgated by the colonial state delayed the onset of a politically conscious middle-class. Thus, for the Urdu middle class milieu from the 1930s through the 1950s (a period of increasing Hindu-Muslim communitarian strife), the politics of self-interest was overshadowed by a much more significant set of politics, that of self-expressionism. Self-expressionism was based on the idea that collective subjectivities were formed by looking

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<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that *qaumiyat* did not at all play a role in determining the interests of the Muslim League heirs to the Aligarhists in fashioning ideological reasoning for 'Pakistan' but it fails to see that what 'Pakistan' meant was quite different at different times on the eve of Partition of the subcontinent.

inwards and being self-contained ultimately this middle-class expressed the goals of individuals and nations to be one and the same. The rise of a consumerist society in this period and Daechsel turns to sources such as advertisements played a formative role in determining how such self-expressionist politics arose, as nationalists expressed fears in pamphlets about the dangers of food, sex, filth, and bodily pleasures, related to communitarian conceptions of the other (Hindu and Muslim respectively): ultimately, communitarian identities for Daechsel have been about the politicization of aesthetics, as members of the middle-class sought to claim authentic expression of their inner essences. In focusing on figures such as Inayatullah Khan Mashriqi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and V.D. Savarkar, Daechsel demonstrates how individual introspection, together with a powerful language of cultural authenticity, ideologies of eugenics, militarism, and the rise of a consumerist society, resulted in a fascistic worldview amongst the middle-class one that identified individual with nation. By downplaying the politics of self-interest, Daeschel seems to delineate politics into two separate spheres, but it is unclear whether the historical process of identity formation in late colonial India, and self-expressionism specifically, can be endowed as a phenomenon separate from the powerful role of the state.

Daechsel's analysis of Urdu print culture and literature, from newspaper articles, pamphlets, and advertisements is detailed, and offers a persuasive account of how a shared linguistic arena (Urdu) between Hindus and Muslims determined how discourses of community were fashioned through notions of inward self-celebration and abnegation. However, Daechsel overlooks the fact that there were several individuals who may have asserted a politics of self-expression, but did not necessarily conflate their inner selves with the nation as such, having an uncritical engagement with nationalism. Additionally, nuances of the Urdu language and concepts which feature as part of its history are underplayed, and therefore, there is little in

Daechsel's account that explains any number of individuals who positioned their writings as ethical intervention to communitarian politics, and openly challenged fascistic and culturally exclusive political realms.

Meanwhile, studies which have focused upon Urdu progressive writers have heretofore examined the intellectuals from fields other than history, such as comparative literature, Urdu studies, and English. From within the field of Urdu studies, the progressive writers have preoccupied the principal subject of a plethora of works—given their substantial influence upon the study of the language—most recently Raza and Ali Mir's *Anthems of Resistance: A Celebration of Urdu Progressive Poetry*. Mir and Mir do not offer an argument about literature and nationalism so much as they wax nostalgic about the achievements of progressive writers, cataloguing their poetry and songs, documenting a combative tradition which resisted culturally exclusive forms of nationalism. While the work is a welcome addition to knowledge about the movement, and includes such voices as Pakistani feminist poet, Kiswhar Naheed, the anthology ultimately aims to trace a lost sensibility against communitarian bigotry by revolutionary poets. Thus, much of it is informed by nostalgia for a period wherein political interventions were made by left-literary endeavors by Urdu intellectuals. Mir and Mir ultimately do not attempt to examine what the progressive writers had to do with the larger political forces of nationalism, communitarian conflict, or indeed cultural and intellectual production against statist ideologies of secularism, nor does it deal adequately with how progressive literati questioned the sexual conservatism of their communities.

Two recent works which have creatively engaged with questions of literature, history, and nationalism in mid-twentieth century South Asia in focusing specifically upon Urdu progressive writers, have been Priyamvada Gopal's *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender,*

*Nation, and the Transition to Independence*, and Amir Mufti's *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. In her study of literary radicalism in India, Gopal has focused upon the "historical and existential actuality of the "internal" migration, dislocations, indenture, exiles and wanderings as well as forced immobility that always already underwrite national communities."<sup>12</sup> She argues that "the ideological terrain field of the nation had exploded into a "terrain of struggle" for several social and political forces that were organizing around issues ranging from gender, caste, and religion to labor, language and region--struggles which took place on the ground of the nation, but were inflected by phenomena of global dimensions." Thus Gopal succeeds in showing how Indian nationalism was a multi-variegated process by drawing attention to progressive literati. In focusing in two chapters on women writers such as Rashid Jehan and Ismat Chughtai, she shows how they transformed the "women's question" in India into a self-reflexive engagement with national identity, being subjects conceiving of their relationship to modernity, rather than simply objects and symbols of tradition and community. Gopal has also resisted the tendency in post-colonial studies to move away from an engagement with history, and in her insistence upon gender as the veritable crucible around which questions of modernism and self-critique were worked out, she disrupts conventional studies about the progressive literati which have tended to focus heavily on class to be the determining feature of the left-oriented progressive writers. She argues that rather than being a merely thematic importance, gender came to have a *constitutive* importance in literature—that is issues around the women's question, of education, domesticity, and family

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<sup>12</sup> Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation, and the Transition to Independence* (London: Routledge Press, 2005) p. 2

issues intersected with questions of citizenship, political responsibility, labor, sexuality, class, caste and religion.<sup>13</sup>

However, in spite of Gopal's attempt to show that literary radicalism in India was not a monolingual affair her dependence upon translations of vernacular Urdu literature renders her analysis of the literature incomplete. This is because there is no larger examination of the community from which these writers emerged, and the specific concepts with which they were engaging when confronting the conservative elites therein. This is all the more pronounced, given that Gopal has focused all her attention on four writers from the Indian Muslim community, Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto, and K.A. Abbas respectively, as critics and commentators. The question of how writers from a minority community became so influential within the progressive writers movement is thus elided. Furthermore, other than Manto, Gopal does not engage with progressive Urdu writers who migrated to Pakistan and what happens to the collective of progressive writers when they attempt to set up literary and political organizations in the new nation-state. Thus, while the story of Indian nationalism as a variegated phenomenon is addressed, Gopal remains silent on questions of selfhood in relation to the collective self-fashioning of Muslim minority community in colonial India, and how that played a formidable role in utopian projects during the transition to independence.

Conversely, Aamir Mufti's work begins from the very problematic of the minority figure in relation to the modern nation-state, and what this relationship brings to bear on post-colonial literatures. *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, from the outset, is an attempt to chart the history of the "Jewish question" of marginalization of a religious and cultural minority of modern Europe, in relation to its broader global repercussions, in particular, the crisis of Muslim identity in modern India. As Mufti puts

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 5

it, his work is “an attempt to make the cultural and critical legacies of the Jewish Question, speak to debates and dilemmas that are distinctly postcolonial.” Mufti sees the modern Hindu-Muslim communitarian conflict in India as a colonial version of what he calls “the exemplary crisis of minority” Jewishness in Europe. He argues that the emergence of this conflict in the late nineteenth century South Asia was essentially the re-iteration of the “Jewish question,” in a non-Western colonial society. Additionally, Mufti asserts that his work is about “the crisis of modern secularism and of postcolonial secularism in particular, at whose center is the terrorized and terrifying figure of the minority.”<sup>14</sup> Exploring the literary aspects of this crisis, he ultimately argues that, “the crisis of Muslim identity must be understood in terms of the problematic of secularization and minority in post-Enlightenment liberal culture as a whole, and cannot be understood in isolate from the history of the Jewish question in Europe—beginning with the eighteenth century—and that its “paradigmatic narratives, conceptual frameworks, motifs concerned the very question of minority existence, which then were disseminated globally in colonial and semi-colonial conditions.”<sup>15</sup> In examining South Asian Muslim figures such as Abul Kalam Azad, Saadat Hasan Manto, and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mufti’s analysis demonstrates that rather than seeing the nation-form as a unifying project—à la Partha Chatterjee—minority literatures actually disrupt the homogenizing impetus of nationalism. Thus, rather than being a homogenizing process, nationalism is also “the disrupter of social and cultural relations.” That is, it reconstitutes populations and societies creating minorities—groups that are always in exile, and “exile being the actualization of the threat inherent to the condition of minority.”

Mufti’s argument is a provocative one. His chapter analyzing the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz entitled, “Towards a Lyric History of India,” alerts the reader to the subtle overlap in the

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<sup>14</sup> Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* p. 2



leftist poet's work between the secular and the religious. Mufti's argument is one about the exclusionary effects of the homogenizing narratives of nationalism, though he raises questions more comparative in the literary sense, rather than historical in scope. In ultimately claiming that processes of minoritization in South Asia are carry-overs from liberal Enlightenment paradigms of othering (i.e., Jewish question in Europe), Mufti completely ignores the local, regional, and specific urban contexts of late colonial India that had a strong role in determining the minoritized existence of Muslims. In claiming that processes of minoritization specific to colonial India owe their genesis to European contexts, he falls into the trap of seeing such processes as entirely derivative of colonial contexts—thus, the comparative impetus of his analyses become problematically causal. Why, for instance, would the intellectual and literary practices related to othering in eighteenth century Europe be more pertinent to understanding the writings of Urdu intellectuals of twentieth century South Asia, than say, pan-South Asian Persian intellectual traditions of eighteenth century South Asia? While Marx's *Jewish Question* is certainly relevant for South Asia precisely because of how the secular state conceives of religious difference and treats religious minorities, Mufti's comparative project winds up re-creating binaries between East and West (Indian Islam and Europe) that inadequately deals with the transnational and international linkages being forged by Indian anti-colonial political actors in the twentieth century (the very conditions under which progressive Urdu literati were writing). Additionally, while Mufti offers a compelling definition of minority and minoritization, and indeed attempts to problematize the ideology of secularism so central to the modern nation-state, (here the modern Indian nation-state), it is unclear how he distinguishes between secularism and secularization. In not defining these terms from the outset, secularism and secularization are ultimately conflated, and secularization is ultimately seen as a process bestowed upon South Asia by European

colonial frameworks. As stated earlier, secularism is an ideology, fashioned from projects of modernization initiated in the building of nation-states, rooted within a specific European history in which the values of Enlightenment reason were seen to be superior, final, and absolute. Secularization, however, is an open-ended historical process, whereby historical actors look beyond spiritual concerns, and apply their moral and intellectual energies on the present, temporal issues. In this sense, decolonization era intellectuals appropriating Urdu literary traditions tied to religious sensibilities, much like their forebearers, were part of a long history of secularization within Muslim societies— a history albeit complicated by colonial prescriptions about religion in India.

This dissertation is an attempt to historicize the emergence of literary and intellectual traditions by showing that the disproportional engagement by the Urdu literati with progressive, communist, and leftist literary and social justice projects— all anti-colonial and anti-imperial— was no accident. I examine how ethics formed the principal terrain out of which new moral economies were put into motion by progressive intellectuals, and charting their longer genealogies in this historical narrative. To reiterate, the Muslim is often seen as the bearer of religious identity, and therefore, a particularity. The historical issue in this dissertation deals with how Muslims were disproportionately influential in a number of political projects in North India on the verge of independence: leftist, communist, anti-imperial, anti-colonial— that in their variety would be generally viewed as “secular.” How do we account for this? Examining Urdu literary traditions provides a window into understanding this problem. Such literary traditions are neither secular nor religious in a strict sense. Moreover, because Islam has long allowed for the expression of individual autonomy, progressive intellectuals were able to harness literary

traditions of self-expression to political projects of liberation while maintaining individual criticisms and engagements with nationalism.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. In chapter one, *Poetry and the Political Past: Muslims, "India," and Narratives of Decline, 1800-1929*, I examine shared literary spaces and the language of Urdu in relation to a long-standing history of culturally informed religious identity for Muslims in North India. In order to understand why the specific issue of "progress" came to pre-occupy the literary milieu of the 1930s through the 1950s, I explore how the lexicon of decline and related moral discourses has long preoccupied the literary spaces of Urdu, indeed from its very inception. I argue that the shared Urdu language and literary spaces which formed in moments of imperial disintegration if not decentralization, continued to carry over into colonial and post-colonial periods. In chapter two, *The "Disreputable" Woman: Literary Ethics Beyond National Frames, c. 1857-1952* I show how the moral discourses from the late nineteenth century onwards, that emerged around a specific social figure—the courtesan—was at once a figure of nostalgia and moral reprobation for Indo-Muslim society. I demonstrate how this figure was then invoked in progressive literary domains of the twentieth century as a figure which came to stand in for a secular Indo-Muslim polity. In chapter 3, *Progressive Literary Ethics: Challenges to Sharif Cultures, 1932-1947* I focus upon two political-literary interventions by progressive writers which destabilized notions of respectability and related social, literary, and ethical conduct. Chapter four examines how many Urdu progressive intellectuals identified with the city of Bombay as home, over and above the Indian nation—and articulated nationalist voices in the form of urban modernism. In chapter 5 I attempt to trace the

broader international forces which informed the goals of the progressive literati, and how such forces overlapped with various ideas of Pakistan held by leftists.

## Chapter 1

### Poetry and the Political Past: Muslims, 'India' and Narratives of Decline, 1800-1929

In the thirteenth century of the Muslim era when the decline of the Muslims had already entered its most extreme phase, and, along with their wealth, renown and political power, their great achievements in the arts and sciences had also departed from them, by some good fortune there gathered in the capital, Delhi, a band of men so talented that their meetings and assemblies recall those of the days of Akbar and Shahjehaní In the days when I first came to Delhi, autumn had already come to this gardení Yet even amongst those who remained, were men whom I shall always feel pride at having seen, men whose like it seems that the soil of Delhi, and indeed of all India, will not produce againí ó Muhammad Altaf Husain Hali (1897)<sup>16</sup>

Gone are the days when I would be alone in a gathering.  
In my garden now, I have many confidants. ó Muhammad Iqbal (1929)

### Introduction

Narratives of decline pervade the popular, political, and scholarly accounts of Muslims in South Asia. Colonial, nationalist, and Marxist renderings of öHindustanö in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as periods of simultaneous öMuslimö and öfeudalö decay, many of which were shaped by Orientalist history-writing about India, have seeped into one other.<sup>17</sup> For the Muslim upper-middle class urban elites (*ashrāf*) of Northern India, the loss of Mughal sovereignty in 1857 and the onset of the high noon of colonial modernity led them to reconsider notions of individual ethical conduct in relation to a community's moral decline. Politics, or rather political loss, as experienced by the *ashrāf* was a deeply aesthetic phenomenon, and the lament for Urdu as a dying language is inseparable from the history of its modernity. The theme

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<sup>16</sup> Altaf Husain Hali, *Yadgar-e Ghalib* (New Delhi: Ghalib Institute, 1986), cited in *The Oxford India Ghalib: Life, Letters, and Ghazals*, ed. Ralph Russell, pg. 40

<sup>17</sup> The theme of öOriental Despotismö in particular was a prominent feature of European history-writing about South Asia. Colonial historians then translated the waning political fortunes of Mughal emperors and the decline of the court and army in the eighteenth century to describe an overall erosion of Indian society, economy, and culture during the eighteenth century. Seen to be a period of anarchy and turbulence the eighteenth century has only recently been revisited as a period of transition. Based on the works of C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (Routledge, New York: 2002), and others, (Seema Alavi, ed. *The Eighteenth Century in India*, London: Oxford University Press, 2008), we know now that the eighteenth century was a period of regional dynamism and was characterized by the establishment of vibrant successor states to the Mughal imperial polity.

of the Muslim community's moral failings found ardent expression in Urdu poetry in colonial India.

Poetry was the main artery of Indo-Islamic salon culture, around which codes of ethical conduct, civic virtue, and cultural refinement were furnished. Poetic practice by the nineteenth century became the authenticator of community action. Central to this poetic practice were tropes of decline, which justified elite self-perception as advisors for a wider Muslim community. In this chapter, I first introduce the early modern Urdu socio-poetic milieu in two sections. In the remaining half of the chapter, I turn to how notions of political representation, a society in decline, as well as identification with Islam and with India, were cultivated in two shifting post-imperial political contexts under colonialism for Muslims: the Mughal loss of power in 1857 and the period following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1917.

The argument here is about both continuity and change. There is a persistence of Muslim self-expression through multiple moments of both imagined and real political decline. The long-standing phenomenon of poetic genres which have long sustained the expression of the Muslim as an individual, did not foreclose possibilities of participating within the wider Muslim community, nor did it foreclose ethical critique of society. This ethical critique of society is one that is intimately linked to aesthetics, especially aesthetics which invoke political and social decline. The use of earlier poetic genres, to which notions of loss and decline were central, and themselves embedded as critiques of state and societal power, made them prone to being creatively re-worked by intellectuals of the Indo-Muslim milieu of colonial North India in the context of imperial disintegration. Genres of Urdu poetry which emerged during periods of imperial disintegration and political fracture were thus re-invigorated by Muslim elites during the early twentieth century because of the possibility of liberation from colonial rule.

## Poetry as Indic-Mughal (*Hindustani*) Landscape: Court, Street, and Shrine

It was during the late eighteenth century, as centralized Mughal power was eroding, that the Urdu language achieved considerable efflorescence, as its literature and poetry was patronized and cultivated within independent regional kingdoms in such places as the Deccan. Urdu, however, did not replace Persian as the specialized lingua franca of elites, though the language elicited a wider audience, increasingly making it the colloquial vernacular of North India.<sup>18</sup> Given the decline of cities such as Delhi and Agra during the 1700s owing to invasions from the North and Northwest (Persia and Central Asia), Urdu poetry of the Mughal heartland was replete with criticisms of state corruption. During the moment of its emergence and early promulgation, Urdu poetry contained powerful critiques of the state and religious authority. I argue that the anti-authorial aspects of the Urdu poetic milieu—specifically its critiques of law-based interpretations of Islamic ways of life—later symbolized for the nineteenth century class of elite Muslims, a Mughal hegemony that long outlasted Mughal rule: such poetry became part and parcel of a shifting Urdu literary canon. Poetry in the eighteenth century, however, was an expressive manifestation of Indo-Persian societal and political ties between various groups, classes, and institutions within Hindustan.

The Urdu poetic milieu connected three actual and symbolic locales of the Indo-Muslim/Indic-Mughal city landscape: the court/palace, the market/street, and the mosque/shrine. The domain of the court included not only the epicenter of the sovereign's power, his palaces, gardens, and interiors, but also extended to the homes of functionary elites and notables. The street, which included taverns, coffee-houses, the quarters of courtesans, vendors, merchants, and

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<sup>18</sup> For more, see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001)

by-ways, linked every-day commercial activities to local and state officials, reflecting a loosely structured regulating Mughal imperium. Meanwhile, the separate, yet somewhat interconnected worlds of the *masjid* (mosque) and the *dargāh* (shrine) linked the religious functionaries (*pirs*, *murshids*, *imāms*) and theologian-scholars (*ʿulema*) to the devotional practices of the popular sphere (even if in oppositional ways). The cultural institution of the *mushā'irah* (poetry symposium), central to the cultivation and performance of Urdu poetry, enabled a somewhat associational unity between these three spaces, for poets traversed, reconstructed, and critiqued the multiple locales of the Indo-Muslim/Indic-Mughal landscape within their verses. The *mushā'irah* was a space which brought together not only poets, but diverse men of letters, exemplifying the Indian ecumene, what C.A. Bayly has defined as, a form of cultural and political debate typical of North India before the emergence of the newspaper and public association, yet persisted in conjunction with the press and new forms of publicity into the age of nationalism.<sup>19</sup>

The *mushā'irah* is the emblematic cultural universe of South Asian Muslim-ness associated with the extant Mughal heartland of Northern Hindustan, and the practice of composing, reciting, and debating Urdu poetry constituted its chief aims. Over the twentieth century, many poets of the region retained this Northern Hindustani location within their *takhallus* (pen-name) the towns (*qasbahs*) and cities of their origin becoming part of their poetic names: Khumar Barabankavi (Barabanki), Josh Malihabadi (Malihabad), Akbar Allahabadi (Allahabad), Firaq Gorakhpuri (Gorakhpur), Jalandari, Jigar Muradabadi (Muradabad), Sahir Ludhianvi (Ludhiana). The *mushā'irah* made its first appearance in the Indo-Persian literary milieu during the sixteenth century, serving as spaces for intellectual rivalries

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<sup>19</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780– 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 5.



between poets, competitive arenas for poets seeking patronage, technical workshops, and gossipô as the primary institution of literary culture, fostering Urdu language and poetry.<sup>20</sup> The typical *mushā'irah*, was a salon-like sphere, consisting of a small gathering of poets and high-ranking notables seated on the floor, passing around a candle before the poetø whose turn it was to recite. This type of *mushā'irah* continued to exist throughout the latter nineteenth century in colonial North India along similar lines, and to some extent, the format is followed in contemporary settings. Some of the most popular *mushā'irahs* today are those which bring together Indian and Pakistani poets in the cities of the Persian Gulf, such as Dubai and Jeddah, where the audience is seated on the floor, participating with poets in appreciative applause, exercising agreement or disagreement over various couplets, and discerning also to what degree the poetry is an accurate reflection of the contemporary political climate.

Throughout the early modern period, a *shāhī* (royal) *mushā'irah* in the Mughal imperial capital of Delhi was held in the sovereignø *divān-e khās* (assembly of the prominent), or at times, the Red Fort, though they were never open to the majority of the cityø people. The first records of *mushā'irahs* emerge from *tazkirās* (biographical testimonies), which recount the details of such sessions held in the homes of esteemed poets and notables, such as in the home of the prominent Sufi mystic of the Naqshbandi Mujaddidi order, Khwājā Mīr Dard (1721-1785). It was here where õmasters of Urdu held discussions on how to improve the language, what words and expressions to import into it, and what to avoid as archaic and vulgar.ö<sup>21</sup> Debates in the *mushā'irahs* were structured around the place of Persian within Urdu, and to what extent local Indian terms and phrases could or should be included, as political and economic conditions

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<sup>20</sup> See, CM Naim, *Urdu Texts and Contexts* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); Munibur Rahman, õThe Mushairahö in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, no. 3 (1983), pp. 75-84; Frances Pritchett, A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, in (Ed Sheldon Pollock), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) p. 894

<sup>21</sup> Munibur Rahman, õThe Mushairahö in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, no. 3 (1983) p. 79.

fractured the wider Persianate world during the late eighteenth century. Even as Urdu flourished during this period, many poets were bilingual, and Persian continued to be the language of philosophy, the court, as well as politics.<sup>22</sup>

Several genres of poetry, such as the *masnavi*, *rubā'ī*, and *qasīda*, were recited and debated within a *mushāi'rah*, but it was the *ghazal*, a love lyric composed of rhymed verse organized in metered couplets, which acquired prominence within this particular setting. The genre is not unique to Urdu, and has been composed in various languages of the Muslim world, including Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. Several themes emerge within the world of the *ghazal*: the lover (*āshiq*) or mystic articulates his loathing for what he perceives as the wide-spread hypocrisy of a legally defined, that is, *shari'at* society. Instead, he seeks *visāl* (union) with the *māshuq* (beloved) or God, who is often described as an idol (*sanam*, *but*). In order to fully attain divine union, the mystic/lover must not only undergo persecution by a law-bound society, at times denouncing himself as a *kāfir* (non-believer), but must simultaneously endure the cruelty and tortures of the beloved. This beloved is one who prohibits the lover/mystic from entering a private world of pleasures and excesses that defines the *mahfil*, *bazm*, or *majlis* the sanctuaries and circles of mystics and poets. One of the definitive features of the world of the *ghazal* is the metaphor of wine, as intoxication in awe of the beloved (spiritual or earthly), and as an open opposition of any *shari'at* prescriptions regarding the consumption of alcohol. The wine-drinker and the server of wine (*saqī*) are intimately linked to one another in their mutual experience of beauty, love and truth, and divine union.

I argue that the continued popularity of the Urdu *ghazal* lies in its somewhat subversive power, for the themes of dissent and protest have long pervaded its lyrical universe. While in the

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<sup>22</sup> See Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (May, 1998), pp. 317-349

nineteenth and twentieth century, it came to be associated with aristocratic depravity, the *ghazal* itself was rooted in much older critiques of state and societal decadence. The *ghazal* genre combined aspects of Perso-Islamic modes of philosophical and theological thought—broadly in line with Sufi mystical discourses—with local Indian folklore and folk practices. In this regard, Sufis have always had an ambivalent relationship towards the state as well as society, and this informed the communicative modalities of the *ghazal*. Sufi discourses viewed the state with disapproval and suspicion, often seeing it as deviating from pious practices associated with the life of the Prophet. From their very inception during the ten and twelfth centuries, movements of Sufi mystics, ascetics, thinkers, and theologians, not only questioned the policies of wealth accumulation by palace courtiers in the context of Islamic conquest and expansion, expressing disapproval of lavish courtly lifestyles, but Sufis themselves also came to play an important role as local and alternative, religious authorities.<sup>23</sup> In the absence of *ʿulema* (scholars) in lands and regions on the peripheries of the urban centers within Muslim empires, people turned to Sufis as local bodies of authority, who had established their own centers and orders (*khanaqās* and *silsilāhs*). In the Indo-Persian cultural milieu of the Mughal empire, the folklore which had found expression in the vernaculars of the *bazār* (marketplace), also melded with the languages of pilgrims on their way to devotional centers and shrines (*dargāhs*) sustained by Sufi orders. Urdu poetry, in this sense, was deeply connected to Islamic mysticism, and to the relationship between devotee and the divine. In the words of Khwājeh Mīr Dard of Delhi:

To consider the art of poetry something easy grows from ignorance, and it is easy not to think of any perfection out of non-understanding and ignorance; for either the ascetics without experience of Reality out of their foolishness regard those disciples of the Merciful as too much talking, or the ignorant scholars, out of

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<sup>23</sup> See Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Anne-Marie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina Press, 1975); and Carl W. Ernst, “From Hagiography to Martyrology: Conflicting Testimonies to a Sufi Martyr of the Delhi Sultanate” in *History of Religions XXIV* (May, 1985).

the pride of their own book-reading, count these mirror holders of -He taught them speech as nonsense-talkers. Then, for whom would poetry appear and from whose mouth would a tasteful word come into existence? It needs much strong and concrete relation with the Inventor, the Bounteous Bestower, so that harmonious and charming speech emerges from the tongue. Not every animal, unacquainted with speaking, finds this inner meaning from speech, and not every man-shaped being who is far from humanity, can carry the burden of this trust.<sup>24</sup>

Even as Sufis excluded themselves from the discourse of the state, abstaining from acquiring wealth, and attempting to lead lives of poverty, the establishment of shrines and devotional centers were not entirely separate from the workings of state power. The authorities who managed the shrines (*murshid*, *pīr*), obtained donations from monarchical rulers who in turn, provided patronage for these sites in order to maintain their legitimacy in the eyes of the people frequenting devotional sites. Popular Islamic practices, thus, were sustained and supported by centralized state authorities. *Ghazal* poetry, while flouting social prescriptions about love and desire, was also linked to critiques of state officials and religious orthodoxy. Since the *ghazal* was intimately linked to Sufi conceptions of the relationship between the believer and the divine, it was inseparable from the kinds of criticisms launched against the *ʿulema* and other established religious authorities.

The *ghazal*, however, was also the love poetry recited in the court, the genre literally means, "speaking about love to a woman," and so hegemonic did the tropes of the *ghazal* become, (and so central to court life were its recitations), that poets were able to critique the religious elites and officials, without invoking the wrath of the state authorities by the double-entendres of earthly versus spiritual love built therein. The themes of *kufir* (unbelief) and *iman* (faith) were reworked within the literary conventions of the *ghazal*, and the poet often claimed to stand at the threshold of disbelief and faith because of his devotion to the object of desire

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<sup>24</sup> Khwājeh Mir Dard, *Shām-e-Mahfil*, as quoted in Anne Marie Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth-Century Muslim India*, (New York: Brill Press, 1976) 113.

through *ishq* (love; state of ecstasy) and desire for *visal* (union) with the beloved or God. The most famous of love panegyrics of the medieval Islamic world, is the tale of the two lovers Laila and Majnun who are separated from one another through societal dictates, though Majnun's love for Laila is so strong, he is transformed in mystical poetics as a metaphor for the ideal lover of God. For his crazed passion for Laila, Majnun is accused of *kufir*, but as many Sufi odes declare, Majnun's '*kufir*' represents greater devotion to the divine, than even the pious man saying his prayers who is distracted by Majnun who is unable to keep his focus upon God. Sufis writing in Persian from the ninth century onwards used the story of Laila and Majnun in relation to mysticism, to illustrate the concept of *fana fi' Allah* (egolessness in the way of God). To this day, popular *qawwalis* in South Asia invoke the story of Majnun walking in front of a pious man on his prayer mat bowing towards God. The man stops praying and asks, "What punishment shall I mete out for you who have interrupted my prayer?" to which Majnun responds, "I am in love with a mere mortal, and I am utterly unbroken in my contemplation and devotion for her, and you stand there worshipping God, yet you have broken your prayer and were so easily distracted from devotion to Him."

Love for the divine, in the fourteenth century poet's, Amir Khushraw's *Chaap Tilak*, is expressed through metaphors of earthly love, as the female lover, so overcome by a glance of her beloved, claims that the *tilak*, the very mark on her forehead signifying her as Hindu, disappears in the midst of mystical union. Thus, any outwardly mark of the Hindu as idolator, dissipates in the face of confronting and embracing the beauty and gaze of the divine.

You have stolen my gaze, my identity, by just a glance.  
 By making me drink the wine of love,  
 You have intoxicated me by just a glance;  
 My fair, delicate wrists with green bangles in them,  
 Have been held tightly by you with just a glance.  
 I give my life to you, oh dyer of cloth

You have dyed me in yourself, by simply a glance.  
I give my whole life to you oh, Nijam,  
You have made me your bride, by just a glance.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, poets could communicate irreverence towards established socio-religious norms as well as clerical religious authority, but this did not in any way preclude them from being a part of the Muslim community.<sup>26</sup> In the fourteenth century, we see in the poetry of Amir Khusraw the value attached to an individual's love of the divine, even if expressed in the manner of 'paganism' as superior to the teachings of the legal scholars and religious elites who may have monopolized scriptural traditions.

I am a pagan, a worshipper of love: the creed of Muslims I do not need,  
Every vein of mine has become taut like a wire  
the (Brahman's) girdle I do not need.  
Leave from my bedside, you ignorant physician!  
The only cure for the patient of love is the sight of his beloved ó  
other than this no medicine does he need.  
If there be no pilot in our boat, let there be none:  
We have god in our midst: the sea we do not need.  
The people of the world say that Khusrau worships idols.  
So he does, so he does; the people he does not need  
the world he does not need.<sup>27</sup>

Amir Khusraw experimented with various languages within his poetry during the Delhi Sultanate, combining Persian with local Indian languages (Hindavi, Braj) as he composed verses inspired by his devotion to Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya (1238 - 1325), the renowned Sufi saint of the Chisti order. Khusraw's new Persian poetry not only reached beyond the borders of the South

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<sup>25</sup> Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw, The Poet of Sultans and Sufis* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2005)

<sup>26</sup> For more on the distinction between Islam as faith and Islam as a demarcator of social difference in South Asia, especially in relation to normative prescriptions of Islamic practice in relation to Muslim as individual subject, see Ayesha Jalal, *Self & Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001) p. 2

<sup>27</sup> Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw, The Poet of Sultans and Sufis* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2005)

Asian subcontinent into the wider Persianate world, but the poet was able to forge a link between the imperial court and the Sufi *khānaqah*, a relationship which was often tense.<sup>28</sup>

Much of *ghazal* poetry continued to be a mode of expression from which critiques of authority figures were possible, but the socio-political turbulence of North India during the eighteenth century made these critiques increasingly linked to narrations of city decline. The sermonizing and moralizing *muhtasib* (religious official), *waiz* (preacher), *nasih* (counselor), and *sheikh*, who represented both religious and state authority, were often the butt of ridicule and defiance. The eighteenth century poet, Mirza Rafi Sauda (1713-1781) mocks the moralist who preaches to society about the merits of temperance, but frequents the tavern:

Even as the Shaikh passed by the tavern in the eve  
It is beyond Sauda to describe the treatment meted him by the tavern mates.<sup>29</sup>

Saуда's satirical poetry was popular in his time, and his criticisms were not only delivered in the genre of the *ghazal* but also the *masnavī*, as he bemoaned the corruption of state officials, such as the *kotwāl* (the chief police officer) of Delhi (Shahjahanābad), who instead of maintaining law and order, was involved in bribery, being nothing more than a petty pilferer who led a confederacy of thieves.<sup>30</sup> The scope of his satire extended beyond the state, to society as well, as he harshly condemned hypocrisy while insisting upon values of individual privacy, free from the interference and judgement from moralists:

I never understood what prompts a man,

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<sup>28</sup> Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw, The Poet of Sultans and Sufis* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2005). See especially chapter two, in which Sharma discusses how Amir Khusraw was one of the few poets who was both a court poet composing verses lauding kings, as well as a Sufi poet whose poetry was recited in the Islamic mystical context of the *khanāqah* popularized amongst pilgrims and devotees.

<sup>29</sup> *Koi maikhane se na gahe sham ko guzrey / Kya kahun Sauda jo randoN ne suluk un se kiya*

<sup>30</sup> *Masnavi dar hajv-e sidi kafur kotval-e shahjahanabad (A Masnavi Satirizing a Kotval of Shahjahanabad)* in *Kulliyat-e sauda*, Vol. 3 ed. by Muhammad Shamsuddin Siddiqi (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1973). Trans. Henry Court, 1872. See Frances Pritchett, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/saуда/index.html?#index>

To ferret out the vices of his neighbors  
 Surely a decent human being can  
 Find a much better object for his labors.  
 The rosary was meant for other things  
 Than counting up a fellow-creature's sins  
 Suppose my every sin a deadly one  
 Does that stop you living a life of piety?  
 I sin in my own way, involving none:  
 Does that in any way corrupt society?<sup>31</sup>

Sauda's satire about the ethics of respecting individual privacy, was possible not only because of the specific eighteenth century context of political tumult, but also because Islam had long afforded the individual Muslim as having an un-mediated relationship with God, and therefore the argument has long been made by the Muslim believer that his sins are to be a matter between himself and God. This finds resonance, for instance, in the often repeated story that the second Caliph of Islam, Umar ibn al-Khattab (586-590) remembered in Islamic traditions as a rigid ruler who strictly enforced moral injunctions within the early Islamic community as it expanded rapidly beyond the Arabian peninsula decided not to punish a group of wine-drinking group of reveling Muslims since he had obtained evidence of their wrongdoing by spying.<sup>32</sup>

The Urdu poetic milieu of the eighteenth century questioned social conventions, religious orthodoxy, and state authority. Urdu poets were responding to the pietist renewal movements such as those led by Shah Wali-Ullah (1703-1762), amongst others, in the eighteenth century. Such renewal movements, made up of traders and merchants who were able to gain a foothold in cities, garrison towns, and administrative centers because of increasing commercialization and political instability, advocated against shrine cults and what they perceived as decadent mores, calling for a renewed unity between the sacred and the profane, and for a return to the faith in the

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<sup>31</sup> Ralph Russell, Khurshidul Islam, "The Satires of Sauda" in, *Three Mughal Poets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pg. 52-53.

<sup>32</sup> See Sadiq Reza, "Islam's Fourth Amendment: Search and Seizure in Islamic Doctrine and Muslim Practice" in *Georgetown Journal of International Law*, Vol. 40, No 3, 2009.



tradition of the Prophet.<sup>33</sup> It was this wider context of eighteenth century dynamism where debates took place between scholars (and functional elites) who reinforced state interests, following standardized syllabi for legal texts from well-known seminaries, and the newly emerging groups representing pietist revival, which stood for more radical social change that influenced Urdu poetics. Urdu poets offered a somewhat unique perspective. Poetry often was a means of challenging societal and state authority.

The strongest feature of Urdu poetry the feature of the individual inciting an ethical critique of state and society was deeply intertwined within its aesthetics, and the context of political turbulence as well as the decline of centralized political authority, allowed such poetry to flourish with greater gusto. This perspective was often shaped by the reflections of the individual poet himself, commenting upon self-conduct in relation to his superiors, and the role of individual as ethical commentator informed the shifting politics in the making of the Urdu classical poetic canon. Thus, the poet Mir Taq Mir (1723 ó 1810), referring to bowing before a sovereign (be he the emperor or the religious functionary), composed the following:

No one can subserviently bend their head  
Alas, you and I are mere slaves of god, and not the divine himself.<sup>34</sup>

It was out of such rich poetic traditions of individual expression that the most celebrated poet of Mughal culture, Mirza Muhammad Asadullah Khan Ghilab (1797-1869) emerged. Ghilab

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<sup>33</sup> Jamal Malik, "Muslim Culture and Reform in Eighteenth Century South Asia," in *JRAS, Series 3*, 13, 2 (2003), pp. 227-243. It should be noted, however, that Shah Wali-Ullah's thought was far more complex than a simple rejection of devotional practices at shrine cults, and that Shah Wali-Ullah was interested in critiquing the excesses of Sufism. As Ahmed Dallal has noted, even though Shah Wali Ullah was concerned with political division and disintegration, the solutions he proposed were found outside the realm of politics, in society, stressing the role of the scholars (*'ulema*) who were responsible for guarding the inward social order. See Ahmad Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 113, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1993), pp. 341- 359

<sup>34</sup> *Intikhab-i-Kalam-i-Mir Taqi Mir, Tartib Va Ta'aruf*, Ed. Muhammad Raza Kazmi (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008)

occupies an iconic status in the historical evolution of Urdu poetry, poised between its classical and modern periods, as he has gripped the popular imagination of diverse communities of South Asia. Ghalib's context, too, made up of the increasing involvement of colonial officials within the workings of state power, and the hollowness of Mughal political authority, was one of transition. His prolific oeuvre consists of a reservoir of couplets which constantly throw established norms, social orthodoxies, and narrowly defined religious practice into question. Ghalib too, testifies to the fact that attachment to religious symbols of the Islamic faith expressed in poetry did not preclude Muslims from participating with members of various other communities.<sup>35</sup> Mocking the conventionally pious, Ghalib wrote:

To put it briefly, my heart too inclines to pietyô but then,  
I saw the way the -goodøbehaved and fell in with the infidels.<sup>36</sup>

Commenting on where he stood in relation to *kufir* and Islam, Ghalib penned the following:

Faith pulls me back, even as infidelity draws me with force  
I stand transfixed between the Kaçaba and the church  
For God's sake, draw not the veil away from the face of the Kaçaba, oh cruel one,  
Lest the self-same Kafir idol make its appearance underneath!<sup>37</sup>

Here, Ghalib pushes the envelope so far as to challenge whether the Kaçaba in Mecca, where Muslims perform the *hajj* pilgrimage, is not itself merely covering a secret of Islam itself, that at the foundations of the religion is the self-same idol; the claim in one blow boldly vitiates and indeed mocks, the monotheism so central to Islam, and so staunchly defended by its orthodox

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<sup>35</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self & Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001) p. 2

<sup>36</sup> Ralph Russell (Ed.), *The Oxford India Ghalib: Life, Letters, and Ghazals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) p.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

jurist guardians. Alternately, as a poet, Ghalib saw his verse as inspired from realms other than his own creative impulse:

The subjects that form these thoughts come from an unknown/absent place  
Ghalib, you write with the pen, but it filters the voice of angels.<sup>38</sup>

In this couplet of Ghalib's, the call for the individual path of contemplation is self-evident. As Ayesha Jalal has noted, the subjectivity of the Muslim as individual found ample voice in poetry, and prose, and *ōit* is a subjectivity which borrows heavily from Islamic idioms, but one whose expression is interspersed with a welter of other demarcators of identity such as territory and language.<sup>39</sup> The world of the *mushā'irah* was an eminently cosmopolitan universe: it was made up of poets who hailed from various cities across the Indo-Persianate world, and was open to various religious groups. Cultural difference here, while subject to debate, was accommodated, if not welcomed, and this found abundant expression in poetry. The poet could at once invoke multiple religious tropes, while celebrating local cultures in descriptions of the urban landscape in which he resided. Akbar Hyder, in his study of Ghalib's Persian *masnavī*, *Chiragh-i Dayr (The Temple's Lamp)*, has argued that this in part explains Ghalib's enduring legacy. It was the socio-literary cosmopolitan *imaginaire* of Ghalib's poetry, Hyder writes, which would come to impact the mosaic of nineteenth and twentieth century Urdu literary world<sup>40</sup> and that of progressive poets in particular. The latter drew from Ghalib, *ōa* vision of the future that presents itself as a creatively emancipatory rendition of the past, one that is both the product of, and an aid that actively shapes a cosmopolitan ethos or ethics.<sup>40</sup> *Chirāgh-i Dayr* was written en route from Delhi to Calcutta after several months in Benaras in 1827, and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850*, London, New York: Routledge, 2000. Pg.9

<sup>40</sup> Syed Akbar Hyder, *ōGhalib and His Interlocutersō*, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vo. 26, No. 3, 2006. Pg. 463

Ghalib satirically lamented his separation from Delhi, while also comparing the beauty of Benaras to that of China, employing symbols of Islamic lore and invoking verses of the Qurʾān and simultaneously celebrating the flourishes of local cultures.<sup>41</sup> By playing with the meanings of the term most used to refer to Delhi, *Jahanabādō* which can be separated into *jahān* (world), but also (*abād*) invoking an even larger world, to refer to a place where the world lives, Ghalib could deploy its usage to include places such as China.<sup>42</sup>

Such poetry was exchanged and recited amongst poets, nobles, and courtiers from various cities of the Indo-Persianate world, including Hindu Persian poets. In fact, Ghalib first recited the *masnavī* as an allusion to Benaras, the holy city of Hindus, at a *mushāi'rah* in Calcutta, where there was no shortage of Persian poets. It was here where Ghalib first became involved in a dispute with Indian scholars of Persian; during the *mushāi'rah*, objections were raised as to the language used in some of his lines. At the same time, that such a dispute could even take place in the first place, pointed to the existence of a shared Indo-Persianate salon culture which guided social relationships, such as friendship, between genteel, lettered men and cross religious lines. It determined the community of which Ghalib was a part. There had already been a considerable rise of Hindu Persian poets from the seventeenth and eighteenth century onwards, such as Anand Rām Mōkhlesō (d. 1751), Lālā Amnat Rāy ōAmnatō (d. 1732-33), whose main work was a lengthy *masnavi* interspersed with *ghazals*, based on the *Bhāgavata Purāna* containing an Islamic interpretation of the figure and deeds of Krishna; and Lālā Ṭayyib Dās (d. 1731-32), who composed a work dedicated to Mathurā, a holy city of the Hindus, again consisting mainly of *ghazals*.<sup>43</sup> There were Sikh poets writing in Persian as well, and both Sikh and Hindu poets

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Stefano Pello, "Hindu Persian Poets", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, April 2008, available at <http://www.iranica.com/articles/hindu-persian-poets>

continued to play a strong role in the making of the Persian poetry throughout the nineteenth century, including Raja Ratan Singh Zakhmi (d. 1851) who was esteemed at the courts under the nawabs of Awadh, as well as Har Gopal Tafta (d. 1879) of Secundarabad, who was a student of Ghalib, and left four collections of Persian verse.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, even if the *mushāi'rah* itself was chiefly an enterprise associated with poetry, it represented a wider culture of sociality and intellectual parlay, in which all manner of thinkers were welcome, not only those whose primary preoccupation was poetry. Theologians, philosophers, and religiously minded men of letters, also participated within the ecumene that the *mushāi'rah* represented. Thus, even as Ghalib was not interested in religious debates, per se, he deeply respected one of his closest friends, Fazl-e Haq, a man of high learning in both Arabic and Persian, and a scholar of a more traditional outlook who was constantly in argument with a new group of pietists, the Wahhabis.<sup>45</sup> Fazl-e Haq respected Ghalib, seeing him as an extremely accomplished Persian poet, and persuaded him to write a *masnavī* in Persian that attacked the teachings of the Wahhabis, especially over the question of impossibility of a peer of the Seal of Prophets:

Ghalib first objected that it was difficult to discuss learned questions of this kind in verse, but Fazl-e Haq brushed this objection aside, and Ghalib had no alternative but to write a *masnavī*. When he recited it to Fazl-e Haq, he praised it extremely highly, but he was extremely annoyed that Ghalib had expressed an opinion somewhat at variance with his own. When Ghalib first brought the *masnavī* to Fazl-e Haq, the Maulana said, "What nonsense is this you have

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that the term, "Wahhabi" is the one that Ralph Russell has problematically used to describe this specific group of pietists. In scholarship of modern Islamic thought that trace its origins to eighteenth century revivalist movements, a problematic link is often forged between Wahhabi puritanical ideas (associated with Ibn Wahhab of the Arabian peninsula), and later Islamic thought. Additionally, the term, "Wahhabi", is applied to such diverse groups as the followers of the South Asia's Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi and the Subbanu al-Muslimin (Association of young Muslims) of west Africa, in spite of the recognition that in both of these cases the title Wahhabi is a misnomer. For more, see Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); See also Seema Alavi's work in progress, "Fugitive Mullahs and Runaway Fanatics: Indian Muslims in British Imperial and Ottoman Politics," presented at Center for Middle East Director's Series and the Harvard Initiative on Contemporary Islamic Societies, March 2010.

written? You say that there could be numbers of worlds and numbers of Seals of the Prophets. Not so! í Cut out this point altogether from the *masnavī* and write what I tell you.ö Ghalib had no quarrel with the Wahhabis, and owed no allegiance to their opponents. All he wanted to do was to fulfill his friend's request. He therefore immediately did as he had told him í ö<sup>46</sup>

The cultural worlds of the *mushāi'rah*, overlapped in as much as these were somewhat fluid spaces wherein lettered men could discuss and exchange ideas, through a world of shared values, associated with the workings of the sovereign's court (i.e., various modes of comporting one's self amongst peers, inferiors, and superiors). This world of shared values was also determined by the interactions between the court-life, and the contours of broader society. The place of Persian was significant as a language that crossed regional difference: during the early nineteenth century, it was the continued prevalence of Persian as a mode of elite correspondence and official discourse that made it possible for Ghalib to be familiar with the writings of the Calcutta-based reformer Ram Mohan Roy, whose early articles about reform circulated not in Bengali or English, but in Persian newspapers. One scholar has suggested that gatherings such as *mushā'irahs* and *mahfils* during the eighteenth century testify to how the Islamic world cultivated an intellectual culture where the questioning of traditional orders and orthodoxies bore a striking similarity to parallel developments in European contexts. In this sense, the Enlightenment, rather than being read as a strictly European phenomenon is rendered as a universal one.<sup>47</sup> Even as the *mushā'irah* epitomized a salon culture that spoke to the concerns of elites, state functionaries, and nobles, it was also a forum which popularized Urdu poetry.

Whether Urdu poetry was recited in the *shāhī* (royal) *mushā'irah* or within the homes of high-ranking poets and men of letters, it very often found its way into the world of the *bazār* and the

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<sup>46</sup> Ralph Russell (Ed.), *The Oxford India Ghalib: Life, Letters, and Ghazals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 7. See Ab-E-Hayat

<sup>47</sup> Jamal Malik, "Muslim Culture and Reform in Eighteenth Century South Asia," in *JRAS, Series 3*, 13, 2 (2003), pp. 227-243.

wider public (and vice versa). Such performances were in turn circulated anew amongst Urdu poets, who never existed at a remove from the city's people.

### **City as Homeland, City as Moral Terrain: Elite and Popular Poetic Discourses**

As we saw with Ghalib's poetic invocation of *Jahānabād* to refer both to the world at large as well as to a specific city (Delhi) the city of birth, origin, or residence was central to Muslim self-expression within the Indo-Persianate world. So marked was this attachment to the city, that it formed the principal subject of an entire genre of poetry in Urdu, the *shahr-āshob*, a lament for the declining city. In Persian, *shahr-ashub* or *shahr-angiz* (lit. city disturber) was more often a social *topos* than a literary genre, and the term originally was a name used for a beloved in a poem, or a short bawdy lyric addressed to a young boy involved in a trade or craft, coyly offering his wares to the poet the earliest of these poems dating to the twelfth century.<sup>48</sup> Persian odes were filled with beloveds differentiated not only by their trade guilds, but by membership within their specific religious community, though by the sixteenth century, such poems became a unified work composed specifically for a particular city and its ruler. By the early eighteenth century, the joyous city poem in Persian with *shahrashub* elements became the *shahr-āshob* (the disturbed city), a lament for the declining city in classical Urdu poetry.

The emergence of the Urdu *shahr-āshob* in the eighteenth century described the actual ruin of North Indian cities by Persian, Afghan, Maratha, Sikh, and British devastations of the Mughal imperial polity. *Shahr-āshobs* were written primarily by poets belonging to the North Indian Mughal heartland, most affected by the invasions, in particular the raids on Delhi by the Persian Nadir Shah in 1739, an important point lest the genre be taken to signal overall political

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<sup>48</sup> Sunil Sharma, "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24:2 (2004) p.73

and cultural decline in eighteenth century India. The Urdu genre of the *shahr-āshob*, unlike its Persian counterpart, shifted into a satirical mode, and also entailed a historical narration of the city's many subjugations— a life history of the city which depicted its social and political fabric. This life history of the city took up several major themes: the decadence of rulers, the corruption of the state administration, the demoralization of the officer class, and the much-begrudged rise to power of the merchant professional community. In the aftermath of Nadir Shah's invasion, raids, and resulting devastation upon Delhi during the late eighteenth century, poets such as Mirza Raf Sauda (d. 1781) and Mir Taq Mir (d. 1810), composed *shahr- āshobs* very much in this satirical mode, portraying a bleak picture of urban society. Their verses bemoan the collapse of traditionally established social hierarchies in the face of political turbulence, and a newly emerging mercantile culture, while lamenting the reversal of elite fortunes.

Mir Taq Mir cast the city of Delhi as a space originally inhabited by men upholding moral obligations, but who had now been replaced by those who were corrupt, debauched and selfish. His *shahr- āshobs* elicited a strong attachment to Delhi, as he imbued himself with the affect of yearning so typical of the *-āshiq* of the *ghazal*, while decrying the new behaviors of the city's *umarā* (nobles). In *zindagāni hui hai sab pe vabāl (Life Has Left Everyone Burdened)* Mir depicts the urban notables: debauched, corrupt, capricious, and money-mongering; he begins his verses with a fastidious description of the army. His biting sarcasm comes through as he portrays an army whose encampment, having become more permanent due to lack of funds to move foot-soldiers, attracted a similar encampment of prostitutes: "the soldiers now, have time only for whores and drink with no regard to order, hierarchy, or discipline."<sup>49</sup> Additionally, he remarked that the *faqirs* (itinerant ascetics) no longer travel with a begging bowl, but descend upon food like flies, and the city's notables— in particular state administrators like the *bakshi*

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<sup>49</sup> *Kuliyat-e-Mir Taqi Mir*, Vol. 1-2 (Delhi: National Council for the Promotion of the Urdu Language, 2003) p 327



(treasurer), the *vazīr*, and local *mansabdārs* (rank officers) were held responsible for much of the chaos, having become uncouth. Mir goes as far as questioning whether they are human, since he sees the *umara* as men full of only deceit and bribe-taking, taking advantage of those who are in desperate need of loans.<sup>50</sup> He sarcastically comments upon the noblemen as *purported* offspring of Hatem Tai sarcastically referring to a staple character from Islamic legend known for his generosity. Even the city's corpse-washers, are not spared, for Mir bemoans how they steal the shrouds in which bodies were wrapped, in order to feed their families, while grocers are forced to cheat for a living. All throughout the *shahr- āshob* is a mocking tone, reserved for the notables of the city who are perceived as having become moral degenerates, while the sultans (princes) have gone mad.<sup>51</sup>

The weakening of centralized Mughal power shifted the worldview of poetry, and many *shahr- āshobs* were thus cast in a pessimistic note. While it has been suggested that the nostalgia within these poems had to do with yearning for a more unified Persianate world, it is important to recognize that many of these poets were bilingual in Persian and Urdu, lest a close but uncritical reading of solely their Urdu poetry incline one to perceive this period as solely one of decline. Complex networks of patronage did not so much collapse, so much as fracture in the face of shifting imperial formations of Safavid and Mughal alike: scholar-poets were travelling between urban centers (Delhi, Lahore, Lucknow, Aurangabad) and continued to communicate with their contemporaries in Persian, albeit in more localized, provincial ways.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the Urdu *shahr- āshob* poems of the period, also tended to mock those elites whose positions were influenced by an emerging mercantile commercialism, and so, the amiable and competent

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> *Kuliyat-e-Mir Taqi Mir*, Vol. 1-2 (Delhi: National Council for the Promotion of the Urdu Language, 2003) p 327

<sup>52</sup> I would like to thank Sunil Sharma and Mana Kia for this suggestion in my many conversations with them about Iranian migrants of the Indian Ocean world, especially those who were travelling and connecting with Indians in the Mughal imperium during the eighteenth century.

professionals are shown to be nothing more than base caricatures of their former selves who will stop at nothing for the sake of making profit.<sup>53</sup> As the poet Mirza Rafi Sauda noted in his *shahr-āshob*, a *mukhammas* (forty-five fine line stanzas) on the desolation of Shahjahanabad:

Neither does the private purse (*sarf-e khas*) function, nor does the public  
exchequer. From the soldier to the clerk, all are out of work.  
Now beyond that, in the office of salaries (*daftar-e-tan*), how can I express the  
wretchedness?  
Having torn up documents with the [royal] signature, the druggist  
Wraps up and gives myrobalan (plant)<sup>54</sup> to one, and opening-medicine to  
another.<sup>55</sup>

In Sauda's view, the culture of the old Mughal nobility was disappearing as a result of a new class of opportunists, the effect of a merchant culture which was eroding older codes of conduct of the Mughal elite. Above, we see the physician, healer, and druggists' targets of frequent attack in Sauda's poems' as cheating their patients, offering placebos in place of actual medicine. This perspective upon local businesses being enlarged by corrupt practices, were shaped by the culmination of the slow but steady commercialization of India under a loose, but dynamic Mughal hegemony. As C.A. Bayly has put it, commercialization meant more than a slow increase of money in the economy: it also meant the use of objective monetary values to express social relationships.<sup>56</sup>

Like Mirza Rafi Sauda too commented upon the economic turbulence wrought by the fracturing of the Persianate world and the decentralization of Mughal power as new commodities began to circulate on the market. This meant that older professions were subject to the corrupt state

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<sup>53</sup> Sunil Sharma, 'The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape,' in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24:2 (2004) p.73

<sup>54</sup> Myrobalan is a type of plant used in herbal remedies.

<sup>55</sup> Mirza Rafi Sauda, *Mukhammas* on the Desolation of Shahjahanabad, Trans. Frances Pritchett, Workshop at Columbia University, 'What is Shah-Ashob?' April 2009, see also, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/meaac/pritchett/00urduhindilinks/workshop2009/index.html>

<sup>56</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

administration, and indebted to a rising new class of merchants (here referred to as *baniyas*).

Sauda continues:

However many were cash-renders and rank-holders [*mansabdār*] of estates [*jāgīr*]  
Having become helpless, they searched for a village constable's job.  
Ignorantly, in debt to Baniyas, they helplessly surrendered their sword.  
Now when they leave their house, taking their weapons,  
Under their arm there's a staff; in their hand, a begging bowl.<sup>57</sup>

Yet, Sauda's verse is not only an account rich in its historical relevance, especially the picture he portrays of the imperial capital's destruction after Nadir Shah's invasions, but is also a social text which expresses the personal devastation felt by elite poets who served as courtiers for the emperor. Such a personal sense of loss—after all, the poets themselves took pride in being representatives of Delhi as a seat of Mughal political and cultural power—is captured by a lament of the fore-lorn heart:

Those buildings are ruined, how should I tell you?  
The sight of which once drove away hunger and thirst  
And now if you look [at them], the heart is sorrowed by life  
Instead of the rose, it is grass that grows waist-high in the gardens.

When was Delhi deserving of such tyranny?  
Rather this city had once been the heart of a lover.  
That has been destroyed as though it were the work of falsehood  
It was a wondrous shore of the world's ocean  
This city from whose soil, men used to collect pearls.<sup>58</sup>

The city poems were written in a completely different style, form, and manner from the dominant *ghazal* form, as the *shahr-āshob* poet was so moved by his experiences within the

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<sup>57</sup> Mirza Rafi Sauda, *Mukhammas* on the Desolation of Shahjahanabad, Trans. Frances Pritchett, Workshop at Columbia University, "What is Shah-Ashob?" April 2009, see also, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urduhindilinks/workshop2009/index.html>

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

socio-political chaos, so as to shift from the standard modes of *ghazal* expression, and compose verse in the new manner. In Sauda's *shahr- āshob* above, we see not only a reflection of society in which new social groups arising are seen to be wreaking havoc upon an older order, but the poet's individual relationship to the city as a beloved. The lover (*-āshiq*) of the *ghazal* is here presented as the persona of the city itself. Thus, the beauty of the Mughal architectural landscape, its gardens and riches, have been destroyed much in the same way the lover of the *ghazal* is ravished by the cruel tortures of the beloved. This motif of decline signaled a new conception of historical time by North Indian elites in the face of a seeming end to the Mughal imperial center.

Urban decline was associated with the political decline of Mughal elites in cities such as Delhi, and Agra, where landscapes of beautiful gardens were invoked to remember a time past in which the Mughal nobility were wealthy and venerable. Not every poet, however, subscribed to this dominant mode of *shahr- āshob* composition in which the elites were to be pitied for their fall, even if satirized and scorned. Nazir Akbarabadi (d. 1830), further re-formulated *shahr- āshob* lyricism, for his poems were attenuated especially towards the world of the marketplace, the throbbing economic center of the city. He composed hundreds of *ghazals*, though he was more well-known for his *nazms*—loosely organized prose-like poems written in free verse. Nazir's verses were tuned in to mostly ordinary people's lives in the underbelly of the city, the class of people broadly referred to as the *ajlāf*: vendors, fruit-sellers, artisans, palanquin bearers, and so forth, not to mention the *ōvilerō* social groups of prostitutes, profligates and drug addicts. The elite Mughal attitude towards this class of people was one of contempt, as Sudipta Sen notes:

Most professions attending to the elite were held in disdain and looked upon as fit only for the mean and the vile—personal servants, watering men, elephant

keepers, venders, perfumers, sweets sellers, and bread-makers were considered scoundrels (*pāji*)<sup>59</sup> even among ten rupee officeholders (*masabdārs*), an elephant keeper with a monthly allowance of five hundred rupees was seen absolutely as a social unequal. The company of people engaged in mean professions or the market (*bazāriyan*) was to be carefully avoided. No aristocrat, Mughal, Shaikh, Sayyad or Afghan, would marry into their ranks, have them join their table, or entertain them at their social gatherings.<sup>59</sup>

This attitude certainly pervades the *shahr- āshob* of the Navab of Awadh, Asif ud-Daulah (r.1775-97), who composed a *mukhammas* on the shameless behavior of the lower-classes<sup>60</sup>, but it was this *ajlāf* world that Nazir Akbarabadi's poetry privileged and celebrated; even the language that Nazir used was that of a simplified *kharī bolī*, and did not include many, if at all, Persian words unlike most of his contemporaries. His love for the city was clearly a love of local festivals, marketplaces, and streets colored by the city's populace. Nazir satirized the elites, but in ways that almost celebrated their demise, portraying the city's underclass life-world in carnivalesque fashion, in his poems about the difficulty, for instance, of procuring prostitutes.<sup>61</sup> In the life-history of Agra, Nazir Akbarabadi remarked upon how the city was not a space to be only identified with elites, but with various social strata:

Call me a lover or a doting slave, Agra is where I live;  
Call me a *mullah* or a learned knave, I am Agra's native;  
Call me poor or call me *fakir*, Agra is where I live;  
Call me a poet or simply Nazir, I am Agra's native.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998) p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> See *Shahr ashob*, ed. by Na'im Ahmad (Delhi: Maktaba Jami'a, 1968), pp. 98-99. Na'im Ahmad identifies his own text source as a manuscript of 'Kulliyat-e Asif' in the State Central Library, Hyderabad Deccan. Translation by Frances Pritchett,

<sup>61</sup> For more see Aditya Behl, 'Nazir Akbarabadi: Poet of the Bazarsö', in *A Wilderness of Possibilities: Urdu Studies in Transnational Perspective*, (Ed.) Kathryn Hansen, David Lelyveld, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005)

<sup>62</sup> *Kuliyat-e-Nazir Akbarabadi*; Trans. Javed Malik (source)

In focusing upon increased commercialization and rapidly expanding networks of commodity exchange upon ordinary people's lives, Nazir's *shahr-ashob* also accounts for the sufferings of the ordinary people:

All the craftsmen sit here, hitting one hand with the other,  
And all the professional people cry piteously.  
The ironsmith pounds his body, the goldsmith beats his head.  
It's not just one or two whose work has suffered, friend!  
All the thirty-six serving groups find their business closed.<sup>63</sup>

Ironsmiths, goldsmiths, artisans, paper-makers, petty traders, grocers, merchants, and dancing boys are the people who make up the thirty-six professional groups of Nazir's *Kulliyat* (Collected Works). Within Nazir's depictions of Agra, especially striking is his attachment to the food vendors of the *bazārs*, his odes to the *chana* (chickpeas) seller, the melon seller, and the *kākri* (lotus stem) seller:

O how wondrous are the *kākrīs* of Agra  
The best of course are those from Iskandara  
How slender and delicate, how lovely to behold,  
Like strips of sugarcane, or threads of silk and gold,  
Like Farhad's liquid eyes or Shirin's slender mould  
Like Laila's shapely fingers, or Majnun's tears cold  
O how wondrous are the *kākrīs* of Agra  
Some are pale yellow and some lush green  
Topaz and emeralds in their luster and sheen  
Those that are round are Heer's angles green  
Straight ones like Ranjha's flute ever so keen.  
O how wondrous are the *kākrīs* of Agra  
Crunchy and crisp though tender to touch,  
In beating the heat the *kākri* helps much  
Cools the eyes, soothes the heart, I can vouch,  
Call it not *kākri*, it's a fairy as such  
O how wondrous are the *kākrīs* of Agra.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Cited in, Aditya Behl, "Nazir Akbarabadi: Poet of the Bazars," in *A Wilderness of Possibilities: Urdu Studies in Transnational Perspective*, (Ed). Kathryn Hansen, David Lelyveld, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005)

<sup>64</sup> *Kulliyat-e-Nazir Akbarabadi*; Trans. Javed Malik (source)

Thus, in Nazir's *shahr-ashobs*, there are few, if any, depictions of grandiose buildings, lush palace gardens, or a yearning for the *sharāfat* (respectability) which once characterized the now declining class of Mughal nobility. The focus is instead upon local culture and ordinary people. The beloveds in the above poem are the *kākris* themselves, as commodities and objects of consumption, which in the hands of the *kākri* seller are nothing short of gems, legends, and other-worldly creatures. Employing the widespread folklore and legends of eternal lovers such as H r Ranjha of the Punjab, and Shir n Farh d of Persian legends, Naz r compares the wares of the ordinary *kākri* seller to the embodied, sensual romances, thus inverting the *shahr- āshob* away from the romantic poetry of declining elites, and upon the *ajlāf*, who are also affected by changing market conditions of the eighteenth century. Elsewhere in the life-story of Agra, Naz r focuses upon the trials and tribulations of the poor and his moral tenor reaches further than castigating elites as debauched, but to the experience of poverty itself:

Only the poor know the pain of poverty  
 The poor know no politeness or formality  
 They fall upon food with uninhibited alacrity  
 Risking their lives for a piece of loaf.<sup>65</sup>

That Naz r's verses avoided the stylized Persian which characterized the Urdu of Mir and Sauda's compositions, attests to the growing popularity of a colloquial Urdu in Northern India during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: the period saw a steep rise in Urdu literary production. Beyond attachment to the city, in his poetry more generally, Naz r not only criticized how social relationships were being defined by the increasingly rapid circulation of goods and currency, which deteriorated the life the poor, but commented also upon the power of poor, itinerant groups to determine the destiny of elites. In the poem, *Banjarā Namā*, (*Chronicle of a Nomad/Gypsy*)<sup>6</sup> a poem which today continues to be transmitted in school textbooks<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Kuliyat-e-Nazir Akbarabadi*; Trans. Javed Malik (source)

Nazir reflected upon a tribal category of itinerant peddlers (*banjāra*), who roamed the countryside, but also sought temporary work in urban locales. While the poem is not a *shahr-āshob* in the classical sense, its approach to the notion of a city populated and defined by ‘virtuous’ (read elite) men as contrasted to the realm of uncouth hordes upon urban perimeters of the respectable class, recalls themes drawn from tenth and fifteenth century Persian and Arabic texts such as Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddama* and Farabi’s *Virtuous City*. Such texts, undoubtedly also influenced the works of urban decline by Mir and Sauda – the main idea being that the notable classes of the city ran the risk of being ousted from governing power if they did not act virtuously, by hordes of tribal men of the countryside or desert, at the edges of the cultured city life. Nazir here depicts the uselessness of the wealth of moral men in the city, for wealth will not save them from death:

Discard greed and lust, my friend, do not roam miserably from land to land!  
 The cossack of death (*qazzāq*, lit. bandit) loots and plunders, beating his drum  
 (*naqqārā*) day and night.  
 What are cattle and bullocks, bulls and camels, sacks and panniers and head-  
 loads?  
 What are wheat and rice, and lentils and peas, what are fire and smoke and  
 sparks?  
 All your splendor and goods will be useless, when the Banjara loads them up to  
 go!<sup>66</sup>

The ‘peddler of death’, the *banjārā* (gypsy) was the name for both a tribal group, and a new profession, a peddler who would collect dead bodies, to bury them far from the city. The profession may have become a source of income for the many itinerant groups of the countryside, especially in the context of widespread plague in the 1780s as well as the displacement of tribal peoples owing to the conquests by the East India Company’s armies in the country-side. Yet, the *banjārā* of the poem here, not only attests to the movement of goods and

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<sup>66</sup> Nazir Akbarabadi, *Banjara Nama* (Delhi: Mahvis Press, 1870). Trans. Tariq Akbar.



the commercialization of agriculture, but plays a moral role, enacting the eviction of city's well-to-do merchant class. Naz's explicit suggestion is that the wealth of 'moral' men, counts for nought in the face of death, pointing to the vacuity of social position. The poem also illustrates how the Urdu poet was in many ways intrinsically linked to the people through performance and oral narration: the *mirāsīs*, *fakīrs*, itinerant groups, such as the *pindarīs* and *banjārās*, as well as the female entertainers such as the *tawā'ifs* to *domnīs* spread poetry from their place of origin to the city and beyond.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the *shahr- āshob* topos in which the decline of elite groups was sarcastically mocked, henceforth disappeared from the Urdu literary universe. Narratives of urban decline pre-dominated the literary landscape, but mostly, the new *shahr- āshobs* were serious in tone, featuring the lament for a glorious Mughal sovereignty in the face of its political collapse before British domination. After 1857 especially, the *shahr- āshobs* bemoaned the loss of Delhi, likening it to a beloved, or full of beloveds, but this was no longer satire, nor was there any explicit reference to the city's various inhabitants by occupation. This was a decline wrought by the take-over of the British crown. In the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar's ode to Delhi, the death-knell of an empire is present throughout:

Everyone was joyful and occupied in prayer;  
 Since the Christian army entered, all that is gone.  
 Why should that bird not flutter in the hunter's net,  
 When sitting on the throne for hours at a time is gone.  
 An evening flower had blossomed in the square  
 Where now, O God, the heads of multitudes have rolled.  
 Sun and moon, *houris*, and *paris*, all inhabited this city,  
 Someone has stolen them and gone off somewhere.  
 This city of Delhi was ahead of its time, now it is destroyed.  
 What happened, Zafar? Where has the vigor gone?<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> See Sunil Sharma,

Furthermore, territorial attachment to the city was displaced, in such a way, that the spatial contours of that attachment were no longer represented by the people who inhabited it, but by symbols. The following *shahr- āshob* was composed by Hakim Muhammad Ahsan Khan Bahadur, a notable of Delhi known by his *takhalsus*, (pen-name), *ʿAhsan* first appearing in the 1863 collection, *Fughan-I Dihli (The Lament for Delhi)*.<sup>68</sup> The 1863 collection had several *shahr- āshobs* by prominent members of the Delhi literati, recalling the events of 1857, as the city came under the ruin during the revolt, and the subsequent British destruction:

Alas for those who were the soul of Delhi! They went to heaven, imagining Delhi.  
 Moses fell down swooningô this has been disclosed,  
 Every home in Delhi is a house of light.  
 Letø call Chandni Chowk the breast, and say the Fortø the head,  
 and letø imagine Jama Masjid is the waist of Delhi.  
 The *lam* (letter L) of Delhi is the flagpole, and *he* (letter H) squiggle is the flagô  
 Now, that nothingø left but Delhiø name and trace.  
 Tyrannous Sky! Are there any more disasters left?  
 Why do you spy upon Delhi through the Sunø eye?  
 In sorrow for Delhiø ruin, rather than pure wine,  
 Delhiø wine-drinkers now drink their own heartsø blood.  
 I have such love for this place that after I die Iø watch over Delhi through a  
 chink in my grave.  
 Small wonder if this is spoken in Eternity: may Heavenø folk enjoy the tongue of  
 Delhi.  
 Tear open Ahsanø breast and, as Rizwan says, øthe mark of Dehliø decline is  
 upon his bloodied heart.<sup>69</sup>

The verses here recall the vanished cityø very signs (the flag and pole), and commemorates those signs by means of their likeness to the written form of the cityø name, using the letters of the Perso-Arabic script to illustrate the point. Rather than a landscape filled with several communities, or even peopled with elites whose fortunes have been reversed, the *shahr- āshob*

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<sup>68</sup> For more, see Pasha Muhammad Khan, *Two Ghazals About the Sufferings of Delhi in 1857* presented at workshop, øWhat is Shahr-Ashobö Columbia University (April, 2010).

<sup>69</sup> Trans. Pasha Muhammad Khan, *Two Ghazals About the Sufferings of Delhi in 1857* presented at workshop, øWhat is Shahr-Ashobö Columbia University (April, 2010).

which signals the onset of the colonial state invokes shattered monuments and ruins standing in not for the beloved, but for the city itself. Furthermore, there seems to be a greater attachment to Islamic lore within these poems, in the poet's narration of the city's fall. At work in the poem is a form of "representation" which would only retrospectively be invoked as part of a "national" collective identity by North Indian Muslim elites. Whereas in the eighteenth and even early nineteenth centuries, the poet situates his self through affinity to the panoply of the city being a territorially defined home, by the mid-nineteenth century, the *shahr- āshob* poetry of North India begins to bemoan the plight of Muslims as a whole, aligning a pristine Mughal city with a generalized Muslim fall from past glory. Indeed, the city as a central feature of identification in terms of territorial loyalty had long been part of Muslim affinitive sensibilities within South Asia. While such a territorial attachment to the city reached well into the era of formal colonial rule and much long afterwards (as I discuss in chapter 4), the colonized Muslim subject was no longer at liberty to determine what that urban space would or should look like, and thus, in literary discourse, the city was represented as a more homogenized landscape. The old order of Mughal Delhi was replaced with a new British rule of law, so the Urdu poet yearned nostalgically, as Shahab al-Din Ahmad did for Delhi's "old splendor," and the "thousands of musicians with enchanting melodies," bemoaning the loss of its "ancient sky," recognizing that Delhi was to be ruled by a new class of "virtuous" men, to whom Muslim subjects would have to turn, to save themselves from the city's destruction:

God sent us a governor, just and wise, then some of Delhi's houses were peopled again.  
 Who is that ruler of Jamshed's rank? Cooper sahib! May he be called the Shah Jahan of Delhi!  
 Night and day, the citizens of Delhi chant: "God save the ones who brought such grace to Delhi!"

Once more the Jama Masjid's bustle fills the market; once more every store in Delhi is adorned.<sup>70</sup>

This recognition of British officials restoring order within Delhi, emanated from the fact that the revolt of 1857 was led by sepoys, the India soldier class of the East India Company, against British authority and command. The event was important for Mughal elites, for it did not entail the liberation from English subjugation, so much as the potential for elite subordination at the hands of a lower-class who were politically agitating against their status as British-trained sepoys. Indeed, the first principle of the 'Constitution of the Mutineers' sought to establish was a new 'court of administration', the *jalsa-i intizām-i-fauji wa mulki*.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, it was out of the fear that the mutineers would overturn them, evident both within the *shahr- āshob*, (as well memoirs such as that of Khwaja Hasan Nizami), that led Mughal elites to give up sympathy for the revolt, and throw in their lot with the English who then protected them from the general populace. This of course came at the price of having the older order of the Mughal empire officially terminated. The *shahr- āshob* after 1857 indeed, narratives of decline more generally came to be imbued with a narrative of elite loss of control of the city. According to Faisal Devji the *ashraf* of the late nineteenth century were able to build the idea of the 'nation' implicit in the term *qaum*, as 'a new sort of private sphere from the wreckage of the moral city', and that the works of poet-reformers such as Muhammad Altaf Husain Hali, whom I discuss in the next section, 'marked the limit of the *shahr-ashobí* with the city's demoralization and transformation into a reified representative of *qaum* or country, it becomes a spent force' and

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<sup>70</sup> Trans. Pasha Muhammad Khan, *Two Ghazals About the Sufferings of Delhi in 1857* presented at workshop, 'What is Shahr-Ashob' Columbia University (April, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> See 'Constitution of the Mutineers,' The Original document in Urdu is available at the National Archives of India, New Delhi. Reference - Collection No. 57, Serial no. 539-41 (Mutiny Papers). Photocopy of the document is available at the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), New Delhi. English Trans., 'Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh' (ed.) by S.A.A. Rizvi & M.L. Bhargava, (Publications Bureau, U.P., 1957) Vol. 1, pages 419-21. See <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2412/stories/20070629006301600.htm>

there is now a new kind of lament, an elegy on the world of Islam, and the *ōqawm* displaces the moral city as a site of discourse.<sup>72</sup> While this kind of lament certainly describes a new kind of emergent Muslim collectivity, it was *not* a national collectivity that was being articulated during the late nineteenth century. The lament for the city, far from being something that disappears, continues to be composed and heard to this day. In particular, as I argue in chapter 4, Urdu elegies for cities were disseminated throughout the 1930s through the 1950s at the peak of the Indian nationalist movement appearing as a sort of modernist urbanism that is posited against the formal politics of territorial nationalism. During the course of the late nineteenth century, however, narratives of decline acquire a concern for a united Muslim community.

### **Colonial Rule, Language, and Narrating Decline: Predicament of Poetics**

As a colonized society, the *ashrāf* could not openly assert politics in the public realm without being viewed as a potentially rebellious threat to the stability of British rule. The widespread portrayal in the Anglo-Indian press of Muslims as having incited the revolt as well as colonial retribution which disproportionately singled out the residents of Delhi, gave rise to the notion that Indian Islam was nested in tension with British colonialism.<sup>73</sup> Muslims were seen as irredeemably disloyal to the crown and a host of stereotypes about Muslims— as essentially war-like and fanatical— was put to the test by colonial officials. Commissioned to write the report, *The Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound to Rebel Against the Queen* (1871), W.W. Hunter concluded that while Islam itself did not necessarily drive Muslims to rebel against a non-Muslim ruler, India's Muslim community included "fanatical" elements which, if left unchecked,

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<sup>72</sup> Devji, Faisal. *Muslim Nationalism: Founding Identity in Colonial India*. Diss. University of Chicago, 1993. p. 78-79.

<sup>73</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self & Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001) p. 58.

threatened to stir up their co-religionists, ða raceö given to ðintense feelings of nationalityö and a predisposition to expressing such sentiments in ðwarlike enterprise.ö<sup>74</sup> Under such circumstances, the prominent Muslim reformer Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817 ó 1898) had to convince the British that the Muslims of India were loyalö refuting Hunter's allegations about Muslim bigotry by disproving over-generalizations,<sup>75</sup> and writing a lengthy critique of British policies, *Asbāb-e-Baghāwat-e-Hind (The Causes of the Indian Mutiny)*. He also assumed the role of advising his community that cooperating with, and learning from the West, would be beneficial for them:

In direct contrast to our English rule, the common people enjoyed no rights under [Hindustani] Government. Now the people have obtained freedom, and each person is master of his own thingí .To the extent that the English government protects its own right, to the same extent does it also protect the rights of the people.<sup>76</sup>

Syed Ahmed Khan saw opportunity in the new style of ðrepresentationalö politics introduced by the British, and he articulated a defense of the Muslim role in the uprising that yielded little to the heterogeneity of India's Muslim population; his idea of a collective Muslim *qaum*ö a term that could mean religious sect, clan, or groupö became one of the key idioms of discourses around Muslim identity upon the loss of formal sovereignty.<sup>77</sup> As heirs to the extant Mughal nobility, the *ashraf* were made up of the a class of former *mansabdārs* (men of rank), including descendents of well-known *qāzis* (judges), *mufītīs* (jurists), scholars and poetsö all of whom were gradually displaced from high-ranking positions within older structures of state

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid p. 59

<sup>75</sup> See Syed Ahmed Bahadoor, C.S.I., on Dr. Hunter's 'Our Indian Mussulmans - are they bound in conscience to rebel against the queen?' Author(s): Khan, Sayyid A mad Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, (1872) in JSTOR

<sup>76</sup> See Syed Ahmed Khan, *History of the Bijnor Rebellion*, pp. 107-9 in (ed). Stephen Hay, *Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. 2: Modern India and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) p. 185.

<sup>77</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self & Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001) p. 58.

power throughout the nineteenth century. As Mughal court life came to an end, its Muslim elites entered the service gentry, becoming closely tied with colonial courts as native assistants and scribes, while local dispensers of justice, such as the *qāzis* were diluted of their power. The shift from the court of the sovereign ruler and his auxiliary functionaries, to the court based upon the sovereign *rule of law*, was characterized by specific colonial assumptions and hierarchies. Most notably, the prevailing presumption of the colonial state in the latter part of the nineteenth century was that the numerical strength of communities— defined in terms of caste and religion collected through the census— should determine their share of resources. A complete departure from earlier modes of governing India's diverse population, colonial rule was premised upon the assumption that India was made up of essentially discrete, religious communities. By the late nineteenth century, the new legal and political category of "Indian Muslim" was born and it was linked to a politics of self-interest, by which a small cadre of educated elites (*ashraf*) aimed to determine the political future for all Muslims. The category, "Indian Muslim" materialized alongside the colonial state's policies of supervising the vernacular press, encouraging translations of English works in line with new educational initiatives which sought to foster Western ideas into Indian minds, and patronizing literary societies for the refinement of the Urdu language in the late nineteenth century.<sup>78</sup>

The formal teaching of Urdu had begun with the British long before, with the establishment of Fort William College in the early 1830s where young East India Company officials were taught Hindustani in both the Persian and the Devanagiri scripts. Perceiving the language as the authentic vernacular of the "Muslims", in spite of the overwhelming evidence that elite Muslims coveted centers of Persian and Arabic learning, the British also wanted to

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<sup>78</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self & Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001) p. 58.

introduce the teaching of Urdu in local, provincial, and religious educational institutions. Although Persian had been replaced by English as the official state language in 1837, for most of the Muslim upper-classes of North India it continued to be a language associated with higher education in philosophy, the sciences, poetry, and politics for several decades to come. Even as the British experimented with the teaching of Urdu at the primary school level, most Muslims were simply not interested in attending schools where Persian was not taught or where only Urdu was taught.<sup>79</sup> The British forged ahead, wanting to add Urdu to the curriculum of the *madrasas* which had long been strong-holds of Arabic and Persian studies. An official report from 1854 claims:

The Oordoo language, which the Mussalmans of Bengal consider their vernacular, and which is indeed the only idiom which is spoken by the educated classes all over India, deserves particular attention, and it is the more necessary that it be taught in the Madrissa, *because we cannot expect for many years to come that the natives will have sense enough to make it the basis of their private instruction.* In Delhie and Agra, though the Oordoo is spoken with great purity, it is taught in the Government colleges, how much more is it necessary that it be studied in Calcutta where it is much degenerated.<sup>80</sup>

In spite of British efforts to introduce Urdu in *madrasas*, and institutions of higher learning for Muslims such as Delhi and Agra Colleges, Urdu remained quite unpopular as a language of instruction for Muslims well into the early 1870s. Urdu did however begin to reach the literate audience through a vibrant press and publications market which made remarkable headway especially after the introduction of lithography in the early 1800s, and one of the major effects of the rise of Indian-owned presses in North West Province and Oudh was the flourishing of the Urdu press by the 1840s. Agra, Lucknow, and Benares had several Indian owned presses, providing impetus to greater numbers of Urdu newspapers, and between 1868 and 1895, book

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<sup>79</sup> See Tariq Rahman, "The Teaching of Urdu in British India" in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 15 (2000) p. 39

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



production in Urdu quadrupled, and the publication of Hindi books increased threefold.<sup>81</sup> With the establishment of Syed Ahmed Khan's Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College, later Aligarh University, Urdu increasingly began to acquire a status as a symbol of collective Muslim identity in India, within North Indian *ashraf* circles. By the second half of the nineteenth century Urdu had to begin competing for importance with English, in both symbolic and practical terms. Many elite Muslims, in particular those from the religious seminaries, were reluctant to enter into English education. Even ardent proponents of English education pointed out how learning the language introduced the *ashraf* to alien cultural practices, and negatively impacted their sense of selfhood. In a letter written to his son, the reformer Nazir Ahmad (1836 - 1912) who was employed by the state to write and supply educational literature in Urdu, opens with a critique of English education, quoting a Persian couplet to illustrate his point:

You've often heard me sing the praises of English education, because I wanted you to be taught English. Now that you've learnt English to the extent that every good subject of our Empress Queen should, let me now tell you the faults of the English, because everything has its good and bad aspects. *Naf'-e mai jumla ba guftu zararash niz begu. You've told me all the benefits of wine. Now tell me all the harm it does you too.*<sup>82</sup>

Comparing his ruler's language and culture to wine is indicative of Nazir Ahmed's critical posture against a whole-hearted embrace of the English language. Nazir Ahmad had made his position on the consumption of wine evident in didactic Urdu texts such as in the 1873 novel *Taubat-u-Nasuh (The Repentance of Nasuh)* where a wayward son meets his end as a penniless pauper due to his attachment to wine and Persian poetry. In his letter, Nazir Ahmed lamented that Muslims were deprived of modern knowledge because the many English words used in the

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<sup>81</sup> Ulrike Starke, *An Empire of Books: The Nawal Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007) p. 70.

<sup>82</sup> Nazir Ahmad's Letter to His Son, tr by Ralph Russell, Urdu Annual Studies. Original Edition is From Nazir Ahmad, *Mau'iza-e Hasana [A Good Counsel]*, ed. Iftikhar Ahmad Siddiqui (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqq -e Adab, 1963) pp. 210-228., p. 492. It should be noted that this couplet bears a great deal of similarity with Qur'anic passages about the harm versus the good of consuming intoxicants, though what constitutes 'intoxicant' was debated by early classical scholars of Islam.

sciences, were outside the scope of Urdu, a poor language that it is. To illustrate his point about Urdu's poverty, he finds recourse in Persian, and quotes a couplet (*ke āmadī, ke pīr shudī*) which literally means, "You are only a child and you are trying to explain things which are far beyond the capabilities of anyone who is not an old man," thus implying that Urdu, a young language in being placed within the context of higher education, was endeavoring to do something far beyond its capacity.<sup>83</sup> Nazir Ahmed's most significant point was what the learning of English did to Indian minds, the arrogance of English speakers, and the negative impact this had upon his community:

Our English speakers begin to regard our society with contempt. Learning English inevitably makes a man *prejudiced* to some extent. That is, the idea of the excellence of everything English enters into his mentality to a greater extent than it should. And do these English speakers, poor fellows, think they know these faults of our society better than we do?...Our first fault is poverty, and that too of a kind which there is perhaps no prospect of ridding ourselves of for ten generations to come. On top of that is prejudice, ignorance, incompetence, irresoluteness, idleness, short-sightedness, selfishness, disunity—that is, all the attributes which make for our fallen fortunes. But most regrettable of all is the fact that it is not for these reasons that our English speaking brothers, who are considered to be the flower of our country, despise us. How can they, when every one of these has faults and even more are to be found in them too? If we are one-eyed, they are blind. They see only one fault in us—that we do not adopt the civilized ways of the English, do not live in homes like theirs, do not wear clothes like theirs, do not eat and drink what they eat and drink, do not allow our women the freedom to rove around freely. As though these wise men of ours thought that the worldly ascendancy of the English is the result of their civilized way of life. Our English speakers expect that if we adopt English ways, the English will accept us and welcome us into their society. They certainly won't. As long as the English and we are rulers and ruled, victors and vanquished, dominant and subordinate, we shall be like oil and water, which have never mixed and never will. Our time is one of widespread irreligiousness. There are very few heads empty of the irrational craze for the imitation of the English.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Nazir Ahmad's Letter to His Son, tr by Ralph Russell, Urdu Annual Studies. Original Edition is From Nazir Ahmad, *Mau'iza-e Hasana* [A Good Counsel], ed. Iftikhar Ahmad Siddiqui (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqq -e Adab, 1963) pp. 210-228., pg. 492

<sup>84</sup> Nazir Ahmad's Letter to His Son, tr by Ralph Russell, Urdu Annual Studies. Original Edition is From Nazir Ahmad, *Mau'iza-e Hasana* [A Good Counsel], ed. Iftikhar Ahmad Siddiqui (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqq -e Adab, 1963) pp. 210-228.

Nazir Ahmed's epistle about how English language, customs, and culture constitute a kind of intoxication and madness, gestures towards a rationalist critique of colonial modernity: indeed irreligiousness here is contrasted to irrationality. Furthermore, Nazir Ahmed was not claiming that fondness of the English language would necessarily corrupt the cultural and spiritual sensibilities of traditional Muslim-hood, so much as opining that adopting the language of the colonizer *as one's own*, would lead to self-hatred. Nazir Ahmed's letter illustrates how the reconstruction of the Urdu language had become one of the few grounds by which the *ashraf* could counter the domination of the English.

Colonial policies towards vernacular literature in the late nineteenth century, subsumed it into educational prerogatives, and led to a great output of literary and educational associations, *anjumans*. The official colonial view insisted that Urdu be a language equated to Muslim; Urdu was then *dashrafized* to such an extent, that as far away as Gujarat, elites such as Badruddin Tyabji equated learning and conversing in Urdu with achieving the status of speaking for the interests of the entire Muslim community. As colonial policies closed off the freedoms of a pre-existing *sharif* public arena made up of lettered men, earlier forms of public debate, like the *mushāi'rah*, were partially subsumed into the more formal organization of the *anjuman*. In the absence of local arbiters of justice, *ashraf* elites now stood in as representatives for a nascent Indian Muslim community, passing resolutions and officiating over meetings purportedly for the betterment, moral uplift, and reform of their community, such as sessions of the Muslim Educational Conferences of the 1890s. Such meetings, according to Faisal Devji, served to objectify and invent the *qawm* which he has problematically translated as nation for the meeting did not constitute or represent the polity, but rather *advised* it; its relationship to the *qawm* was purely didactic – the Aligarhists considered their leadership to be a kind of *farz*

(moral obligation) which had nothing to do with representation or consent.<sup>85</sup> While it is certainly true that the *ashrāf* were not interested in mobilizing a wider Muslim population, it is a mistake to assume that an Indo-Muslim community was articulated in terms of *qawm* qua nation. At this point in time, the term was not always used to describe a circumscribed and delimited nation or community, unlike during the decades approaching independence in the twentieth century; in the nineteenth century, the term could be used interchangeably for various social and cultural forms of belonging, and not just to the collective Muslim community under the auspices of *ashrāf* leadership.

In the political context of the late nineteenth century, *ashrāf* elites had to defend themselves from the majority community, who condemned Muslims for having extra-territorial loyalties, and conceived of Muslims as an undifferentiated category defined by religion alone.<sup>86</sup> The *ashrāf*, who were entering into the politics of self-interest as a result of colonial regimes of enumeration, began to speak and write in terms of a more collectively defined Muslim identity, constructing a discourse of Muslim interest that eclipsed the numerous divisions that existed within the community of Islam in India.<sup>87</sup> It was in this context – as both colonized subjects, and perceived as ‘foreign’ by fellow Indians – that *ashrāf* elites sought to uplift a ‘backward’ community of Muslims through *islāh*, or correction, a course of action that was cultivated within reverberating historical narratives of cultural decline of the Muslim community. While such a discourse about the backwardness of Muslims preoccupied North Indian *ashrāf*, it also arose in other Muslim communities in South Asia, such as in Bengal, where as Neilesh Bose has noted, Bengali Muslims began to critique social relations and backwardness in the Bengali language (as

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<sup>85</sup> Devji, Faisal. *Muslim Nationalism: Founding Identity in Colonial India*. Diss. University of Chicago, 1993. p. 104-105

<sup>86</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self & Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001)

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

opposed to English or Urdu) in the 1890s.<sup>88</sup> The concept of *islāh* was also intimately tied to poetic discourses, and becomes as we shall see below in Altaf Husain Hali's work, a way to re-invent Urdu language and literature, and articulate a collective Muslim identity. In doing so, the Indo-Muslim urban landscape as a textured, poetic associational milieu was re-imagined: it was invoked symbolically, as the responsibility of *ashraf* elites, who sought to manage it as solely their ethical realm. They competed and disagreed with one another about the ways and means of managing their community, but they had no interest in mobilizing Muslim masses for wider political gain.

The new mode of limited representation whereby the *ashraf* were seen by colonial officials as the only leadership capable of mediating between the state, and the population of the subcontinent's Muslims led to a predicament within Urdu poetics. Poetry was re-evaluated on the basis of its perceived moral degeneracy. The loss of Mughal sovereignty in 1857 was a traumatic event for Muslim elites. The body of the sovereign Bahadur Shah Zafar was deposed in Rangoon, his dynastic line exterminated. Narratives recalling those events, such as Khwaja Hasan Nizami's *Begamat Ke Ansu (The Tears of the Noblewomen)*, filled volumes of history writing about Muslim decline for decades to come. The sovereign body could only be recovered *symbolically*, something epitomized within new methods of correcting Urdu poetic practice. At the same time, poetry was one domain over which official colonial policies had a relatively limited impact, and thus, it became a reservoir where the political strivings of this nebulous Muslim community was articulated. The political context of colonial modernity—the emergence of the census, literary initiatives being absorbed into educational policies, the burgeoning press, meetings for social reform and the related issue of the Urdu language—impacted how

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<sup>88</sup> Bose, Neilesh. *Anti-Colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics, 1840s-1952*. Diss. Tufts University, 2009. p. 86-89.

*mushā'irahs* were performed and how the tropes associated with the *ghazal* universe were attributed with negative values.<sup>89</sup> The Aligarh reform-minded literati began to perceive the Urdu *ghazal* as morally decadent as they reconstructed a history of classical Islam.

### **Decline and Progress in Hāli's Poetic Polemics: Ebb and Flow of Islam**

The purported debauchery of the *ghazal* was most poignantly expressed in the work of Muhammad Aftab Husain Hali (1837-1914) whose poetic career emerged out of the *anjuman*, the Punjab Society for Oriental Learning. Belonging to a generation of poets who were rendered homeless in the wake of revolt and subsequent destruction of Delhi, he changed his *takkhalus* Khista (the Exhausted), to Hali (Contemporary), and acquired fame and stature for authoring the *Musaddas (The Ebb and Flow of Islam)* first published in 1878. The *Musaddas* was written at the behest of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, who saw it as the most important work in the service of the Muslim community of India: "When God asks me what I have done, I will say: nothing, but I had Hali write the *Musaddas*."<sup>90</sup> Clearly, a new era of patronage for poets had begun: the poet could now serve as an instrument of moral didacticism and the *ashraf* desire to recuperate sovereignty was displaced onto the prerogatives of community leadership. If such themes were apparent within the *Musaddas*, so too were themes of Victorian moralism: the benefits of thrift and hard work were emphasized, and the dangers of wine, woman and song were explicitly cautioned against within the *Musaddas*. Hali worked closely with the colonial state in Lahore, and officials involved in the Punjab Society for Oriental Learning, such as one Colonel Holyroyd bemoaned the corruptness of Urdu poetry, which reinforced the belief amongst *ashraf* elites that

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<sup>89</sup> See, Francis Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>90</sup> Christopher Shackle, Javed Majeed (Trans., Ed.) *Hali's Musaddas: The Ebb and Flow of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998)

their failings were moral ones. Thus, the reiteration of Victorian values within the cover of the Prophet's message. However, we must be careful not to reduce the *Musaddas* as stemming entirely from the principles of colonial Victorianism, for that would ignore the ambiguity of the *Musaddas* towards themes of decline and progress as it related to Muslim society as well as the Europeans.

*Musaddas* literally refers to how the poem is structured as a series of stanzas made up of six lines each, *musaddas* meaning the plural of six, in Arabic. Translated as *The Ebb and Flow of Islam*, speaking to the cyclical thematic of the rise and fall of civilizations, the poem is an elegy, at the core of which is a potent critique of Muslim aristocracy. Hali bemoaned the condition of Muslim society as contrasted to that of Europeans and Hindus as having fallen into moral stupor. No one is free from criticism: religious institutions and their leaders are characterized in sardonic terms, the clerics lambasted for their lack of learning, members of Sufi families mocked for their limited knowledge and moral defects, and theologians are accused of producing intolerant interpretations of Islam.

Urdu poetry had long allowed for a space from which to criticize religious and political authority. However, what distinguished Hali's *Musaddas* from previous critiques of the hypocrisy of moralists, was his attempt to construct a collective community of Islam in India. This was not, however, a community premised on a separate entity of the *qaum*, but rather one based on love of homeland (*hub-e-vatani*). In contrast to debauched aristocrats, misguided religious men, and the false prestige of the powerful, Hali claims that the true believers are those who are devoted to their country (*mulk*) and community (*millat*), a notion he drew upon from the *hadith*, *ôhubbu l'watani min al-iman*" (love of country is a part of faith):

Those whom the Muslim think are lost, and have no hope of pardon in the next world

No paradise or Rizwan allotted to them, no *houris* or heavenly slaves granted in their fate

Whose place after death is hell, whose water is hot and whose food is cactus,  
Are devoted to their country and community, and fulfill the needs of everyone mutually.

Those among them who possess learned skills or are wealthy seek the welfare of God's creatures

It might be said that this was their trademark, for patriotism (*hub-e-vatani*) is the sign of true believers.

The wealth of the rich, the energy of the poor, the compositions of the writers, the wisdom of the philosophers

The speeches of the orators, the daring of the brave, the weapons of the soldier, the power of the kings

The hopes of their hearts, the joys of their desires, all these are devoted to their fellow countrymen and their country.<sup>91</sup>

Hali also emphasized realism in his moral and aesthetic disapproval of the Muslim community in India. The common refrain was that the Urdu literary universe as a specifically Muslim mode of expression had been given to lies and exaggeration. This emphasis on foregoing the excesses of imagination for realism was tied to Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's understanding of *nechari* (of nature), corresponding to the idea that poetry was now supposed to represent reality objectively, a theme greatly influenced by colonial attitudes towards the purported romantic excesses of Urdu.<sup>92</sup> Broadly speaking, *nechari* was associated with the question of materialism and rationalism, and Syed Ahmad Khan, who was impressed by the achievements of English education, adopted a rationalist-scientific approach, by arguing that Islam was not only a religion based on reason, but also nature thus supporting the study of Western natural sciences, amongst other subjects. However, not everyone welcomed the political commitments associated with this notion of realism. Sir Syed Ahmed's ideas of *nechari* came under attack from not only segments of the *ulema*, but also by Muslim revivalists, such as the thinker and political

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<sup>91</sup> Christopher Shackle, Javed Majeed (Trans., Ed.) *Hali's Musaddas: The Ebb and Flow of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.165

<sup>92</sup> See, Francis Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).



activist, Jamal-uddin Afghani (1838 - 1897), who critiqued Aligarh's founder for advocating cooperation with the British rather than adopting a pan-Muslim stance against foreign domination. In the 'Refutation of the Materialists,' originally a work in Persian, but translated into Urdu as *Haqiqat-e Mazhab-e Nechari* (The Reality of the Religion of the Materialists/Naturalists), Afghani explained the social and political purpose of religion, as a system of laws and practices based on a belief in a transcendent divine, and argued that materialism is a source of corruption and causes social discord (*fitna*). Above all, he stood against Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's acceptance of British rule and education.<sup>93</sup> It was not only the architect of pan-Muslim identity who found fault with the new notion of realism. His commitments to realism did not convince poets of the period. The satirical poet Zareef Lucknawi (1870 - 1937), in his ode, *Shaer-Ashob* (Lament for Poetry) - the title itself a pun upon the *shahr-ashob* genre - decries the decline of poetry's aesthetic value as a result of the proliferation of poets writing in new verse he deemed uncreative; Lucknawi also scorned how this led poets to be nothing more than mere entertainers for the new gentry, as opposed to independent-minded thinkers:

Poetry which in days of yore was knowledge ultimate,  
 Is now condensed, in the poetic name shorn of former grace  
 Uncontrolled is your growth, beyond the census's grasp,  
 You are deemed an angel, dressed in human garb.  
 You do not use your head and heart, while you write your text,  
 All you write must be easy, not at all abstract.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> See Margaret Kohn, 'Afghani on Empire, Islam, and Civilization', *Political Theory*, Volume 37 Number 3 June 2009. 398-422. Kohn demonstrates how Afghani's ideas are to be in no way understood as opposed to 'rationalism' because for Afghani, philosophy, like religion rightly understood, is about the pursuit of wisdom. As she points out, however, 'Refutation of the Materialists,' is formed around a unique array of oppositions. Instead of contrasting philosophy against religion, or religion against science, Afghani equates religion, philosophy, and science as modes of rationalism and contrasts them with materialism.

<sup>94</sup> *shairy go ahd-e mazi mein thi payan-e- aloom / ab takhallus me simat kar aa gai jaan-e aloom.  
 teri kasrat har jagah mardam shumaari ke siwa / tu farishta hai basher ki shakl mein is ahd ka.  
 jab ke tu leta nahin apne dimagh o dil se kaam, / sahl se hai tjh ko matlib, aur kya muskil se kaam.  
 pahle arbab-e- nishaat aate the gaane ke liye / ab tau shair jaate hain ghazalein sunaane ke liye.*

Lucknowi's lambasting of the new style of poetry, in particular his reference to the rewriting of text and its proliferation, is indicative of the kind of impact that the critiques of Syed Ahmed Khan and Altaf Hussain's hard-hitting poetics about Muslim society being degenerate, had upon a wider audience. Urdu writing by the mid-nineteenth century had become much more accessible as formidable changes occurred within print culture, for as print became commercialized, it offered a hitherto unknown general access to the products of written culture among literate audiences. Thus, individual critiques and debates within urban North Indian Muslim society such as those exemplified by Afghani's pamphlet as well as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's magazine *Tehzib ul Akhlaq*, were being accessed by a growing readership. As one historian of print culture in South Asia has shown, the scholarly preoccupation with India's rich manuscripts has sidelined the fact that for the average Indian reader, manuscripts were very expensive and difficult to come by, which is why the step from the rare and costly manuscript to the mass-produced printed book—costing barely one tenth of the price of a manuscript and available through a rapidly expanding network of distribution sites and agents—was revolutionary.<sup>95</sup> She points out for instance that Naval Kishore, an Indian publisher of Hindu origin, was most likely the world's first publisher to issue in 1868 a finely printed Qur'an at the sensational price of 1 rupee, 8 annas, thus bringing the holy book within reach of an unprecedented number of ordinary Muslims. Commercial mass printing dramatically shifted power configurations within the intellectual and literary domains, and knowledge was no longer the preserve of tiny set of elites but expanded into the public realm.<sup>96</sup>

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*Yaad-e-ayyam ke shair ko zaban par naaaz tha, / Quwwat e takhayyul hi sarmaya e aazaaz tha.*

See, K.C. Nanda, *Masterpieces of Humorous Urdu Poetry* (London: Sterling Publishers, PVT Lmtd, 2002) p

<sup>95</sup> Ulrike Starke, *An Empire of Books: The Nawal Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007) p. 19

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

Hali's work had a formidable reach: it was not only published and re-published, but had the capacity to be recited before large audiences because it was, after all, poetry. The loss of sovereignty and a generalized powerlessness of Muslim elites before the colonial state formed the wider context of Hali's moral polemics: he conceptualized Muslim society in terms of failure and cast the period of classical Islam in utopian terms. The perceived degeneracy of the pre-Islamic Arab world, described as *jahālat* (ignorance) was mapped onto the community of Indian Muslims, seen as having fallen into a state of pre-Islamic depravity. Hali diagnosed the Muslim community as poverty-stricken and ill, due to its moral wickedness. There is the reminder to the audience that universal justice once prevailed under the Caliphs of early Islam. The trope of a pristine, classical Islamic world was held up to contemporary Muslims as a mirror into the desired (political) future: just sovereigns ruling wisely over their people, living according to the proper tenets of Islamic law. In fact, in Hali's view, the Europeans had progressed because they, more so than the Muslims, had followed the tenets of the *shari'ah*:

We who have broke the tenets of the *shari'ah*  
The people of the West have fixed those tenets.<sup>97</sup>

Guiding the view of a fall from the golden ages of Islam, was the manner in which Hali conceived of Arabic as superior to Persian, and the authentic language of Muslim heritage: this was a view which was gaining ground in the late nineteenth century amongst some quarters of the *ashraf*, because of how Persian, once the official state language, had been taken away by the British, and thus effectively enervated as a language of political power.<sup>98</sup> Arabic, the language of

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<sup>97</sup> *Shari'at ke jo ham ne paiman tore / Voh le jaa ke ahl-e-maghib ne jore*

<sup>98</sup> More recently, historian Seema Alavi has been arguing that this was happening as early as the eighteenth century, with the rise of what she has called an Arabicist ecumene, engendered by the migratory patterns of pilgrims, traders, and military men between the hijaz and India. See, "Fugitive Mullahs and Outlaw Fanatics", paper presented at Royal Holloway University London, February 2010. <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/02/seema-alavi-fugitive-mullahs-and-outlaw-fanatics/>.

classical Islamic texts, remained unaffected in this regard by British colonial policy on the vernaculars in India, and began to thus acquire the perception as having a greater status than Persian. Within the decline narrative of the *Musaddas*, the most caustic passage in the text is the one describing the alleged dissoluteness of contemporary Urdu poetry:

The filthy archive of poetry and odes, more foul than a cesspool in its putridity, /  
By which the earth is convulsed as if by an earthquake, and which makes the  
angels blush in heaven, / Such is the place among other branches of learning of  
our literature, by which learning and faith are quite devastated.<sup>99</sup>

Yet, even as Hali bemoaned the consequences of modern Muslim poets' betrayal of a heritage of Arabic poetry, and in spite of his suggestion that Persian be abandoned in favor of Arabic, the *form* of the *Musaddas* takes its cue from traditional Persian poetic rendering.<sup>100</sup> Persian may well be characterized as the language of debauchery and depravity, but Hali found it impossible to remove the language from Urdu poetics. As Javed Majeed has argued the importance of the *Musaddas* lies in its endeavor to distinguish the ethical realm (*akhlāq*) from the historical decline of a government.<sup>101</sup> The *Musaddas* extends its ode to the glories of classical Islam, while retaining deep ambivalence towards the Perso-Urdu poetic past:

In a sense, the *Musaddas* can be read in terms of the formulation of the role of conscience in Islamic history, which rests on making a distinction between Islam as personal faith and inner piety and Islam as social system and historical force. In this scheme of things, the epoch of classical Islam becomes the only period in Islamic history where inner piety is perfectly mirrored in external polity. Similarly the powerful model of classical Islam in the poem becomes the unique historical counterpart of an inner piety and faith. The rest of the poem is an attempt to rescue that inner faith from the steady historical decline of Islam.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Christopher Shackle, Javed Majeed (Trans., Ed.) *Hali's Musaddas: The Ebb and Flow of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 18

<sup>100</sup> Christopher Shackle, Javed Majeed (Trans., Ed.) *Hali's Musaddas: The Ebb and Flow of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.

<sup>101</sup> Javed Majeed (Trans., Ed.) *Hali's Musaddas: The Ebb and Flow of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 51

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid* p. 52

At the same time, Hali did not believe that civilizational decline was a specifically Muslim phenomenon, but that all worldly power is ultimately fleeting and transitory. There is a strong suggestion to the British will eventually meet the same fate that has afflicted all civilizations in the past.

Hali's *Musaddas* also emphasizes the theme of universal justice prevailing during the Caliphate, and structures this in terms of social egalitarianism. In describing the nascent Muslim community, Hali spends several stanzas upon the question of social equality:

There, no tedious excess of formality in their meals, nor was the purpose of their apparel a display of elegance. / Commanders and soldiers had the same appearance. (*amir aur lashkar ki thi ek surat*) Poor and rich were all in the same state. (*faqir aur ghani sab ki thi ek haalat*) The Gardener had laid out a garden which did not contain any very large or small plant.

The Caliphs were guardians of the community in just the same way the shepherd is the guardian of the flock. They thought of non-Muslims and Muslims in similar fashion. There was no striking difference between slave and free man. Bondwoman and lady were like sisters born of the same mother are in the world.<sup>103</sup>

The theme of social justice and egalitarianism which is seen to have characterized early Islam and the ways in which Hali constantly admonishes the rich as having betrayed such principles, had an enduring impact within the Urdu socio-literary sphere. Such ideas were later harnessed to Marxist interpretations of feudal decadence that, unlike notions of history in Islamic revivalist narrations, looked not to a pristine ideal past, but to a revolutionized, egalitarian future. It is significant that the tenor of Hali's elegy regarding Muslims in a state of cultural decline is set in the opening First Introduction by a reference to a gathering of poets: *ōī* sing no longer with the nightingale (*bulbul ki chaman mein har zubani chordhi*) / From poets and recitals now I quail

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid p. 123

(*bazm-e shuara khwani chordhi*).<sup>104</sup> The *bazm* (gathering) of mystics and poets is abandoned in favor of a unified Muslim community, and an entire generation of aristocrats is depicted as rogues and scoundrels. While escape from the *bazm* or *mahfil* itself is a trope within the *ghazal* universe expressing the frustrations of the mystic/lover, in Hali's rendering, such a gathering, where illicit desire and subversion of a normative and legal societal order is celebrated, is deserted: it offers no panacea to a community of Muslims seen to be floundering culturally and socio-economically. By the end of the *Musaddas*, Muslim society is symbolically described as a boat on the point of sinking.

For Hali, poetry must acquire moral purpose, and thus the *õislāh* (correction) of the *ghazal* is the most important and necessary task, which meant eradicating speech having to do with lust and desire. Even as certain tropes of the *ghazal* were perceived by Hali to be morally reprehensible, he employed much of traditional *ghazal* imagery to make moral valuations in the *Musaddas*. In contrast to how wine, drinking, and intoxication were often conceived as metaphors for ecstatic or divine experience, Hali uses the imagery as metaphors for moral vices. The *Musaddas* associates Urdu poetry with conventional imagery of wine and intoxication, but puts this in a context of moral condemnation, so that wine becomes a signifier for the lowly state of Urdu poetry. Despite this new powerful strand of moral discourse which stressed the unity of Muslims appeared, there were poets who refused to abide by the conventions associated with the moral discourse, such as Dagh Dehlavi (1831-1905):

O, Pious man, let me drink wine while sitting in the mosque.  
Or else show me some place where God doesn't exist!<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Christopher Shackle, Javed Majeed (Trans., Ed.) *Hali's Musaddas: The Ebb and Flow of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.

<sup>105</sup> *Zahid sharab pine de masjid mein baith kar  
Ya phir who jaga bata de jahan par khuda na ho*

The *Musaddas* was so popular, and widely received, that it almost immediately underwent a second edition. In it, Hali emphasized hope over sorrow—a theme which found direct resonance with the Marxist-inspired rules for Urdu poetics several decades later. Much of Hali's second edition focused upon expanding the theme of the need for the Muslim community to lift itself up through hard work (*koshish-o mihnat*).<sup>106</sup> Hali's theme, that the leisured worlds of the rich were constructed by the back-breaking toil of the poor, was to be widely implemented by progressive poetry half a century later. In fact, writer Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, a progressive socialist playwright who had a leading role in establishing the IPTA (Indian People's Theater Association) turned to Hali's *Musaddas* as a pre-eminent example of employing the thematic of hope in times of disillusionment. Abbas took special pride in sharing ancestry with the Hali. In the semi-autobiographical novel, *Inquilab (Revolution)* published in early 1950 he includes the following reflection by the main character, himself a budding socialist and anti-colonialist:

But more than anything else Anwar had been moved by *Musaddas-e Hali*, the inspiring epic of Islam's rise and fall composed by [the] poet of Panipat at whose grave Anwar and his father had offered homage—the rhythm and flow of Hali's immortal words swept him along on a wave of emotions. As he recited the stanzas he experienced the same uplifting feeling of joy and power that he used to feel when reciting verses from the Qur'an. Every time Anwar read it, he felt as the poet undoubtedly had intended his readers to feel—in turn, inspired, proud, depressed, dejected, and humiliated. But out of it was born a sense of the urgency of change, a desire for dispelling the gloom of ignorance by the lamps of learning, which was just as the poet had undoubtedly planned.<sup>107</sup>

The *Musaddas* was inseparable from the history of Urdu poetry, giving rise to staged performances, public recitations at *mushai'rahs*. More importantly, the text became vital to how poets and intellectuals of the twentieth century re-interpreted its assertions as they began to

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<sup>106</sup> Javed Majeed (Trans., Ed.) *Hali's Musaddas: The Ebb and Flow of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998)

<sup>107</sup> Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, *Inquilab* (New Delhi: India Paperbacks, 1977) p. 59-60.

conceive of, and debate, the question of Muslim identity in relation to Indian nationalism in the twentieth century.

### **Colonialism and Nationalism in Muhammad Iqbal's Narratives of Decline**

It was not until the first decades of the twentieth century that narratives of communitarian identity amongst the *ashrāf* began to take on a uniquely Indian Muslim conception of *ḥ-nation* and *ḥ-nationalism*.<sup>108</sup> Western-educated Muslims may have thrown doubt upon the political aims of the Indian National Congress to represent and speak for all of India (a critique that had begun as early as Syed Ahmed Khan's speech in 1885 to persuade Muslims not to join), but this did not mean that they perceived their loyalties to a wider global community of Islam (*ummāh*) to be an obstacle in fashioning a shared Indian nationality.<sup>108</sup> The fact was that Muslim political prerogatives remained divided along regional and local lines, in spite of how electoral politics at the all-India level (i.e., the granting of separate electorates for Muslims) kept endorsing the abstract legal category of *ḥ-Indian Muslim* as a solely religiously informed affiliation.<sup>109</sup> As Ayesha Jalal has noted, it was the question of their location within Indian nationality, and not the issue of nationality itself, that gripped the imagination of the *ashrāf* as they began to articulate anti-colonial politics in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>110</sup>

It was the philosopher and poet Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938) who deeply altered the intellectual and political horizons of the *ashrāf*, by articulating Muslim conceptions of *ḥ-nation* and *ḥ-nationality* whilst also critiquing various strands of Western nationalism and ideas of

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<sup>108</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001) p. 165

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid* p. 166



democratic liberalism.<sup>111</sup> Iqbal was born in Sialkot, Punjab and his family was originally Kashmiri Brahmin, his grandparents having converted from Hinduism to Islam. Well-versed in Urdu, English, and Persian, Iqbal was educated first in the *maktab*, then the Scotch Mission School, before going on to Government College, Lahore where he studied Arabic and English literature, and philosophy. Given Iqbal's prominent role in giving expression to a politics of an independent Indian and Muslim homeland, the poet is today viewed in Pakistan as one of its chief intellectual architects, alongside Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Iqbal has also been widely heralded in the Muslim world beyond South Asia in such places as Iran, praised for his Persian and Urdu poetic verses celebrating a global community of Islam. Iqbal was critical of the institutions and dogmas of Western imperialism as well as the narrowly defined nationalisms of his compatriots who sought refuge in religious conservatism as a way to cope with the loss of sovereignty under British colonial suzerainty. Since Iqbal wrote poetry in multiple voices and from within a political context wherein nationalism was being variously defined, he has been appropriated to diverse political agendas, from Indian nationalism, to Marxism, and Islamism, in spite of the complexity of his poetic works. While Iqbal's poetry and philosophy shifted in later years towards a focus upon notions of a united Islamic community (*ummāh*) most of his work cultivates expression about both individual freedom as well as the Muslim community exemplifying, as Jalal has noted, the distinction between Islam as personal faith, and Islam as social demarcator of cultural difference.<sup>112</sup> In such a world-view, spiritual expression did not translate into a uniquely Muslim preoccupation, nor were the *'ulema* seen to be the ultimate

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid

<sup>112</sup> Ibid

guardians of Islam, for in Iqbal's view, "an infidel before his idol with wakeful heart is better than the religious man asleep in the mosque."<sup>113</sup>

In part, the dynamism of his oeuvre is a result of how Iqbal's Urdu poetics drew inspiration from his forebears as well as his contemporaries; he was giving voice to an already existing, but hitherto un-expressed political sentiment amongst the *ashraf* regarding their subjugated condition *vis à vis* British colonial rule, as well as their marginal and minoritized position in relation to anti-colonial agitations at the all-India level. Iqbal's complex verses were filled with encouragement to his fellow Muslims to awaken from what he referred to as their "long slumber" under colonial suppression; he also sought to illustrate the compatibility between Islam and Western modes of thought, constantly reiterating the role of Islam in the making of Western history and civilization. Moreover, Iqbal was the first Urdu poet to lay out a politicized aesthetic and politically committed verse: his principal intent has been variously described by scholars, "as instilling in his audience a fresh sense of community through the recovery of an earlier sense of it, recreating in the hearts of others the agitation he experienced in his own, awakening his contemporaries to the condition of their nation, and treating language not just an end in itself but as a vehicle of articulating perspectives on ethics and communal rights and duties."<sup>114</sup> It was Iqbal's poetic and philosophical creativity which would have a formidable impact upon the socialist and communist inspired progressive literati a few decades later; they would turn to, as well as debate, the merits of Iqbal's reinterpretation of long-standing traditions and styles of Urdu poetry, in formulating a politics of anti-colonial resistance that aimed to give voice to the struggles of lower-class Indians.

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<sup>113</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Javed Namah*, (Book of Eternity), 1932 excerpted from Rajmohan Gandhi, "Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938)," in *Understanding the Muslim Mind* (Penguin Books, 1986), 47-79.

<sup>114</sup> Javed Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge Press, 2009) p. 2

At the heart of Iqbal's work was a message about modernizing Indian Muslim consciousness through his theory of *khudī* (selfhood). Iqbal not only articulated notions of Muslim self-empowerment in the face of colonial dominance, but did so by shifting the medium of Urdu poetics itself, so that its traditional tropes were both employed and altered.<sup>115</sup> This was a process, argues Javed Majeed in his biographical study of Iqbal, of a creative interplay between tradition and innovation, which must be closely examined since the aesthetics underpinning modern Islamic thought, have been little understood. That Iqbal's poetic persona was divided between tradition and innovation is evoked in the dual sense of how the terms of *islāh* (correction) and *mazmūn* (poetic theme) are deployed, for, alongside his use of these terms in their conventional meanings, he refers to how his correction (*islāh*) of another's verse is made from the perspective of ethics and religion, and is not concerned with technical errors in meter or word choice.<sup>116</sup>

Iqbal's entire oeuvre is far too varied to examine in detail, so I shall focus here upon one aspect of his political aesthetic in his early poetry between 1905 and 1914: that is, the way in which he creatively used existing tropes of decline within Urdu poetics to animate ideas of Muslim political loss in relation to anti-colonial Indian politics. Prior to his travels in Europe, Iqbal was concerned with the condition of India, as well as the increasing levels of Hindu-Muslim animosity; upon his return from Europe, Iqbal's poetry began to evince concerns for a global community of Islam—however, the latter was not at odds with his attachment to India as a homeland.<sup>117</sup> The poems which he composed upon his return to India tended to laud Islamic

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<sup>115</sup> For more on *khudī*, see Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001) and Javed Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge Press, 2009)

<sup>116</sup> Javed Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge Press, 2009) p. 3

<sup>117</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001) p. 168

notions of universal brotherhood, while disparaging western territorial nationalism as the source of bigotry and communitarian exclusivism, as Iqbal refashioned notions of nationality encoded within terms such as *millat* and *watan* terms that were not limited to territorially based love of homeland.<sup>118</sup>

I argue that it was Iqbal's creative appropriation of longstanding narratives of decline within the Urdu poetic milieu that made the interplay between tradition and aesthetics a powerful medium which articulated an independent Muslim selfhood and its place within anti-colonial Indian politics. More specifically, it was Iqbal's turn to mystical dimensions of Sufi poetry in spite of his oft-repeated admonishment of certain strands of Sufi practice (i.e., the visiting of shrines, for instance, or the belief in self-annihilation) coupled with renewed narratives of decline, which emboldened his verse with anti-colonial verve. The mystical dimensions of his poetry, especially the themes of separation and union, pervaded poems that emerged during a period where Iqbal's critique of western nationalism and colonialism became more pronounced. Lastly, it was at the moment when Britain's imperial encroachment in many parts of the world formerly subject to Muslim rule had reached its peak, together with the Indian political scene of the early twentieth century, when a new narrative of "Muslim decline" was invoked by Iqbal.

One of Iqbal's earliest poems which discusses the issue of the Muslim community's decline, is *Sicily (Siqilliya)* an ode capturing the sentiments of Islamic universalism that Iqbal composed while he was in Europe between 1905 and 1908. During these years, Iqbal studied philosophy at Cambridge and law at London's Lincoln Inn, and he wrote a dissertation on Persian metaphysics, earning his doctorate at Munich University, Germany. Iqbal's travels in Europe transformed his understanding of the relationship between Islam and the West, for Europe's vitality struck Iqbal; simultaneously Iqbal began to develop a critique during this time

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid 168

about the excesses of Western materialism, rationalism, and territorial nationalism. While a thorough examination of how Iqbal's travels informed his politicized aesthetics is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is worth dwelling on the poem, *Sicily*, as evocative of a period of Iqbal's intellectual life during which he conceived of the role of Islam, the West, and anti-colonial Indian nationalism:

*Sicily*

Now weep blood, oh eyes, for the tomb of the arts of Arabia (*tehzib-e-hijazi ka mazar*) stands there in sight.  
Where the men of the desert whose ships made a playground of ocean once rushed to the fight  
They who brought into the emperors' throne-rooms earthquakes and swords in which lightning had nested:  
Their advent proclaimed a new world till the old was devoured their keen blades never rested;  
At their thundered Arise! A dead earth sprang to life, and man burst from the chains of unreason:  
From that tumult our ears are still tingling with joy shall their hymn ever know a new season?  
Oh Sicily, crown of the sea, like a guide in the waters' wide wilderness set,  
On ocean's cheek rest like a mole, rejoice with your lamps the wave-wanderer yet!  
May your balm to the traveler's eye, the foam-dance on your rocks, be forever the same,  
You who cradled the arts of that nation whose earth-melting luster once shone like a flame!  
As the nightingale voice of Shiraz for Baghdad, and for Delhi Dagh shed bitter tears,  
As Ibn Badrun's soul lamented when heaven ended Granada's opulent years,  
So to sorry with you fate has chosen Iqbal, oh this heart that knows your heart so well!  
Whose annals lie lost in your ruins? Those shores and their echoless music might tell.  
Tell your grief then to me, who am grief, who am dust of that caravan whose magnet you were:  
Stir my veins let the picture glow bright with fresh color, the ancient days' record declare!  
I go with your gift to India, and I who weep here will make others weep there.<sup>119</sup>

While this is a *ghazal*, the poem is also reminiscent of the *shahr-ashob* topos in which the city of Sicily appears as not only a beloved, but as a mole upon the face of the ocean. Sicily is likened to other cities of past Islamic polities such as Delhi, Shiraz, Baghdad, and Granada, whilst it is used to evoke the historical glories of Islam. Iqbal reworks the idea of the role of the beloved in the traditional *ghazal*; the smoothness of the beloved's face a metaphor in place of the Indian and Mediterranean oceans functions to meld together diverse regions, to form a far-reaching

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<sup>119</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Siqilliya*, in *Bang-e-Dara*, reprinted and trans. V.G. Kiernan, *Poems from Iqbal* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 32-33.

and evocative geography of pan-Islam. Above all, woven throughout the poem is the condition of decline: the opening and closing verses are tied together with the act of weeping. This act of weeping, however, is not fatalistic; it is a political act. The poet asks his audience to, "give your grief to me", or literally, to give over the pain of loss to Iqbal, who is its destination (*manzil*) of that historical movement of loss, so that he is enlivened. Thus, the act of weeping before the ancient ruins of Islam within Europe animates Iqbal, so that he will take a message to India, where his homeland is oppressed; Islam here is depicted as a liberating force against colonial tyranny. What was different about Iqbal's poetry and philosophy as compared to earlier narratives of decline of the Muslim community was how Iqbal understood decline of Muslim power to be intimately connected to the Western representational style of politics. In Iqbal's view, this was limited form of politics because it was inadequate in addressing the ethical bonds between men that transcended national identities: for Iqbal, "Democracy (*jamhuriyat*) means a mode, to rule the common man / No doubt they count the votes, but conduct they do not scan."<sup>120</sup>

The most dramatic of Iqbal's poetic verse narrating the decline of the Muslim community was the poem *Shikvā* (*The Complaint*), first recited by Iqbal in 1909 at a gathering of the Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam in Lahore. The theme of *Shikva*, is the poet's petition against God for the injustices he has meted out upon the Muslim community; while its message was explicitly engaged with a Muslim audience shortly after the formation of the All-India Muslim League, Iqbal was first and foremost appealing to God. The poem created a stir, for unlike the popular reception to his works, *The Complaint* generated controversy amongst educated Muslims as well as many Hindus. While some Muslims thought that *Shikvā* was insolent and possibly heretical, Hindus took offense to a tone that extolled Muslim warriors for the destruction of idols as well as the poem's depiction of Hindus as uncivilized non-believing heathens. Certain

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<sup>120</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Jamhuriyat*

orthodox Muslims also objected to the terms used by Iqbal to refer to Allah, such as *harjaī* (unfaithful). Responding to the criticisms generated by *Shikva*, Iqbal composed *Javāb-e-Shikva* ('*In Reply to the Complaint*') four years later in 1913. He then recited it before a *mushai'rah* in front of Mochi Gate, Lahore, where a meeting had been organized to raise funds to help the Turks fight against the Bulgarians. Both poems deal explicitly with the question of decline and loss of power of the Muslim community.

*Shikvā* begins with the poet's humble request for forgiveness for having dared to address Allah directly. It begins with a self-questioning: "Why must I all attentive be to the nightingale's lament, Friend, am I as dumb as a flower? Must I remain silent?"<sup>121</sup> There are then several stanzas which beseech God, asking why, despite all that Muslims had done for Allah in fighting wars and acquiring wealth for the glories of his name, in spreading Islam to distant shores, in bringing order and monotheism to various idolatrous societies, in their constant faith in the message of the Prophet, and in building empires they have been reduced to a wretched state, ignored by Allah's mercies and neglected by him. Iqbal in stanza 13 writes, "The floors of your *Ka'aba* we with our foreheads swept, the Qur'an you sent us we clasped to our breast / Even so you accuse us of lack of faith on our part / If we lacked faith, you did little to win our heart." Iqbal then laments the decline of Muslim political and economic power, and how Muslims are now subject to "strangers' taunts, ill-repute and penury" and like many stanzas in the poem ends, this one too ends with an intrepid question: "Must disgrace be the lot of we who gave our lives for You?" Iqbal then wonders why "infidels are rewarded" with wealth and

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<sup>121</sup> Khuswant Singh, Trans., *Muhammad Iqbal, Shikwa and Javab-e-Shikva: Iqbal's Dialogue with Allah* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 28. Also, as Javed Majeed has noted, the correlation between the unaltered garden of aesthetic tradition with passivity, that is the notion of remaining silent as a flower, is also expressed in another poem, "Khizr-e Rah (Khizr on the Road) in *Bang-e Dara*, in the section on "Capital and Labor" when the laboring man is asked, "Like a bud, forgetful one, how long will you merely accept dew on your lap?" As Majeed notes, this is a pre-eminent example of Iqbal's political intervention in poetry since the traditional image of the passive garden in which the poet has not intervened, now becomes a symbol of political acquiescence. See also, Javed Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge Press, 2009) p. 8.

security in the world, while Muslims are promised reward only upon their death, calling into question Allah's bounty; that is, if Allah's graciousness is so limitless, then why would Muslims necessarily remain so poor and wretched.

In *Javāb-e Shikvā*, Allah responds by claiming that the believers have abandoned the core values of Islam, by assimilating into *kāfir* societies, exchanging their faith in God and his messenger for personal glories and for exclusivist cultural identities; there is the criticism of Muslims as being divided in tribes and castes; abandoning their forefathers' traditions; and having fallen into the clutches of wealth and power. One stanza in particular claims that 'If any there be who still take our name, it is the poor. If any there are today who cover up your shame, it is the poor. The rich know us not; they're drunk with the wine of wealth; the enlightened community survives because of the poor man's breath.'<sup>122</sup> Such an evaluation of the oppressed and the oppressor preceded that of the progressive-Marxist poets and writers regarding the theme of social justice and the place of the poor within society.

The poems resemble a petition to a sovereign, written in the style, if not the form, of court poetry such as the *qasīdā* which was written for a ruler; at times, such *qasīdās* could expose the dissatisfaction that the poet could express towards his patron. In *Shikvā*, the poet demands to know the reason behind God's 'betrayal' of the Muslims. Allah here is depicted as a sovereign for whom Muslims have sacrificed, fought, and built empires, yet has forsaken them. The rewards promised to Muslims, such as *houris* in paradise, Iqbal laments, will come to them only after death, while non-believers are offered immediate fortune in this world.

The themes of decline and progress within *Shikva* and *Javab-e-Shikva* must also be read in relation to how the poems are replete with symbols and images familiar to the *ghazal* topos:

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<sup>122</sup> Khuswant Singh, Trans., *Muhammad Iqbal, Shikwa and Javab-e-Shikva: Iqbal's Dialogue with Allah* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 75



gardens, birds, wine, *mahfils*, as well as evocations of the eternal and divine love. Iqbal uses the Persian love-story of Laila and Majnun, for instance, to compare the poet's enduring love of Allah. At the same time, such tropes are also used to evoke a love for one's community. Certain Persian tropes are put into the service of glorifying a classical Islamic past, especially the early Muslims of the Arab community. *Shikvā* and *Javāb-e-Shikvā* are often seen as Iqbal's most "Islamist" poems, characterized by his assertions of a strong Muslim identity. What is important to recognize is that this strong Muslim identity is being juxtaposed against the poet's critiques of western nationalism. At the same time, Iqbal did not lose sight of the Indian-ness of their expression. In the last stanza of the *Shikva*, Iqbal writes:

Let the lament of this lonely *bulbul* pierce the hearts of all / Arouse the hearts of the sleeping, with this my clarion call. / Transfused with fresh blood, a new compact of faith we'll sign. Let our hearts thirst again for a sip of the vintage wine. / What if the pitcher be Persian, from Hejaz is the wine I serve. What if the song be Indian, it is Hejazi in its verve.<sup>123</sup>

The place of Persian in relation to cyclical themes of decline and progress and as a linguistic register to assess the moral stature of Muslims is an interesting one. The term that Iqbal uses to describe the pitcher, is *ajmi* (from *ajami* and *ajam*). In Arabic, the term *ajam* literally means "one who is illiterate in a language," "silent," or "mute," and has referred to non-Arabs in general, specifically Persians. While the wine (and song) Iqbal refers to symbolizes an Islamic spirit that is associated with authentic expression of Arabic, naming the birthplace of Islam, the Hejaz the form of the expression of Islamic spirit here, is contingent on culture (Persian, Indian). Iqbal thus makes a distinction between religion and culture through the symbolism of the pitcher of wine. Lastly, Iqbal's conception of a homeland for Muslims was one based on humanitarian ideals, and not territorial limits.

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<sup>123</sup> Khuswant Singh, Trans., *Muhammad Iqbal, Shikwa and Javab-e-Shikva: Iqbal's Dialogue with Allah* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 58

## The Imperial City Re-Imagined: A New *Mushā'irah*

By the early 1920s, Indian Muslim responses to colonial rule were being articulated alongside Gandhian nationalism, as the Khilafatists—those Indian Muslims who sought to preserve the institution of the caliphate in Turkey after World War I—were collectively organizing against British imperialism in order to protect the status of Muslim elites in India. For the first time, the *ashrāf* sought to mobilize masses of Muslims in the service of a united anti-imperial political program. While the melding together of spiritual and temporal power connoted by the term *khilāfat* has a history tied to early Islamic modes of governance, *khilāfat* in the Indian political context of the early 1920s had come to mean something entirely different for the Muslim *ashrāf* classes: Western-educated Muslims alongside the *'ulema*, started to perceive the Ottoman sultan as the authentic worldly and spiritual head of the Islamic holy community (*ummāh*). The waning fortunes of the Ottoman Empire signaled for many elite Indian Muslims not only the increasing encroachment of European powers in Muslim lands, but triggered too, the memory of the loss of formal Mughal sovereignty a mere sixty years prior. Additionally, as Ayesha Jalal has pointed out, the fact that there were so much debate between Muslims regarding the *khilāfat*, demonstrates the many ways that Islamic universalism could be used to fashion various ideals of communitarian identity and politics. In many quarters amongst North India's Muslim elites, there was a turn to authenticating political interest by re-inventing religious symbols that referenced pristine days of early classical Islam.

In light of these developments, *ashrāf* ideas about the institutions of poetry such as the *mushā'irah* underwent some change in relation to nationalist politics: for the first time, litterateurs as well as scholars of Urdu literary criticism and history began to raise questions regarding the origins of the *mushā'irah*. It has only been in the twentieth century, that the

*mushā'irah* itself became a leitmotif which could be examined as *an object of study over time*. Thus, the roots of the term *mushā'irah*, an Arabic word meaning, "excelling in poetry" was first traced as far back as pre-Islamic Arabia by Urdu Professor Rashid Ahmed Siddiqui of Aligarh Muslim University. He argued that it was a *tradition* linked to "harsh tribal rivalries, swordsmanship and techniques of warfare", since the poet's services were enlisted on the pre-Islamic Arabian battlefield.<sup>124</sup> The *mushā'irah*, as a cultural practice, was for the first time being accorded a history of origins, and was attributed with the status of tradition linked to the early Islamic period.

Nowhere has the history of the *mushā'irah* been most elaborately narrated, than by Farhatullah Baig (1883-1948) in his *dillī kī ākhrī shamā (The Last Flame of Delhi)*, first published as a full text in 1928. Farhatullah Baig was originally from Delhi, took pride in his "Turkistan" ancestry, and had an early *madrasa* education, followed by entering Hindu College (1901) and then Saint Stephens, where he received his M.A. Some years later, he moved to Hyderabad, where he lived for the remainder of his life, an increasingly common trend amongst intellectuals writing in Urdu given the institutional patronage afforded to them by the Nizam of Hyderabad. He continued to visit Delhi from time to time, but always expressing dissatisfaction with the changes that had taken place in the city. In the mid 1920s, *Dillī kī ākhrī shamā* had been published as an essay in two Lucknow magazines, *Urdu* and *Al-Nazir*. It gives an account of a young notable, Maulvi Karim-ud-Din, who is assigned the arduous task of inviting Delhi's greatest poets to the *divān-e-khās* (assembly of the prominent) of Bahadur Shah Zafar, so they may exchange couplets one last time before the flame of Mughal sovereignty is extinguished by the official onset of British rule. The narrative emphasizes the humiliation, trials, and tribulations

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<sup>124</sup> See Akhtar Qamber, *The Last Mushai'rah of Delhi: A Translation into English of Farhatullah Baig's Classic, Dill Ki Akhri Shama* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Press, 1979) p18; see also CM Naim, *Urdu Texts and Contexts*.

of Karīm-ud-Dīn as he wanders from house to house, charting the fine lines of literary propriety and cultural refinement embodied in *adab*, (he goes as far as drawing up a seating chart) to ensure that all the poets invited are seated in proper order, taking special care to manage hierarchies and personal rivalries.

Farhatullah Baig's novella about this fictional last *mushā'irah* emerged at a time of upheaval in the history of the Muslim community of colonial India. His understanding of the *mushā'irah* was informed by an acute despair that gripped the Muslim community, and while *The Last Flame of Delhi* was not directed at finding solutions to its plight, in the way that Iqbal's work summoned Muslims to awaken from their state of subjugation, it was an account that attempted to reconstruct a unified Muslim political space through aesthetic expression. Following the failure of the Khilafat movement to achieve its stated objectives, Muslims continued to lack political consensus and a united leadership, and there was an increasing desire on the part of disenfranchised Indian Muslim elites to fashion a collective identity, in the face of a colonial order on the wane, and in relation to the political aspirations of the Hindu majority. Hence, Farhatullah Baig's vision in *The Last Flame of Delhi* was deeply rooted within Indo-Muslim cultural tradition of the *mushai'rah*, as well as political sensibilities having much to do with the legacy of Mughal rule, which in twentieth century colonial India was constantly re-invoked in order to set an agenda for Muslim politics.

Farhatullah Baig wrote *The Last Flame of Delhi* as a semi-fictional history, melding together Persian, Arabic, and Urdu sources, and approached it with a deeply felt concern: that an entire generation was coming to pass who had not personally experienced the destruction of Delhi in the wake of the revolt of 1857. Writing nostalgically from Hyderabad, he mourned that, often it happened that the *shurfā* left their homes never to see Delhi again – and I am perhaps

one of the last to know where they are buried.<sup>125</sup> Yet, this desire to recapture a world of poetic practice in its imperial grandeur, I argue, was not a response solely tied to the losses of 1857, but was rather a response to the failure of the Khilafat movement, borne out of the belief that the *anjuman* had not provided ample political means for the *ashrāf* community to successfully establish Muslim political authority in Turkey. Farhatullah Baig's novel opens with his epiphany about historical duty: "I realized I had to light the lamp of Urdu by giving future generations a picture of the beautiful faces of the poets (even if they appear in a fog)."<sup>126</sup> The most important issue for Farhatullah, was that the poets appear as real people before the readers, for "it is only when one can see [the poet's] face, actions, gestures, and hear their voice, and see their dress, and personhood, that one can truly enjoy their *kalām* (speech)."<sup>127</sup> This emphasis echoed the concerns of accurate representation, an attitude which had predominated Hali's *Musaddas*. Even as Farhatullah emphasized the question of cultural decline, there were significant departures from earlier such narratives: the text had much to do with new forms of political organizing amongst *ashrāf* in the twentieth century. The most significant aspect of Farhatullah Baig's narration of the *mushai'rah* is the celebrated position of the classical *ghazal*.

Congruous to his commitment to realism, Farhatullah Baig does not invent Maulvi Kar m-ud-D n out of thin air: the main character of the novel is based upon a scholar who primarily wrote *tazkirās* of notables as well as poets. *The Last Flame of Delhi* borrows heavily from the *tazkirā* that Maulvi Kar m-ud-D n wrote in 1847, first published as *Ṭabaqāt-i shu'arā' e Hind*, which has been translated as *A Survey of the Poets of India*, and considered to be his magnum opus.<sup>128</sup> In this body of work, Maulvi Kar m-ud-D n explains that he would host a

<sup>125</sup> Farhatullah Baig, *Dilli Ki Akhri Shama* (New Delhi: Urdu Academy, 2006) p. 47.

<sup>126</sup> Farhatullah Baig, *Dilli Ki Akhri Shama* (New Delhi: Urdu Academy, 2006) p. 48

<sup>127</sup> Farhatullah Baig, *Dilli Ki Akhri Shama* (New Delhi: Urdu Academy, 2006) p. 48

<sup>128</sup> See S. Salahuddin's Introduction to *Dilli Ki Akhri Shama* (New Delhi: Urdu Academy, 2006) p 29

*mushā'irah* at his home twice a month, where esteemed poets would come to recite their verses: these sessions were reproduced in writing by Maulvi Karīm-ud-Dīn in a newsletter, which described the poet's work and personality.<sup>129</sup> The introduction to this *tazkirā* also includes passages where Maulvi Karīm-ud-Dīn discusses the strenuous efforts he had to undertake, including the long journeys to the homes of poets, in order to include all the high-ranking poets of Delhi in the compilation. However, the compilation of the first edition begins with the following caveat, "A History of Urdu Poets Chiefly Translated from Garçon de Tassy's *Histories de La Litterature Hindoustanie* By F. Fallon Esqr. And Moulvi Kareemooddeen With Addition." In Farhatullah Baig's reconstructed narrative, the date of the last *mushā'irah* of Delhi is the same as that of the first *mushā'irah* in Maulvi Karīm-ud-Dīn's home, the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 1845.

This narrative reconstruction not only rescues the poet-scholar from his relegation as the colonial state's *munshi*, but attempts to situate him as the penultimate sovereign: in *Dilli ki Akhri Shama*, the *mushā'irah* does not take place within the actual space of Bahadur Shah Zafar's court. Rather, it occurs within a *haveli*, which had once belonged to a wealthy noblewoman, Mubarak Begum, and now housed Karīm-ud-Dīn's printing press. The *haveli* is set aside for ten days for the event. The emperor is absent, and his son, Prince Fakhr-ud-dīn Mirzā is appointed to preside over the *mushā'irah*. Karīm-ud-Dīn appears as the true hero of the novel: the Mughal Empire is retroactively read as on the verge of extinction, and the honor of Delhi is rescued not by the emperor, but by Baig's step-by-step staging of a final gesture (the *mushā'irah*) of Mughal legacy in the *haveli*. The night before the *mushā'irah* is to take place Maulvi Karīm-ud-Dīn is astonished by the transformation of the *haveli*:

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<sup>129</sup> Farhatullah Baig, *Dilli Ki Akhri Shama* (New Delhi: Urdu Academy, 2006) p 30

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the *bazar*, there was talk of the *mushai'rah* on everyone's lips. Some said, "Who is this Kar m-ud-D n?" And the other would respond, "Whoever he is, he has made such impressive preparations, that they give joy to the heart." As I overheard these discussions, I was overwhelmed with joy! The gate of the *haveli* had been decorated with glass, lights, and chandeliers...that had given it the look of *gulzar-e-atish*. The light that emanated from the main entrance, and past the portico, into the *dalhez* was such that it would make the eyes brighten and startle (*chaka chondi ati hai*). As soon as I stepped foot into the house, I nearly lost consciousness. Ya Allah! Was this truly my own home, or had I entered a royal palace?<sup>130</sup>

In this fantasy of recuperating sovereign authority, the *mushai'rah* as a private gathering is turned into a political space. Contrary to the notion that nationalism in India was a discourse premised upon a private sphere of cultural autonomy<sup>131</sup>, Farhatullah Baig's notion of selfhood is closely tied to an aesthetic assertion of imperial, political authority. Farhatullah Baig drew both from the newsletter as well as from Persian sources. While the pretext is that of organizing a *mushā'irah*, Maulvi Kar m-ud-D n's plays the role, not of a courtier, but a diplomat: he negotiates with various poets and notables to ensure that all of them appear together despite infighting and rivalries as a unified group under a single sovereign authority. *Dilli Ki Akhri Shama*, given its huge success, can be read as a symbolic, literary, and fantastical staging of a unified Muslim political leadership. Commentary on changing political conditions increasingly found its refuge within poetry, as Delhi was chosen by the colonial state to be the new imperial capital in 1911. Referring to the Delhi durbar of that year, where esteemed Indian princes were given a ceremonious nod, as colonial officials celebrated the British crown's continued power over India, Akbar Allahabadi composed the following couplets:

We had watched has well, the two days of Delhi's spring  
The gathering of the confused, began with the rulers  
Man and animal and house and machine

<sup>130</sup> Farhatullah Baig, *Dilli Ki Akhri Shama* (New Delhi: Urdu Academy, 2006) p 49.

<sup>131</sup> See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and The Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

Flower and greenery, light, and electricity, rail and telegraph  
Dressed in Western attire, there was the desire to submit  
From Eastern faces which revealed themselves to be proud and self-loving;  
The eyes of the happy victors were darting out in pride,  
While the -honorablesø they stood submissive in their allotted files.<sup>132</sup>

Given these developments in the high-political sphere, it is significant that Farhatullah Baig reconstructs the seat of Mughal sovereign power within a *haveli* that is a printing press, presided over symbolically by a prince, but organized entirely by a lettered man of *sharif* origins. The political exigencies of upper-class, urban-educated North Indian Muslims organizing to represent minority interest during the period are allegorized in Baig's novel, as the *mushā'irah* is depicted as at once political association and salon, weaving a tale of an imperial sovereignty that faces imminent extinction.

In the re-telling, as Kar m-ud-D n describes the people he meets and the places he must go to organize the *mushā'irah*, the city of Delhi is reconstructed in its magnificence, in accordance with Farhatullah's fantasy of the premier Mughal city. At the time that Farhatullah Baig was writing about Delhi, the city itself had become subject to urban re-structuring by the colonial government as the new imperial capital. One recent scholar has argued that both the cities of old and New Delhi, were interconnected spatially, as the colonial government sought security and profit for itself over the welfare and development of the Indian population: the urban landscape was heavily policed, surveiled, and ordered through sovereign violence, laws, and governmental regulation.<sup>133</sup> He has gone on to suggest that these systems of urban discipline in Delhi were resisted through petitions and anti-colonial protests. Farhatullah Baig's own reconstruction of Delhi as a city made up of a shared and collective notions of virtue is through the charting of the *mushā'irah* as a sovereign locale is subject to its own norms and values in

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<sup>132</sup> See, K.C. Nanda, *Masterpieces of Humorous Urdu Poetry* (London: Sterling Publishers, PVT Lmted, 2002)

<sup>133</sup> Stephen Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007)



the face of imminent destruction by the British imperial advancement, and can be read in a similar way. The organization of space is a virtual obsession in *Dilli ki Akhri Shama*: the distance between the gates of the walled city, the details of the interiors of homes of notables, the method of travel between narrow alley-ways, the seating order of the poets are all subject to detailed and precise descriptions. Furthermore, Farhatullah Baig, who was regarded in Urdu literary circles as primarily a satirist ó was highly critical of the changes to Delhi during the first decades of the twentieth century, most vividly portrayed in his essay, *õNayi Dilliö*.

While on the one hand, Maulvi Kar m-ud-D n of Farhatullah Baig's story is one in which the city is reproduced through memory of an older imperial order, the city here is re-organized, re-mapped by the poet who functions as a surveyor of the city: ethical comportment is inseparable from political organizing, as Karim-ud-Din's brings together all the city's highest ranking poets. õThe printing presses were no longer functioning wellö and instead of producing works of the Arabic sciences,ö bemoans Kar m-ud-D n, õthis was the age of Urdu poetry.ö<sup>134</sup> Owing to the colonial management of modernizing education ó the mention of Delhi College, for instance ö Kar m-ud-D n claims that knowledge was no longer sought out for its own sake, but immediately linked to the exigencies of earning a livelihood. When he is forced to leave his occupation of being an *-alim* (learned scholar) and turn to Urdu poetry, Kar m-ud-D n reflects: õI had never before even turned in curiosity to the uselessness that is Urdu poetry. But alas! Necessity had taken over, and I had but no choice but to be obligated in establishing a *mushā'irah*.ö This statement points to how the languages used by Muslims for self-identification and political power have shifted in colonial India. The onset of colonial modernity introduces Urdu language as that of the entire Muslim community, displacing the officiating status of Persianö and thus the *ashrāf* reluctantly adopt Urdu as an impoverished

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<sup>134</sup> Farhatullah Baig, *Dilli Ki Akhri Shama* (New Delhi: Urdu Academy, 2006) p 50

substitute for Persian. Here, retroactively, it is Arabic, as opposed to Persian, that is given pride of place as the language of traditional sciences and fields of knowledge. Thus, the scholar (*-alim*) turns to the Urdu *mushā'irah*, for only can this space now authenticate Kar m-ud-D n's status as a high-ranking notable, while generating the possibility of representing a shared world associated with a dying Mughal imperial polity. At the same time, Farhatullah Baig's narration turns to the classical *ghazal*, as the mode through which the realism of the period can be properly documented.

The *munshi* Kar m-ud-D n becomes the hero of the novel, by default: he is resuscitated here not as a figure of reform, but as a figure who is capable of managing Delhi *ashraf* politics. Farhatullah Baig wrote *Dilli Ki Akhri Shama* while living in Hyderabad— a city where the study of Urdu was actively encouraged in institutions patronized by the Nizam. While it is a work of self-imposed exile Farhatullah Baig laments his separation from Delhi, there is also a way in which Baig's role parallels that of Kar m-ud-D n, as a historian who must bring Delhi back to life, as being relevant to a collective Muslim community. Nor is the world of *adab* in Farhatullah Baig's account simply recuperated: it is also satirized— Kar m-ud-D n constantly complains about how the codes of conduct valued by the notables and poets, force him to go out of his way and suffer all manner of inconveniences. This is in keeping with Farhatullah Baig's other satirical essays, such as *Puranī Aur Nayī Tehzīb Kī Takkarō* (‘Clash of Old and New Culture’), where he mocks the excesses of formality in manners (*adab*), penning portraits of stereotypical *nawābs* while poking fun at the sayings of colonial officials; or in the essay, *Nazir Ahmed Kī Kahani: Kuch Merī Kuch Un Kī Zubanō* Baig composes a studied caricature of the reformer Nazir Ahmed. In his historical novel of the last *mushā'irah*, Baig eschews all responsibility of

historical accuracy by claiming that any mistakes in the text are due entirely to the inconsistencies of Maulvi Karim-ud-Din's account.

The *mushai'rah* was now understood as belonging to the realm of "tradition" as a result of political exigencies of the mid 1920s and by the 1930s, poets turned to the cultural institution as a form of political emancipation within the nationalist public sphere: *The Last Flame of Delhi* was first performed as a play in Aurangabad College during the early 1930s, and by the late 1960s, it was dramatized by the progressive poet, Kaifi Azmi and produced as a play for the Indian People's Theater Association (IPTA). This was not simply the case of the poet of the *mushā'irah* moving from belonging to a patron, to belonging to a public—rather, the shift was in how the *mushā'irah* was defined against earlier readings of the past, and how notions of Muslim individual sovereignty were reconfigured in new political contexts. For Farhatullah Baig, an imminent threat of cultural extinction inspires the account—the poets Zauq, Shefta, Momim Khan Momin, Ghalib, and several others, stand to lose their livelihoods, and symbolically stand in for the *ashraf* of the early twentieth century, who are attempting to politically represent Muslims as one collectivity.

Narratives of decline were central to Urdu poetics, and were reformulated according to shifting political contexts. The condition of colonial modernity limited the terrain of politics available to the *ashraf*, for in depriving Indian subjects the rights to full citizenship, the colonial state sought to define the limits of "public" and "private" space. The colonial public sphere was mired in contradictions, for while the state denied its subjects citizenship, it created a framework of political "representation" but one sedimented in communitarian categorizations. The *sharif* individual expressed his subjectivity through collective discourses which conceded little to the

diversity within communities.<sup>135</sup> Collective discourses of Muslim identity in India found their most ardent expression in Urdu poetry, a realm relatively autonomous from colonial manipulation.

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<sup>135</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2000).

## Chapter 2

### The ‘Disreputable’ Woman: Literary Ethics Beyond National Frames, 1885-1952

The *nautchnī* conceives no evil in following the customs of a hundred generations of predecessors. If her habits are faulty, judged by the standard of latter-day civilization, her principles are sound. For it is a well-attested fact that when these girls marry, they almost invariably become chaste wives and admirable mothers.<sup>1</sup>

She was some *khanjari* (whore) from Lucknow, but í within a matter of days, the entire neighborhood was all a-talk of her beauty and talentí after seating Mubtala, she seated herself, as the very embodiment of refinementí [and said] ÷our profession is such, that even if we garb ourselves with the Qurʻān, even then, no one believes in usí Whether or not you choose to believe me, I come from an honorable family.ø<sup>2</sup>

It is a rather quaint detail of the Urdu language that the term *tawāʻif* a word that has now come to mean prostitute in contemporary popular speech, is derived from the Arabic term, *tawāf*: the rite of circum-ambulating the *Kaʻaba* in Mecca. This detail is not so quaint when one realizes that *tawāf* also connotes frequent visits, as in *tawāf-e kooʻe jāʻnān*: frequent visits to the place of the beloved. Moreover, the Arabic *tawāf* connotes movement and mobility. One of the earliest references to the term, *tawāʻif*, appears in an eighteenth-century collection of biographies of notable poets. The entry cites the following poetic couplet: ÷The whole world is aware of my virtues/Yet somehow you still have your doubts.ö<sup>3</sup> It was composed by M h L qa Bai Chanda, a woman who was not only wealthy enough to own a ÷magnificent retinue of five hundred soldiersö and patronize poets of high stature, but was reportedly so skilled in the arts of archery and horse-riding, that according to one biographerø account, ÷her arrow never missed its mark

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<sup>1</sup> C.H. Forbes-Lindsay, *India: Past and Present*. Volume II. (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co. 1903), p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Nazir Ahmed, *Fasana-e-Mubtala*, 1885

<sup>3</sup> M h L qa Bai Chanda, *akhlāq se to apne vāqif jahān hogā/par āp ko ghalat kuch ab tak guman hoga*. See Carla Petievich, ÷Feminine Authorship and Urdu Poetic Tradition: *Baharistan-i-Naz* vs. *Tazkira-i-Rekhti*.ö *Wilderness of Possibilities: Urdu Studies in Transnational Perspective*. Ed. Kathryn Hansen & David Lelyveld. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 228.

and she rode such that even the best horsemen couldn't keep stride with her.<sup>4</sup> M h L qa Bai Chanda was a courtesan of Hyderabad a *tawā'if*. In the 1972 film, *Pakīzah*, the confessional utterance of *ōl am a tawā'if* by the suffering heroine, Sahibj n, precipitates the dramatic climax of the film: she collapses to the ground in a faint. The statement is nothing short of admitting she is a prostitute. By the twentieth century, the *tawā'if* had literally become the fallen woman. But this is only part of the story. Although the *tawā'if* was tainted as a prostitute, she was also seen within the Urdu public-literary sphere as a purveyor of cultural authenticity, a figure of nostalgia for a past Mughal imperial polity and courtly culture, as a referent to Indo-Muslim male subjectivity associated with aristocratic tradition<sup>5</sup>

How is the *tawā'if*, as both a shifting social category and as aesthetic representation, a window into the cultural politics of nation and community? Since women are seen as the bearers of culture, tradition, and the honor of the family, community, and or, nation, control over women's sexuality becomes a central feature of the process of identity and community formation. As a public woman, the *tawā'if* became the subject of rigorous moral regulation from the mid-nineteenth century onwards by the colonial state and by the emergent Indian middle-classes. By the third decade of the twentieth century, there appeared a new way of speaking and writing about the fallen woman within the Urdu public sphere. This social critique heralded the prostitute-courtesan (and more generally, the lower orders of society, the *ajlāf*, of which she was a part), as ethical figures struggling against an unjust social order, and the moral tyranny of self-

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> For a treatment of the increasingly prevalent use of the term, 'nostalgia' in the social science and humanities scholarship and its prestige as a critical category therein, see Nauman Naqvi's working paper, 'The Nostalgic Subject: A Genealogy of the Critique of Nostalgia' in CIRSDIG (Centro Interuniversitario per le ricerche sulla Sociologia del Diritto e delle Istituzioni Giuridiche), September, 2007. Naqvi notes that since 'nostalgia' has so often been written as a subaltern condition, the nostalgic presented as a counter-Enlightenment subject in the knowledge of the modern West, and therefore as a figure of resistance to modernity as a sign of the non-modern in the midst-of modern he argues that the term should be scrutinized, and aims to write a discursive history that subjects the term to its epistemic-institutional complexes.

appointed spokesmen of community. The *tawā'if* was a figure of political desire, seen as an ideal citizen-subject, and symbolizing a secular Indo-Muslim polity. My aim in this chapter is not to recuperate the *tawā'if* herself as a figure of subversion, but to address *why* she was recuperated as such. By exploring how the *tawā'if* was invoked within aesthetic, ethical, and legal domains of *ashrāf* social and political life in the decades before and after independence from colonial rule, I argue that both nationalism and Islam, far from being monolithic ideologies, were internally contested discourses.

### ***Sharīf* Codes of Conduct: The *Tawā'if* and the Gentleman**

Respectability for the *ashrāf* was defined primarily in terms of two inter-dependent codes of Muslim moral conduct: *adab* and *akhlāq*. *Adab* refers to manners, etiquette, and proper comportment, but it is also that facet of Islamic tradition in which didactic morality is the subject of frequent treatment; in this sense, *adab* has also been defined as correct behavior in a person's education and formation as a Muslim, a quality of personality meant to distinguish those with cultivated tastes from the vulgar.<sup>6</sup> Intimately related to *adab*, is *akhlāq* (ethical conduct), but whereas *adab* has tended to correspond to that which is practical, such as the behavior associated with speaking to one's superiors, or the kinds of dress worn for specific occasions, *akhlāq* has referred to one's innate behavior, character, and moral conduct.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Metcalf has defined the term *adab* as a concept, a literary genre, and a quality of personality which reflects a high valuation of the employment of the will in proper discrimination of correct order, behavior, and taste. It implicitly or explicitly distinguishes cultivated behavior from that deemed vulgar, often defined as pre-Islamic custom. *Adab* means discipline and training. It denotes as well the good breeding and refinement that results from such training. See Barbara Metcalf, *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Akhlāq* has long been part of the Islamic tradition of ethics, ranging from treatises of the refinement of character, to critiques of political state-craft. The literary genre of *ʿilm al-akhlāq*, which emerged within the first three centuries of Islamicate cultures of the Near East, literally means 'the science of innate dispositions' and the emergence of discourses of civility, called *adab*, was the most prominent context in which ethical debate was set forth. See Walzer, R., Bearman, Th., Bianquis, C.E., Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs, 'Akhlāq' in *Encyclopedia*

Throughout the late nineteenth century, as Muslim social reformers expounded upon the condition of women in society, *akhlāq* literature was reformulated as a corrective. Many novels of this genre focused on the need to educate *ashrāf* women. Otherwise, it was widely surmised, the world of the *zenānā* (women's quarters), seen as dark, ignorant, and susceptible to the influences of lower-class women who moved between the domestic quarters and the public *bazār* would keep upper-class women from becoming proper wives and mothers. Late nineteenth century reform movements imposed orthodox Islamic values over the pagan or non-discursive private sphere that women inhabited, and the process was intimately related to the loss of power and authority that Muslim men had experienced due to the consolidation of colonial rule.<sup>8</sup> The limitations of the colonial public sphere for the urban *ashrāf*, led Muslim men in India to turn to the home as the bastion of Muslim civilization.

Inspired by the reformist trends set by educator Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a new kind of *akhlāq* literature flooded the reading public and educational institutions. This was epitomized by Nazir Ahmed's novels, which idealized the educated housewife, at once knowledgeable about arithmetic, reading, writing, and religious scriptures (Qur'an), thus enabling her to skillfully manage a household. In *Mirāt 'ul-Arūs (The Bride's Mirror)*, for instance, Asghari, as opposed to her sister, Akbari, embodies all the traits of a properly educated woman: she is practical as opposed to superstitious, rids the house of a thieving maid, and even reforms her husband so that he is able to obtain a high post in the government offices.<sup>9</sup> (To a great extent, many of these themes continued into the twentieth century in the writings of A.R. Khan, a woman who

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*of Islam*. Edited by: P. Brill, 2008. (Brill Online). *Akhlāq* literature was also a consistent feature of Mughal court life, especially Nasir-ud-Din's treatises. In these texts the idea of justice in the ideal state is defined as social harmony, and the balance of conflicting claims of diverse interest groups [hence] the ruler, like a good physician, must know the diseases afflicting society, and their correct treatment. See, Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: 1200-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Faisal Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform 1857-1900" in *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities, and the State*, ed. Zoya Hasan (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Nazir Ahmad, *Mirat 'ul-Arus* reprint, (Karachi: Sultan Husain Press, 1963).



elaborated upon the benefits of mastering proper house-wifely duties, is a case in point. Her stories mirror those of Nazir Ahmed: instead of Asghari and Akbari, there is Saliqa Begum and Barbadi Begum, or ‘Ms. Proper’ and ‘Ms. Destroyed’ respectively.)<sup>10</sup> Overall, the educated housewife served as the embodiment of *ashraf* morality. Other nineteenth century works, such as Maulana Ashraf Thanwi’s *Bihishti Zevar (Heavenly Ornaments)*,<sup>11</sup> insisted on breaking down women’s spaces with its rituals of gossip and social visiting, by placing women—educated, self-disciplined, and properly Muslim—securely within the home and under the ambit of the husband’s control. Hence, though women were empowered with literacy, they were pushed into a newly created ‘private’ sphere where they were to develop modern forms of housewifery. Such *akhlāq* literature focused on governing the sexuality of women, especially those who were seen as contravening middle-class social norms. The genre was inflected with Victorian values of the late colonial period, echoing the adages of thrift, hard work, and moral uprightness, identifying the home as the most influential source of civilization.<sup>12</sup> Prevailing attitudes towards women within these discourses of reform distinguished between ‘woman as ornament, and woman as prostitute.’<sup>13</sup> Salaried and professional Muslim men in the nineteenth century, in attempts to preserve a distinctive religiously informed cultural identity, were anxious to protect their women from the ‘evil’ influences of colonial modernity: a dichotomy between ‘good’ and ‘wicked’ women emerged, symbolic of the *sharif* household in distinction to the world of the *bazār*.

The *tawā’if* undermined *ashraf* codes of moral conduct for she was a figure who lived outside the normative moral order of marriage, occupied public space, and hence was viewed as

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<sup>10</sup> A.R. Qatun, *Kahaniyan* (Karachi: Welcome Book Port Limited, Main Urdu Bazar, 2001 edition).

<sup>11</sup> See Barbara Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, a translation of *Bihishti Zevar: Heavenly Ornaments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Frances, W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) p. 36. See also Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

<sup>13</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001) p. 70-72.

a chief source of *fitnā* (social chaos); increasingly any female entertainer came to be tainted with the label of prostitute.<sup>14</sup> In order to understand how these women became a beleaguered community, a brief sketch of the *tawā'if* is in order: the term originally referred to a class of women in Mughal North India associated with aristocrats and royal courts, trained in classical music, dance, and poetry, living in lavish establishments supported by nobles. At all Hindu and Muslim courts in the many Mughal *subahs* and kingdoms that made up the South Asia before the British began to conquer them and displace their rulers, the courtesans constituted an influential female elite. They were highly educated, and at times, even quite active in political affairs, such as one Begum Samru (1753-1836), who began her professional life as a young *tawā'if* in Delhi, before becoming the ruler of Sardhana, a principality near Meerut. The Mughal ruler Shah Alam (1759-1806) acknowledged Begum Samru as an esteemed protector, and military strategists of the East India Company considered her crucial to their territorial ambitions: her acquisition of great political, military, and economic clout as well as her acumen for diplomacy, and her movement between the worlds of English, Mughal, and French political interests, have been documented. However, most accounts continue to overlook the fact that she was a courtesan, and that her palace in Chandni Chowk, Delhi was a site where Indian and British elite of the late Mughal capital would gather to watch the skilled performances of professional *tawā'ifs*. Courtesans were perhaps the only class of women in this region who could be educated, but more importantly, their *kothā* (salons) served as finishing schools for young aristocratic men. Men sought the company of the courtesan not simply for entertainment, but to obtain an education in *adab*: manners, social etiquette, and the ethics of comportment. By the late

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<sup>14</sup> See Muhammad Hadi Ruswa's novel, *Sharīfzāda (Respectable Scion)*, first published in 1900, in which he writes that there were to be *no domnis*, dancing girls, or prostitutes invited to perform at the wedding of the chief character's daughter, despite the insistence of the women of the family, for, "these are low, base rituals." (New Delhi: Maktaba Jamia Ltd., reprinted edition, 2000) p. 83

nineteenth century, however, *akhlāq* (ethical conduct), the term that M h L qa Bai Chanda used to satirically denote her virtue, came to define a moral world quite apart from cultivated, high-ranking women of property and influence.<sup>15</sup> After the revolt of 1857, the term *tawā'if* was conflated by the *ashrāf* and referred to a wide range of disreputable women: courtesans, female entertainers, and prostitutes.<sup>16</sup>

In part, much of the hostility visited upon the *tawā'if* by *ashrāf* spokesmen emerged from protracted nineteenth century colonial interventions. Moral and medical boundaries that were established in the early nineteenth century around women deemed prostitutes paved the way for their later moral condemnation and criminalization, and dramatically altered their social and legal status. The reshaping of social and sexual relationships in early nineteenth century India was intimately bound to the threat which Indian women were seen to pose to the East India Company's army: the women's separation from what was deemed respectable Indian society, and their insertion into a criminal category was crucial to the surgeons' and administrators' attempts to justify the invasive and socially disruptive methods they proposed to control venereal disease among the European soldiery.<sup>17</sup> After the British officially seized state power, forcing the Mughal sovereigns and their courtiers into exile, royal patronage for the courtesans came to an end. The imposition of heavy fines on courtesans for their assistance to rebels during the revolt,

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<sup>15</sup>For a study about the prominent position of courtesans regarding property and inheritance during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Vijay Pinch, *Gosain Tawaiif: Slaves, Sex, and Ascetics in Rasdhan, ca. 1800-1857* in *Modern Asian Studies* (2004), 38:3:559-597 Cambridge University Press.

<sup>16</sup>Literature and scholarship about prostitutes prior to this period show that they lived together either in their own, or royal households, divided into various roles and hierarchies, such as *tawā'if*, *khangī*, and *randī*. Social values and Mughal state patronage allowed both the upper class courtesans and the lower class prostitutes to enjoy a relatively privileged place in Indian society. They were officially recognized as an important professional community, at times associate with religious auspiciousness, but never exclusively defined by sexual entertainment. See Sumanta Banerjee, *Dangerous Outcast: The Prostitute in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (New York: 1998). For more on the hierarchies between prostitutes, see Veena Oldenburg, *Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow* in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, *Speaking for Others/Speaking for Self: Women of Color* (Summer, 1990), pp. 259-287.

<sup>17</sup> See Erica Wald, *From Begums and Bibis to Abandoned Females and Idle Women: Sexual Relationships, Venereal Disease, and the Redefinition of Prostitution in Early Nineteenth Century India*, in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 46, 1 (2009): 5-25.

as well as the Contagious Diseases Act regulations (1868), which forced prostitutes and singing and dancing girls to be medically inspected for venereal disease with far greater surveillance and in numbers than ever before, led to the debasement of the courtesan culture into prostitution.<sup>18</sup> The new regulations of medically inspecting and regulating the bodies of native women had to do with concerns that soldiers were ensured with 'healthy sex.'<sup>19</sup> The legislation was tied to British fears about racial miscegenation and concerns about regulating the city.<sup>20</sup> As Ann Stoler has pointed out in the context of concubinage in Sumatra in what she has called the 'cultural hygiene of colonialism', 'an overlapping set of discourses provided the psychological and economic underpinnings for colonial distinctions of difference, linking fears of sexual contamination to the moral breakdown to a European colonial identity with a racist and class-specific core.'<sup>21</sup> In British India, such policies allowed police authorities to mete out atrocities upon 'common prostitutes', a category that included women from the poorer classes, and to target members of the upper strata of the prostitute community, like the *tawā'ifs*.<sup>22</sup> As a result, especially after 1857 when the *navābs* of urban North India had lost much of their power, property, and influence, courtesans began to inhabit the same public space of the prostitutes, stripped of their association with the respectable salon (*kothā*). This group of women was pushed into a narrowly defined social category, where connotations of artistic accomplishment or

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<sup>18</sup> Veena Oldenburg, 'Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow' in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Speaking for Others/Speaking for Self: Women of Color (Summer, 1990), pp. 259-287.

<sup>19</sup> The CDA was established in response to alarm about increasing rates of venereal disease amongst British soldiers; as colonial military and medical authorities debated laws that forbade lower-class British soldiers to bring their wives to India, the Act permitted Indian prostitutes to pursue their occupation by establishing *lal bazars* but severely curbed their movement imposing mandatory registration at police stations, medical examination at certified clinics, and confinement to specified areas of cities and towns, and heavy penalties for violation of these regulations. See Kenneth Balhatchett, *Race, Sex, and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793-1905*. (London: Camelot Press, 1980). See also, Sumanta Bannerjee. *Dangerous Outcast: The Prostitute in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (New York: 1998): 70.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ann L. Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Colonial Cultures' in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Nov 1989, pg. 646.

<sup>22</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, *Dangerous Outcast: The Prostitute in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (New York: 1998).

religious auspiciousness were being eclipsed, as they were being exclusively linked to sexual entertainment. The female entertainer, now read as prostitute, was no longer a person with a trade or craft, but as a commodified body. This is poignantly illustrated in the comments of a woman serving in the British cantonments of Ambala: 'the natives expect us to sit and talk for hours and to give them, pipes and *pān*. The British soldier comes, does his business, and is gone.'<sup>23</sup>

Arguably, the changing nature of prostitution cannot be attributed solely to British power and colonial structure, for as early as the 1850s there were calls for the removal of *tawā'ifs* by a parvenu class who were previously excluded from the soirees of the royal elite; such calls were related to the desire to destroy symbols of an older order.<sup>24</sup> The commodification of the prostitute had also to do with the increasing commercialization of rural areas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The removal of prostitutes from city spaces by the 1910s was due to the emergence of conservative sexual politics of urban reformers and revivalists who saw the prostitute as threatening to a new moral order in which companionate marriage had become the norm.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, courtesans, in Hindu public discourse, began to also be associated with notions of Muslim decadence and corruption, reflecting the Hindi-Urdu debates of the period: Hindi language proponents negatively identified Urdu as a language of excessive eroticism and debauchery, the language of *tawa'ifs*. Alternately, Hindi was a language that was symbolized by the language of the upright moral woman. In many ways, *ashrāf* attitudes towards prostitutes were no different from their Hindu counterparts. From the late nineteenth century onwards,

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<sup>23</sup> Report of the Committee on Prostitution (1893), p. 286. SOAS Library.

<sup>24</sup> Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 64-65.

<sup>25</sup> As Charu Gupta has noted, prostitutes were increasingly held responsible for the rise of crime and the declining sanitary conditions of the cities. Furthermore, the views of colonial authorities meshed with those of Hindu publicists who were concerned about public order in the city, qua bylaws regulating spaces of entertainment and shifting prostitutes to more remote areas. See Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2001).

prostitutes were a source of alarm for the *ashrāf* middle-class public, signifying filth, disease and moral corruption. Newspaper reports of the period are replete with calls to the local authorities to remove prostitutes from public view and out of the city, and complaints that the women cause moral depravation amongst 'respectable young men.' The category 'prostitute' remained a tenuous one, since 'singing and dancing girls' were included in the category of such 'objectionable persons' of towns and localities. Even sharing train compartments with such women was seen to be a problem as fears in the *Nasīm-i-Hind* in 1896 about 'contamination with fallen women' testified. Railway authorities were called upon to 'warn station masters against permitting bad women to sit in the special carriages expressly reserved for the accommodation of respectable native females.'<sup>26</sup> The fear that respectable women 'have fallen into the clutches of disreputable women' brought the editor of *Awāz-i-Khalq* to point out that 'sections 372 and 373 of the Indian Penal Code are not adequate to suppress the evil of prostitution [since] they are not applicable to cases where the age of the girls exceeds 16 years' and demanded that 'Municipal Commissioners' prepare a list of public houses of ill fame and of disreputable women and prostitutes' and 'take steps to have them removed from the locality.'<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the early twentieth century, Urdu novellas and chapbooks repeatedly warned readers to keep their distance from prostitutes, lest they fall into debt, disease, and disrepute. In the 1903 novel, *Shāh Begum: Story of a Bazār Beauty*, a former cantonment prostitute who moves into the city with her mother, seduces the hero, Pyre L I, by 'inventing a tale of woe.'<sup>28</sup> The author ends the story by informing the reader that had Pyre L I not ventured near the 'mischief-making Shāh Begum' he would not have had to pay so dearly by not only contracting

<sup>26</sup> *Nasim-i-Hind*, June 15, 1896. Native Newspaper Reports, NAI.

<sup>27</sup> *Awaz-i-Khalq*, August 16, 1911, Native Newspaper Reports, NAI.

<sup>28</sup> Munshi Danpat Rai, *Shah Begum: Yaane Ek Bazari Mehvish ka Fasana*, 1903, Lahore. Vernacular Tract, 3867b, India Office Records. British Library; pg. 47.

a venereal disease, but lacking the money to pay for his cure.<sup>29</sup> These kinds of texts warned their readers in poetic form as well: *õKar na chãh tawã 'if ke liye/ Bachão jãn o javãni varz-e khuda ke liyeõ* (Do not love for a prostitute's sake; protect your life and youth for God's sake).<sup>30</sup> Hence, the prostitute was banished from the world of the properly moral, reviled as the source of chaos and evil, on the one hand, while on the other, physically removed from the city.<sup>31</sup> For the *ashrãf*, the prostitute came to represent the moral wrongs of Muslim society, for she existed outside the norms of *akhlãq* as defined within the reformist literature meant to discipline family life. Medical texts too, warned that keeping company with such õprofessional-womenö was a sure route to õincurring financial lossí for thousands of wealthy men, becoming engrossed in such activities, have become helpless and continue to become so.<sup>32</sup> In much of the Urdu public sphere, *tawã 'ifs* were likely to sap the strengthõ bodily or financialõ of the *ashrãf* man.

Even as the *tawã 'if* was more generally tainted as a prostitute who embodied disease and filth, the elite courtesan, especially of Lucknow, held out a curious allure: she was at the same time perceived as a symbol of Mughal aristocratic cultural refinement. Intimate association with a cultivated *tawã 'if* continued to represent elite, especially literary, status well into the early twentieth century in the memoirs of men of an emergent bourgeoisie with ties to an aristocratic way of life. As late as the mid-1960s, the poet Niz Fatehpur recalled, õmy father started sending me to these gatherings and it was here that my literary career was inauguratedí the status of the well-known courtesans of the city was that of a *mu 'ãlim* (learned scholar) from

<sup>29</sup> Ibid; Munshi Danpat Rai adds, õWhether or not one heeds it, to give good counsel is my duty.ö pg. 64.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Dr. Saiyid, Ghulam Husain, *Tadbir Baqae-Nasl-i-Insan, (On Diseases peculiar to men and women and their treatment)*, published by Mahfuz Husain and Brothers, Sahna (district Gurgaon), 1912, VT3952d, IOR.

whose conversations and manners the elite learnt the correct etiquettes of Lucknow.<sup>33</sup> Nor were upper-class *tawā'ifs* precluded from visiting the homes of respectable families. The poet Aijaz Husain remarked that in his grandfather's house, great care was taken to treat the *tawā'ifs* lavishly, that as a child he looked upon them as aunts, and that, it was also ensured that arrangements for *purdāh* were made for them, indicating that they shared a status of respectability with the other women in the home. Husain remarks that the *tawā'ifs* were often more well-read than M.A. students of literature, and kept copies of poetry collections passed down for generations, before admitting that he had taken some of these books home with him. Recalling the 1920s, Husain recollects, the salons were not centers solely for spectacle (*tamāsh-bīn*) and play, but gatherings of *adab* (*adab nashist*) and circles of the civilized (*tamīz o tehzīb kī dars-gāh*).<sup>34</sup> For early twentieth century Lucknow chronicler Maulana Abdul Halim Sharar, these absurdities [of frequenting the *tawā'if's* quarters] went so far that it was said until a person had association with courtesans he was not a polished man and furthermore, although these practices may have had a deteriorating effect on morals, at the same time, manners and social finesse improved.<sup>35</sup> In a twist of metonymic nostalgia, the passage is followed by a footnote directing the reader to Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa's famous novel, *Umrā'o Jān Adā: Courtesan of Lucknow* (1899).

Ruswa's project is at once an ethnographic, nostalgic, and moral one. It is an ethnographic project narrated in a nostalgic register while also deploying a morality in didactic

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<sup>33</sup> Niaz Fatehpuri remarks that it was a necessary part of Lucknow society in those days, that the aristocrats should freely attend gatherings of music and dance, and learn the etiquette of society in the company of some of the well-known courtesans of the city. Their status was that of a *mu'ālim* (learned person) from whose conversations and manners the elite learnt the correct etiquettes of Lucknow. My father started sending me to these gatherings and it was here that my literary career was inaugurated. See Niaz Fatehpuri's reminiscences in Khizar Humayun Ansari, *Emergence of Socialist Thought amongst North Indian Muslims* (Lahore: Book Traders, 1990) p. 130.

<sup>34</sup> Aijaz Husain, *Meri Yadein* (Lucknow: Lucknow Press, 1963).

<sup>35</sup> Sharar, Abul Halim, *Lucknow: Last Phase of an Oriental Culture* (translated from, *Mashraqi tamaddun ka akhri namunah*) ed. E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (Boulder: Westview Press, 1976) p. 98.



fashion. It is ethnographic because Ruswa elicits the confession from the courtesan as informant in order to *know* her as a typical *tawā'if* of the Mughal world prior to 1857. Or, to put it in other words, the body of the *tawā'if* is re-written and transformed into a body of knowledge about *tawā'ifs*. It is nostalgic because Ruswa gets Umr ø to divulge her story through the flirtatious art of lyrical interlude captured by the Persianate poetic tradition of the *ghazal*; hence he gains her trust by his ðinsiderø status, since he belongs to a generation of Urdu poets affected by the loss of Mughal patronage.<sup>36</sup> And it is a moral project because it seeks to fix the *tawā'if* as an object of the past, as a figure who is redeemed because she regrets her life: by the end of the novel, Umr ø J n addresses the *randī* (whore/prostitute) as a fool. She refers to herself as a *bazāri aurat* (woman of the market) who will never receive God's blessing of true love, but has faith that her biography will serve a purpose: moral usefulness. Separated from her community a -familyø of *tawā'ifs*, as well as a wider social world, Umr ø J n is exiled into solitude, residing in private apartments, and connected to others only by virtue of her relationship to Urdu poetry. Yet, it is exileø dispersed from the world of Mughal sovereignty and into a new, colonial modernityø which makes the novel possible in the first place. The circumstances under which *Umrā'o Jān Adā* came to be recorded and written, claims Ruswa, was during a poetry reading (*mushā'ira*): as a gathering of his friends exchange couplets, a woman from the apartment next door was overheard voicing her appreciation. He persuades her to join them, where she recites: *In which story is there more pleasure? In the āpbītī (story of the self) or the jugbītī (the story of the age) / Who will listen to the tale of my woeful heart? / Far and wide have I wandered on the*

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<sup>36</sup> The passage where Umraø Jan reveals how she loses her virginity is a good example. The passage illustrates Ruswa's strategy: the veracity of the story is reinforced by Ruswa's searching questions and jest, to which Umrao responds by claiming that he is embellishing. The embellishments are then replaced with the -trueø account; it is an act of building a story around a conversation, in which information is supplied in a question-answer format. The poetry also weaves together the ethnography, which is -indigenouslyø performed to provide it with greater truth value. Umrao Jan is increasingly depicted as embodying a past-ness, which is then reflected back as simultaneous nostalgia, and claims to objectivity resituates the *tawā'if* within the contemporary parameters of morality.

*face of this earth / And I have much to impart.*<sup>37</sup> Within the body of the courtesan resides the lyrical history of the *ashraf*. The Urdu verb, *bītna*, means, to pass over the passing of the self (autobiography) and the passing of an age are intertwined through practices of pleasure associated with the Avadh court. Thus, *Umrao Jan Ada* is nothing short of a description of a period of history, and of a specific place: Lucknow. The couplet reflects Ruswa's commitment to a combination of lyricism and objectivist history-writing. He declared, that unlike his contemporaries, who construct a plot to convey a message and fill in the details accordingly, his objective is to portray reality as faithfully as I can and that my novels should be regarded as a history of our times, and, I hope, it will be found a useful one.<sup>38</sup> Through the life of its heroine, the novel depicts the decay of Mughal culture, and the demise of an entire epoch. By the end of the novel, Lucknow has been destroyed, and the center of power and excellence has shifted to Hyderabad. Thus, even as it is *Umrao's* life that functions as the pivot around which most of events of the novel revolve, Ruswa has composed into its texture the entire socio-cultural world of Lucknow as well as sketches of life in smaller *qasbahs*, such as Kanpur and Faizabad, around the city. Ruswa is not, therefore, solely interested in the courtesans for their own sake, but because of what they represent, and how they animate an entire social and cultural way of life in and around Lucknow. The *kothā* can never simply be the world of the courtesan alone, but is a residence which is occupied at different moments, by the city's varied inhabitants. As Khurshidul Islam has pointed out, Ruswa chose Khanum's salon-establishment, because:

This shop contained all kinds of commodities and its customers came from far and near, and from all classes of society. The level of their cultural refinement was different from one another. Among them were the connoisseurs of the fine

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<sup>37</sup> Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa. *Umrā' o Jān Adā* (Karachi: 2003): 7. *Lutf hai konsi kahani mein, apbiti kahun ya jagbiti? Kis ko sunaein hal di zār, aai ada awargi mein hum ne zamane ki ser ki.*

<sup>38</sup> Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa. *Sharifzada* (New Delhi: Maktaba Jamia Ltd., reprinted edition, 2000) p. 7-11.

arts as well as barbarians. It was the vantage point from where Rusva could witness the vast decay.<sup>39</sup>

The refined Navab Sultan who is Umr   s desired paramour, the charming Navab Chabban, the loyalist Raja, the small-town parvenu Rashid Ali, the wily Navab Muhammad Ali Khan, the notorious bandit Faiz Ali passing himself off as a *jag rdar*, Ali Akbar Khan who is the sanctimonious attorney, the Maulvi in whose *maktab* Umr   and her childhood friends learn to read, write, and appreciate poetry, the elderly Nav b who is the object of ridicule by Umr  s rival, Bismillah, all congregate within Khanam s house of ill-repute. In summoning the language and idiom peculiar to these individuals class, social position, and personage, Rusva colorfully re-creates the social texture of an entire city  a city which has since become the site of the *ashr f* s obsessive nostalgia, a nostalgia somewhat incongruent with Lucknow s actual political relevance within late colonial and post-colonial India.

The ethnographic and moral commitment of Ruswa s novel is also evident in the concern over its realism in the earliest review of *Umr 'o J n Ad *, which appeared in the Urdu journal, *Me'y r* in 1899. It is compared to a contemporary English novel, *Rosa Lambert*, in which prostitutes represent a different morality for changing Victorian British mentalities than they do for the North Indian Muslim middle-upper classes. In this review, the ethnographic and the moral aspects of the text are intertwined: Ruswa s novel is praised for being acceptable reading material for the *zen na* (women s quarters); it is also lauded for being an authentic account since Umr   J n doesn t  flaunt her indiscretions  like Rosa Lambert, but confesses instead, hence making for  natural scenes. <sup>40</sup> *Umr 'o J n Ad * is classified as high culture and the review authenticates the *taw 'if* by fixing her in narrative redemption: Umr   J n was brought into the

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<sup>39</sup>  Umr   J n Ad  , in Khurshidul Islam, *Tanqidein*, (Aligarh: Educational Publishing House, 1977; 1957) p. 80-194.

<sup>40</sup> See C.M. Naim,  The Earliest Extant Review of Umr   J n Ad   in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 15, 2000.

*kothā* against her will, as opposed to Lambert's spiteful decision to enter the profession. This is the same realism and sentimentalism that informs Ruswa's ethnographic and nostalgic project, since it is situated in a period where the *tawā'if* was narrowly defined as prostitute. Ultimately, Ruswa's moral project is inseparable from the novel's narrative of exchange: Umrō J n as a trope for nostalgia functions as symbolic capital. In exchange for the pleasure of his company, Ruswa procures Umrō J n's story, knowledge about the *tawā'if*. A body of knowledge which lives in Umrō J n is commodified: it is both a story that sells (i.e. in the market), and a narrative that sells a story about moral redemption. Indeed, that this is the case is evident in the name of the last signifier of the courtesan, *Adā*. *Adā* in Urdu has two meanings. One is from the Arabic, and has to do with exchange, execution, and transaction: to fulfill a contractual obligation; the second meaning of *adā* is of Persian etymology, and refers to the manner, style, or ways, specific to one's personality; it is also closely tied to coquetry, alluding to emotive gestures, though not exclusively, of the sensual and sexual space of one's body. This bi-furcated meaning of the appellation *adā*, refracting the tensions elicited therein, gestures towards why it is this novel in particular that became the quintessential tale of Muslim identity in colonial North India. It is the first Urdu novel to narrate from the first person point of view: in offering the listener a choice between the story of the self and the story of the age, Umrō J n collapses the two. She represents *adab* (ethical comportment) as a decorum that at once refers to Lucknow's extant nobility and to the emergent Muslim middle-class. It was the form of this narration of decline amongst the Muslim propertied classes that elicited its broad appeal. Lastly, the stylized figure of the courtesan marked the Muslim community as 'reluctantly' modern: by the 1920s, the *tawā'if* within the Hindu public sphere was associated with feudal depravity, representing a decadent Muslim subject antithetical to the national project, a narrative that

rationalized the subordinate, minoritized position assigned to Muslims within India. For Muslim upper-classes of the same period, however, the *tawā'if* was not only summarily dismissed as a feature of a failed aristocratic past, but was also invoked by *ashrāf* as a symbolic figure by which to make sense of such a position in relation to the emergent nation, because she alluded to a sovereign Mughal past (i.e., Lucknow as the epicenter of Indo-Muslim culture and civilization). Since Urdu had become so closely bound up with the re-writing of a past in which Mughal sovereignty loomed large as real political loss, the *tawā'if* was perceived as a threat to respectable society, *and* a figure that marked Muslim cultural identity as distinct.

### **Epistles of a 'Prostitute'**

The paradoxical figure of the *tawā'if* simultaneously viewed as the embodiment of Mughal civilization *and* a figure of contagion continued to gesture to the tension between the commodification of culture and articulations of ethical and moral selfhood within *ashrāf* society well into the twentieth century. The *tawā'if* remained very much a figure of the margins in the world of respectable society, a theme explicitly explored in Q z °Abdul haff rø's popular novella, *Laila Ke Khutūt (Laila's Letters)*, first published in 1932. The entire text is narrated through a critical first-person female voice, a fictional *tawā'if* named Laila. Though at the heart of *Laila's Letters* is the disparagement of the commodification of women, there is a larger critique of capitalist modernity at work: men are charged with prostituting themselves before the double standards of society and before political bodies of authority. In the novella, the *kothā* (salon/brothel) itself becomes a stage, from where the *tawā'if* performs, embodies, and voices a condemnation of social hypocrisy. Laila, the name itself inspired by the emblematic beloved of the Indo-Persian romance epic, is unrelenting in her criticisms of patriarchal authority, and pursues a rigorous re-evaluation of *akhlāq* (ethical conduct) as it was defined by haff rø

contemporaries: social reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The text challenged both the contemporary legal definition of the prostitute as a criminal from whom an idealized Indian nation needed rescuing<sup>6</sup> about which I say more below<sup>6</sup> and common attitudes towards the *tawā'if* as the harbinger of moral depravation within many quarters of *ashrāf* society. Furthermore, this text aimed to discipline male sexual desire while simultaneously criticizing conservative moral and political authority within Muslim middle-class society.

Q z °Abdul haff r (1885-1956) himself was a man of the margins<sup>6</sup> little has been written about his works and life, either from within the Urdu literary canon or elsewhere. He dedicated much of his life to journalism, editing the Urdu journal *Payām* and was actively involved in the nationalist struggle, working closely with several influential political figures of the period, among them, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kal m Azad, and Muhammad and Shaukat Ali. He also translated the Indian constitution into Urdu, worked to rehabilitate Hyderabad after it was occupied by the Indian Army in 1948, and was involved in efforts to promote Urdu, becoming secretary of *Anjuman-e-Taraqqi Urdu* (The Society for Advancement of Urdu) in 1949. On the literary front, he was briefly involved in the Progressive WritersøMovement, authored novels (*Laila Ke Khutut* and the response, *Majnun Ki Diari* being the most popular) several short stories, as well as a travelogue, in which he outlined his views about the causes behind the failure of the Khilafat movement as a viable political project for Indian Muslims. While on the one hand, he was demonized by the national elite for his criticisms of the Indian military while it occupied Hyderabad in the late 1940s, accused in some quarters of being partial to Muslims, he had also been long berated by some *ulema* in his own community for his views on women. Against considerable social and familial opposition, he contracted a marriage to a *tawā'if* from Nainital named Munni J n after the death of his first wife. Munni J n was

reportedly an accomplished singer and tabla player, who converted to Islam upon marriage, changing her name to Sakina Begum.<sup>41</sup>

While there is no evidence to suggest that Sakina Begum herself had a substantial role in the writing of *Laila's Letters*, what is clear is that Ghaffar's novel engages directly with the question of *akhlāq* (ethics), and situates the voice of the prostitute as a form of political protest. In spite of Ghaffar's grim description of Laila in the preface, as a victim of her social world, and her story as a woeful one, the bulk of the text betrays a Laila who refuses claims to victimhood, redemption, and rehabilitation. Structured as a series of 52 letters, the text is not so much an autobiographical narrative, as it is a critical account of *sharīf* norms of social propriety, marriage, and sexuality as the narrator takes on the role of educating her beloved—the reader to whom the text is addressed. Laila begins the text by referring to herself as a philosopher of *husn-faroshī* (beauty-trade), arguing that, "you may have seen many a master, but I am the expert on this subject."<sup>42</sup> After identifying herself as an authority, Laila elaborates upon such subjects as *shari'a*, (Islamic legal codes), *adabiyāt* (the culture of literary refinement) and *jihād* (struggle). For Laila, rumination of such concepts has been monopolized by a patriarchal elite authority. Laila refers, for instance, to *adabiyāt* as a disease, claiming that the editors of literary journals, though purportedly producing refined literature, write only for the purpose of self-promotion. She sees the law as an inherently deceptive set of rules that guide moral behavior, and are nothing more than a cloak behind which those with power hide, to cover their weaknesses. Laila's private quarters are depicted as a space of enlightened thinking, for as she constantly reminds her reader, she never sleeps, she is always awake, alert, and listening. Thus, her

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<sup>41</sup> It is unclear if Ghaffar's novel was inspired by his interactions with his wife, Sakina Begum, though it can be safely assumed that his views about social norms preventing or castigating *tawa'ifs* from marrying into respectable, middle-class families, were informed by his own choices in his marital life.

<sup>42</sup> Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, *Laila Ke Khutut*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition published by Daruladab, Punjab, 1932. Reprint, (Lahore: Almatbata-ul-Arabiya, 2004) p. 39.

femininity is far from signifying an inner, spiritual domain invested with the urgency of preserving the sanctity of national and/or communitarian culture is defined by how she perceives social prescriptions and practices of religion as stemming from public unreason. In the text, *akhlāq* (ethical conduct) is constantly posited against *qānūn* (law). This distinction between the ethical and the legislative (or socially normative) domains of human life is not an anomalous one. As Ayesha Jalal has shown, noting the intrinsic distinction between the temporal and sacred aspects of Islamic concepts (such as *jihād*, for instance) is key to understanding how the relationship between Muslim as individual (faith and ethics), and Muslims as social beings, were re-structured within specific historical contexts. In *Laila's Letters*, the *tawā'if* constantly alludes to this distinction between the ethical and the legislative: that human beings as individuals must make moral and ethical decisions without blind adherence to religious and/or political authority.

The term, *ashraf-ul-makhluqāt*, specific to the Islamic tradition, appearing in the Quran to refer to mankind, literally means the most noble of creatures, i.e., *man* and becomes a subject of renewed scrutiny within the text. Laila argues that *this ashraf-ul-makhluqāt*, referring to the men of her society, is a community who has achieved respectability through fraud and deception, practicing these mostly upon women.<sup>43</sup> She reserves her harshest criticisms for men who clothe themselves in the garb of religion and law, publicly speaking out against the vices of prostitution, yet pronounce epithets of love for me in my private quarters.<sup>44</sup> The three bodies of authority within the community from whom Laila does not withhold criticism are religious leaders, (*mullah, maulvi*), government representatives (*leader, wakil-lawyer*), and the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 56

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 81



literati (*adīb*-writers, *shaiyar*-poets), claiming that the latter tend to plagiarize her writings and publish them for public consumption. Laila's criticisms are delivered in a satirical mode:

“If you collect my private parts and one day publish them, whether or not your name will become respectable within intellectual circles, you will certainly become famous – in fact, if you hold fast to the edge of my tunic, you may become quite the leader! To make a name for yourself as a leader [in our society], all you must do is make a *jihād* against the shamelessness of a *bazār* woman.”<sup>45</sup>

Laila here makes a mockery of male leadership, essentially calling the social reformer a coward and licentious, as someone who can only assume greater social and political status by blaming the prostitute for the ills of society. As Farina Mir has shown in her work about the Punjabi narrative *Hir-Ranjha*, the heroine Hir appears in various texts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as ridiculing the *qāzi* and the *mullah*, in similar ways, and while the narrative may appear in a Muslim idiom, the tale is universal in its critique of religious authorities.<sup>46</sup>

haff r's primary emphasis is upon the oppression that the *qāwi* (powerful) mete out over the *zāif* (weak), in particular, the subjection of women to harsh punishment and social ostracization for the sins of *zinā* – sexuality outside the normative marital order – as opposed to the laxity expressed by the society towards men who are at liberty to pursue their selfish desires. The relationship between the powerful to the weak is expressed through metaphors of consumption, for politics (*siyāsāt*), according to Laila, is the “digesting of one *qaum* (community) by another *qaum*.” Hence, women, who constitute a community apart from men within this moral order, (as wives or as prostitutes), exist for men only to “be enjoyed like chutney, be consumed like wine, and satisfy their thirst.”<sup>47</sup> The Urdu word *qaum*, which has

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> Mir, Farina. *The Social Space of Language: Punjabi Popular Narrative in Colonial India, c. 1850-1900*. Diss. Columbia University, 2002. p. 287.

<sup>47</sup> Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, *Laila Ke Khutut*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition published by Daruladab, Punjab, 1932. Reprint, (Lahore: Almatbata-ul-Arabiya, 2004) p. 161.

been used to refer to clan, religious community, or sect, is here employed at the peak of the nationalist movement in colonial India not to mean 'nation' but a social grouping (women): the reference to communities eating one another up, is a formidable critique about laying claims to representation (identity politics) and is especially pointed given a political climate of intensifying communitarian strife. How are we to read these criticisms of national politics as violent consumption? The text is a universalist critique, mediated not through the lens of religion per se, but through ethics, taking into account the socio-economic sphere and re-evaluating moral conduct in society to thus give it political meaning. To truly appreciate 'haff r's renewed interpretation of ethics from within the Indo-Islamic tradition, it is important to see how the concerns of *Laila's Letters* stands in marked contrast to nationalist legislative definitions of civilization, prostitution, and female sexuality during the 1920s and 1930s, but first a few words about 'haff r are in order.

As his name suggests, Q z °Abdul 'haff r inherited the title, *qāzī* (judge) from his forefathers, who served in high-ranking judicial positions within the Mughal courts. Q z °Abdul 'haff r's title may have been ceremonial, in light of how figures such as his grandfather, head *qāzī* of Muradabad, faced suspicion and potential punishment by the colonial state following the 1857 rebellion: the British laid the blame for the revolt largely on the 'fanatical Musalmans'. The devolution of the *qāzī's* role in Indian society from being a local arbitrator of justice, independent judge, and interpreter of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence), to a mere native assistant in nineteenth century colonial law courts who was expected to simply direct the British legislator in administering the 'correct' Muslim law, has been well-documented.<sup>48</sup> Of some significance

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<sup>48</sup> See, Scott Alan Kugle, 'Framed, Blamed and Renamed: The Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (May, 2001), p. 257-313; Michael Anderson, 'Islamic Law and the Colonial Encounter in British India.' (Eds.) Arnold, David and Peter Robb. *Institutions and Ideologies: A SOAS South Asia Reader*. (London: Curzon Press Ltd., 1993) p. 165-185

here, is that Q z °Abdul haff r, familial background coupled with his role in politics, suggests some degree of familiarity with both local and emerging national juridical realms. He was sent into government service by his father after failing out of Aligarh University, entered politics as a staunch supporter of the Khilafat movement in his capacity as assistant to Maulana Muhammad Ali, and the Indian National Congress; was an active member of the All-India Muslim League Council, and later served as one of Jawaharlal Nehru's Hyderabad correspondents. Given his association with high-ranking nationalist leaders, Q z °Abdul haff r's novella shares an inter-subjective relationship with the all-India legislative domain, for the audience of the novella is an Indian national male leadership. In fact, over a decade after its publication, when the All-India Progressive Writers Association met in Hyderabad in 1945 and a resolution against obscenity in literature was proposed, the motion was defeated because of the opposition of renowned literary figures such as Q z °Abdul haff r.

*Laila's Letters* reads as a charged riposte against the legal prescriptions of prostitution which were being renewed during the early decades of the twentieth century. During this period, reformers and legislators were constructing and revising the definition of prostitution in a series of legislation, Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act (SITA). It seems not by accident that the acronym is Sita—the chaste, loyal, and pure wife of Lord Ram was appropriated from the Ramayana by nationalist reformers as the embodiment of ideal Indian womanhood—since the legislation, ostensibly about rescuing minor girls from brothels, had more to do with nationalist renderings of ideal femininity, than with any concern over the condition of prostitutes' lives. By the early 1930s, the legislation was ostensibly aimed at rescuing minor girls from procurers, but was instead more concerned with rescuing male honor, while defining female sexuality in accordance with normative middle-class prescriptions of monogamous

marriage. The new laws imposed harsher penalties upon prostitutes and their procurers, from fines to prison sentences, and in some cases, whipping.<sup>49</sup> Amendments included removing clauses that prevented buyers from being punished; empowered landlords to rid their premises of objectionable tenants; and though, for the first time, a distinction was made between the upper-class dancing girl and the common prostitute, the caste of such women was to be decided by elite men within local bodies of authority. If the upper-class *tawā'if* was protected in legislation, it was only because upper-class men found it convenient to do so.

Indian patriarchal elites had thus found a discursive space of urgency to describe ideal Indian womanhood, in which marriage was defined as virtue, and prostitution as vice. In the SITA legislations, what was considered in need of rescue was the good name of India since prostitution was a slur [upon it], and the thrust of the legislation was defining it in opposition to earlier colonialist renderings of the prostitution in India as Oriental custom.<sup>50</sup> This legislative forum proved to be a nationalist public sphere in which both Hindu and Muslim men could come together to in order to uphold the nation as one worthy of being called civilized. Nationalists such as Rai Bahadur Babu Vikramjit Singh and Chaudhri Muhammad Ali of the United Provinces legislative assembly cited classical texts such as the Sanskrit Shastras, and Persian epics, such as *Shāhnāmā*, and exchanged Urdu poetic couplets to claim that anything akin to prostitution was seen as a blot on the history of the otherwise pure Indian woman.<sup>51</sup> In spite of slight modifications of definitions of prostitution, it was amply clear from discussions in the

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<sup>49</sup> This punishment applied to the male persons who were accused of detaining or seducing women any place with intent that she may have sexual intercourse with any man other than her lawful husband. Punjab Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, 1933, Sections 8 and 9, L/PJ/7/753, IOR.

<sup>50</sup> Khan Bahadur Maulvi Fasih-uddin, Member of Assembly, Extract from the proceedings of the United Provinces Legislative Council, dated the 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1933, L/PJ/7/509: IOR.

<sup>51</sup> Rai Bahadur Babu Vikramjit, for instance, quoted a Persian couplet from the *Shahnama*, arguing, 'The [couplet means that] they were so proud of the chastity of women what to say of men, even the sun had not seen her naked.' Member of Assembly, Extract from the proceedings of the United Provinces Legislative Council, dated the 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1933, L/PJ/7/509: IOR.

provincial legislative assemblies that it was women's sexual intercourse outside of marriage that was the real source of nationalist anxieties. In the UP legislative assembly that same year, Khan Bahadur Maulvi Fasiuddin claimed that,

Adultery in public when sanctioned by law is much worse than adultery behind walls...Those who do prostitution in a public manner commit a sin against society, the nation and against humanity and those who commit sins in a private manner commit sins against themselves and against the individual. This is a very great difference between the two kinds of *prostitution or adultery whatever we may call it.*<sup>52</sup>

Maulvi Fasiuddin's remark is indicative of the wide-spread hostility by the Indian middle-classes towards the appearance of the sexual woman in public, i.e., women who in any way threatened the normative moral order were perceived as *outside the nation*.<sup>53</sup> The 'public woman' was seen to be a contradiction in terms. Prostitution in legislative discourse was synonymous with unrestrained female sexuality, outside the domains of monogamous marriage, viewed as immoral and criminal. Certainly, it was a crime to detain a woman against her will to have sexual intercourse, but *only* if the man was someone other than her legal husband. In discussions about the amendments, it was mostly men's honor that was at stake, evidenced by remarks of a member of the Punjab legislative assembly who pointed out that, 'If a person happens to get into the clutches of a bad woman she has only to lodge a complaint' immediately that person will be

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<sup>52</sup> Member of Assembly, Extract from the proceedings of the United Provinces Legislative Council, dated the 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1933, L/PJ/7/509: IOR, emphasis mine.

<sup>53</sup> During the non-cooperation movement in the early 1920s, a group of *tawā'ifs* responded to Gandhi's call for Hindu-Muslim unity and support for the Independence movement. They resolved to sing only patriotic songs on all occasions. An outraged Gandhi lashed out at their 'obscene manifesto.' He would not accept them as Congress workers or accept their donation unless they gave up their 'unworthy profession that made them worse than thieves.' See, Saba Dewan's documentary, *The Other Song* (2009).

arrested whatever may be his position in life, it will surely lead to blackmailing. Do not punish the innocent man.<sup>54</sup>

Against this legislative rendering of the prostitute Qazi Abdul Ghaffar announces that although women will enjoy reading *Laila's Letters*, the book will not be appreciated in several quarters, for "the oppressor does not like to see his image reflected back to him in the mirror."<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the heroine of the epistolary novel, questions the would-be social reformer/legislator directly: "You think selling one's body is such a crime? You, who sell *akhlāq* and faith, are these not sins?"<sup>56</sup> The text was written for both a male and female audience: on the one hand, it is meant to redress the moral conduct of male authority; on the other, it seeks to empower women by producing a series of arguments about sexual exploitation, which could inform their conversations with men in positions of power. Yet the epistolary novel was also attempting to influence nationalist discourse in its critique of *ashraf* identity politics.

Historians of colonial India have highlighted the moral and sexual anxieties of the British and the aspiring Indian middle classes, tied with a coercive and symbolic regulation of women, which helped in reifying colonial authority, modernizing indigenous patriarchy, and articulating a collective identity.<sup>57</sup> In the Urdu public sphere, too, attempts were made by Muslim publicists and literati of the *ashraf* classes to redefine literature, entertainment and the domestic arena, especially pertaining to women, and to forge a respectable, civilized, and distinct Muslim

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<sup>54</sup> Extracts from the proceedings of the Punjab Legislative Council held on the 28<sup>th</sup> October and 21<sup>st</sup> November 1935 relating to the Punjab Suppression of Immoral Traffic Bill. The Punjab Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act 1933L/PJ/7/753, IOR.

<sup>55</sup> Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, *Laila Ke Khutut*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition published by Daruladab, Punjab, 1932. Reprint, (Lahore: Almatbata-ul-Arabiya, 2004) p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid p. 98.

<sup>57</sup> See (Eds.) Kumkum Sangari, Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial Indian History* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

cultural and political identity.<sup>58</sup> Yet, considerably little has been said on how a rich variety of literary practices and complexities of cultural imagination were at the same time putting limits upon notions of respectability and homogeneity. In this sense, there was no fixed system of Muslim middle-class morality and self-expressionism, nor was there any final triumph of sexual conservatism in this period. The effectiveness of such a disciplinary power was weakened. I am not suggesting that control over women's sexuality was not brought under greater scrutiny, alongside modernity, late colonialism and nationalism. However, what is important to note is that the period of the 1930s to the 1950s was also a time when class hierarchies and patriarchies in Indian society were being seriously questioned. Reforms, the national movement, education, and women's presence in the public arena all signaled new opportunities for women, however limited. Sexuality, pleasure, and love were articulated in diverse ways. Cheaply produced popular literature provided new forms of mass entertainment, as women and men found ways to dent and destabilize the wide-spread assumptions about gender systems and to negotiate codified sexual relations. *Laila's Letters* hints at the variety of such experiences and practices, indifferent to and even subverting, the tyrannies of respectability and standardization.

In the Hindi public sphere, letters and first-person fictional narratives by women introduced a sense of urgency and a powerful element of personalization: the reader was forced to confront the cruelty women experienced, life stories legitimized women's voices, as well as women's right to suggest solutions to their own problems, thus giving them a new sense of individual worth and emotional life.<sup>59</sup> Such narratives also allowed a bold critique of social and family norms. In the absence of as many women's journals in the Urdu sphere, reflecting the

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<sup>58</sup> Markus Daechsel, *The Politics of Self-Expression, The Urdu Middle-Class Milieu in Mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan* (New York: Routledge Press, 2006).

<sup>59</sup> Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 276.

divide of Hindi-Urdu publications and presses, fewer Muslim women could access the public sphere in such ways.<sup>60</sup> While *Laila's Letters* had much in common with the strategies and concerns of the new Hindi women's journals, it was written by a man, who adopted the female voice in order to stage a satire about the double standards of men and women in society.

Although it is difficult to gauge the precise breadth of its reception, by some accounts, the text was quite popular, and was read by *ashraf* women, often in secret.<sup>61</sup> Whereas in the legal sphere, the women being talked about were not included in the discussions, the discourse of ethics from which Qazi Abdul Ghaffar situated the *tawā'if*, Laila did all the talking. In this sense, Ghaffar's epistolary novella was an incitement against nationalism as identity politics.

### **Civilization, the Prostitute, and Respectable Muslim Society**

I have already outlined earlier, the more general moral *ashraf* discourse concerning the role of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In some ways, *Laila's Letters* bears some remarkable similarities to the 1905 novel I discussed above, *Umrā'o Jān Adā*. Like Rusva, Ghaffar writes in the voice of the *tawā'if*; like Umrā'o who narrates her story in relation to an aristocratic society in moral decline, Laila also conceives of her society as characterized by moral depravity. Yet, these are cosmetic similarities, for Ghaffar's novella ultimately stands in strong contrast to *Umrā'o Jān Adā*. We must remember that Umrā'o Jān, is allowed within the respectable society inhabited by Rusva *only* as a reformed, repentant woman: Umrā'o classifies

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<sup>60</sup> Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

<sup>61</sup> Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri praises *Laila Ke Khutut* in her memoir for its progressive views towards women, mentioning her husband's surprise when she says she is familiar with Qazi Abdul Ghaffar's work. She admits to him that her mother did not know that she was reading such books, though many of her school friends had read the novella. Upon meeting Qazi Abdul Ghaffar and his wife, she ascertains, "The real Laila was just as beautiful as I had imagined." See, Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri, *My Fellow Traveller: A Translation of Humsafar*, trans. Amina Azfar (Karachi: Oxford University Press 2006).



three types of women in society, as ‘the virtuous, the depraved, and the whores,’ before adding that, ‘most prostitutes have brought destruction on themselves,’ and that after ‘I repented’ the thought occurred to me that I might settle down with some respectable gentleman.’<sup>62</sup> Laila, however, adamantly refuses to enter into a social world that she deems full of hypocrisy. Gone too are the poetic couplets, and the commitment to objective history-writing. The series of letters that Laila addresses to her lover(s) is written as a polemic directed specifically against men whose claims to political authority and leadership within Muslim society are tenuous on moral and ethical grounds.

*Laila’s Letters* is a text which not only lends voice to the prostitute, destabilizing common *sharīf* views of marriage and conjugality, but heralds the *tawā’if* as a kind of civilizing figure. What is the ‘civilizing process’ that is at stake, and for which Qazi Abdul Ghaffar invokes the *tawā’if*? Unlike Umr-e-Jinnat, whose civilizational virtue is to be found ultimately in redemption, and she herself is hollowed out as repository of nostalgia for the elite lifestyle of the Avadh courts, Laila is not a signifier for a specific place or city in the *ashrāf* imagination. Thus, Laila writes, ‘It is not so important how I came to this place (of the brothel), but how this brothel has come to be, because of you.’<sup>63</sup> Laila perceives herself not as belonging to a specific place or a time, but as a subject in her own right, as she indicts the men of her society as inhumane. To be a fully civilized man, in Ghaffar’s view, is to perceive of women as subjects with rights, and to privilege feminine subjectivity within the public realm. For Ghaffar a *tawā’if*, in and of herself, was already a fully formed person. The problem for Ghaffar was that *qānūn* (law) was being privileged over ethics (*akhlāq*); he argued that any revaluation drawn from scriptural texts is interpretive, and up to the individual. As Laila puts it, ‘You may be able

<sup>62</sup> Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva, *Umr-e-Jinnat* (New Delhi: Maktabah-e Jamiya, 1971) p. 98.

<sup>63</sup> Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, *Laila Ke Khutut*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition published by Daruladab, Punjab, 1932. Reprint, (Lahore: Almatbata-ul-Arabiya, 2004) p. 14

to remove the apparel of my humanity and denude me; you may be able to attack my chastity (*ismat*); you may be able to make me your mistress. But faith (*imān*) is such a thing, not even the most powerful can take it from the most weak!<sup>64</sup>

haff r strategically adopts the voice of the *tawā'if* in order to challenge how *akhlāq* is practiced as ethical conduct by *ashrāf* men of his period.<sup>65</sup> In doing so, he draws from an older Indo-Islamic tradition of *akhlāq* literature wherein administrators advised sovereigns on proper political conduct, and he also borrows heavily from an established modern didacticism in the literature of reform. At the same time, this new *akhlāq* literature was simultaneously seeking inspiration from the increasing popularity of the stage and theater in colonial Indian life. The text assesses masculine self-hood by reproducing the prostitute not simply as commentator or even heroine, but as a *judge*, whose experiences as a socially marginalized figure are privileged as protest against a moral order defined by men who lack self-control and exert animalistic urges over women. It seeks to discipline male sexuality. Laila is staking her place in the world of the *ashrāf*, and makes it clear that a *tawā'if* has no religion: she is neither Hindu nor Muslim. The critique of Indian nationalism is poignant in the way masculine subjectivity is redefined. For instance, haff r here twisted the modern discourse of eugenics on its head: men who are unable

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<sup>64</sup> Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, *Laila Ke Khutut*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition published by Daruladab, Punjab, 1932. Reprint, (Lahore: Almatbata-ul-Arabiya, 2004) p. 162.

<sup>65</sup> Qazi Abdul Ghaffar Ghaffar was not alone in this endeavor. The poet, Sher Khan BoomøMeerathi, narrated the tale of a prostitute named Tam zan (her name literally means manners) who was murdered by the eldest son of a landlord family when she refused to marry him. Boom wrote a satirical poem about the incident called *Qatl-i-Tamīzan* (*Murder of Tameezan*) which is still printed in Meerut as a chapbook in Urdu and Hindi. Boomøused to recite and sell the poem himself in the streets of Meerut during the 1940s. Another short story which takes on the voice of the *tawā'if* in epistolary form, is Krishan Chanderø *Ek Tawaif Ki Khat: Jawaharlal Nehru aur Muhammad Ali Jinnah Ke Nam* (A Letter from a Prostitute to Nehru and Jinnah), written shortly after 1947. The letter humbly beseeches the leaders of the new nation-states of India and Pakistan, to visit the *tawā'if*'s home in Bombay, where she is taking care of two women rendered homeless and sexually violated by Partition. See Krishan Chander, \_\_\_\_\_

to see women as anything beyond objects for sexual consumption are weak men, and will, in turn, produce weak children, thus diminishing the strength of the nation.<sup>66</sup>

Marriage, for both the *ashrāf* as with the Hindu middle-classes of the twentieth century, had been sanctioned with a moral vision; it was seen as creating families, which in turn formed future citizens of the nation. In this schema, sex could occur legitimately only within the disciplined confines of marriage. Laila argues that both marriage and prostitution are structured according to the desires of men, who act on baser instincts, the claim here being a lack of *civilizé* on the part of men of her particular community, the *ashrāf*. She defines *nikāh*, not as a legal Islamic marriage contract, but as the sexual violation of a virgin woman by her husband, for, when you men listen to the marriage sermon, you envision the beautiful body of a girl or a woman and that imminent night when her delicate body will be presented upon a platter for your desires.<sup>67</sup> The supposedly sacred codes of conduct here are violated through the practices of commodification. In this sense, for a woman, *nikāh* happens only once in a life-time, no matter how many times she may appear before a man unveiled. Hence, Laila views marriage as a social institution which has little to do with sexual purity, and much to do with the violence of consumption. Her definition of *nikāh*, as a way of legitimizing sexual liaison between a master and slave, is also reminiscent of older eighteenth century definitions of *nikāh* as customary as opposed to contractual. In the case of the Bengal Nazim's royal household, as Indrani Chatterjee's work shows, *nikāh* did not have the kind of legitimate status as did a *shādi*, though both referred to marriage. Women of the royal household played a significant part in arranging a *nikāh*, which confirmed relationships between female slaves and a prince informally, as well as

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<sup>66</sup> Laila accuses men of producing weak children since they are sexually enervated due to their narrow-mindedness. See Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, *Laila Ke Khutut*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition published by Daruladab, Punjab, 1932. Reprint, (Lahore: Almatbata-ul-Arabiya, 2004) p.?

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 95

the *shādi*, which was celebrated publicly. Colonial legislators however, viewed *shādi* as a customary practice, whereas *nikāh* was considered by them as the legal binding contract—a reversal of the reality of marriage practices of the time.<sup>68</sup>

Laila is acutely aware that such binding contracts have come to exist not only from within the realm of patriarchal power, but have been mediated through new forms of consumption: the ostensibly sacred marriage practices amongst the *ashrāf* are described as a farce where women are treated no better than pets. While her suitors try to convince her to either marry them or enter into the profession of the stage, Laila staunchly refuses; she prefers her measure of independence, albeit in the form of a public prostitute, rather than a prostitute in the home (as a wife), or to work for someone else (as she would if brought into the wider entertainment industry). In this interpretation, it is not women who are depicted as the embodiment of shame, but men who are to be shamed because of their lack of civility. All that is vulgar, obscene, and uncouth, terms that typically are used to describe the prostitute, are inverted to apply to men of high social status. Although men seek to reform women, for they can reform them in any way they so choose, Laila argues, it is men who need reform.

Laila also enumerates the classes of men who frequent her salon—all of whom, she claims, behave like animals despite pretensions of being religious philosophers, *khadi*-wearing leaders, and properly educated writers. Each category of man is relegated within a typology, like an ethnographic census, and is subject to an entry: the specificity of their desires, the type of deceit and duplicity they perform based on their profession, the food they consume, even the clothing they wear corresponds to the form of their misogyny. *Akhlāq* in this text is reformulated as a critique of commodity, consumption, and commercialization. Laila's is a condemnation of

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<sup>68</sup> Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery, and Law in Colonial India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 90-91.

social hypocrisy, for she consistently reiterates the injustices wrought by those who speak in the name of proper moral conduct for the entire community, but proceed in breaking those norms when it serves their purpose. The uncivilized man is defined as one who seeks satisfaction only from a woman's body, rather than her mind. *haff r* places the *za'if*, embodied by Laila, in the position of didactically instructing men upon proper moral conduct, inducing them to treat their wives with respect. Ethical conduct is redefined so that the socially weak (*za'if*) members of society become judges, accounting for the failure of moral leadership. The *tawā'if* here assumes the position of a woman from whose quarters the *ashrāf* man is evaluated on his lack of civility. In this way, she is upheld as a figure of political desire: as a reformatory prescription for the nationalist man.

At one level in *Laila's Letters*, *haff r* draws upon an older tradition of viewing the courtesan's quarters as the space from which elite men learned decorum in order to assume a refined comportment befitting the status of nobility. Read at another level, however, *Laila's Letters* aims to discipline male sexual desire in the context of rising communitarian strife, and a national political culture which was increasingly emphasized the virtues of self-control. Marcus Daeschel has pointed out that during the 1930s and 1940s, a prevailing concern for the body, associated with hygiene, food, and sex, was central to self-definitions and social identity amongst the Urdu middle class, as reformist concerns in newspapers, medical tracts, and pamphlets focused on the dangers of easy pleasure.<sup>69</sup> The generation of sexual desire through activities such as going to dancing saloons, reading 'cheap novels' and watching films was viewed with disdain by reformists who were defining proper middle-class conduct. Daeschel argues that this was not simply about upholding ideals of frugality and hard work, but that middle-class political

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<sup>69</sup> Markus Daeschel, *The Politics of Self-Expression, The Urdu Middle-Class Milieu in Mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan* (New York: Routledge Press, 2006) p. 106.

culture was influenced by fascistic tendencies which in turn created regimes of bio-power: this was evident by how an emphasis was placed on the inner world of individuals who increasingly came to understand politics as a route to personal salvation, and that this re-orientation of politics was the result of social transformations wrought by the arrival of a consumer society.<sup>70</sup> Thus, for Daeschel, the purpose of politics was to find salvation through the expression of a purified inner self (through for instance, control over the body, avoiding particular foods, sexual indulgence and so on), an ideal that reflected a lack of political power. Self-expressionism, through clothing, ingesting foods, and the body stressing the importance of achieving corporeal and mental strength was the ideological vehicle of a marginalized middle class.<sup>71</sup>

Yet, did a concern with individual selfhood necessarily lead to the kind of politics of inner purification and self-expressionist discourse in which individuals were equated to nations? Not all nationalists who explored the issue of individual identity assumed such an equivalency. Indeed, while *haff r*'s text is concerned with the individual self of the *tawā'if*, it attempts to influence nationalist discourse through the recourse to ethics. Also, what is interesting about *haff r*'s text is that while criticizing patriarchal legal prescriptions as well as the excesses of male sexual desire, it does not abandon discourses of pleasure altogether, structured as it is as a series of love letters. Laila is not only openly critical of consumption and excess, but links it to oppression, as the upholders of morality treat the socially marginal members of society as objects. Pleasure here is inscribed in a way that is oppositional to Ruswa's project: if Ruswa mediated pleasure through poetry, by fixing the *tawā'if* as moral subject, then Qazi Abdul *haff r* restructures the discourse of pleasure by impersonating and staging a critical female voice. As Francesca Orsini has argued, more than articles on social

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p.113

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 34

reform, it was hybrid genres (confessions, epistolary novels), which mixed instruction with entertainment, that allowed taboo issues concerning women to be raised directly; the epistolary novel became a popular genre from the 1920s onwards, giving vent through a first person critical female voice, and allowing for the space of self-reflection.<sup>72</sup>

*Laila's Letters* emerged during a period of several conjunctures: not only was the voice of the *gane-wāli* being made available through immediate means and across vast stretches of space, alongside the rise of staged performance, but women of colonial North India more generally were taking a more active role in the public sphere. Throughout the mid to late 1920s, there was a greater proliferation of women's journals, with increasing numbers of educated women: female readership was being recognized in mainstream news magazines, as newly educated women wrote letters in to editors about problems such as *purdāh*, child-widows, and education. Writing about the Hindi public sphere, Francesca Orsini has shown how the new magazine, *Chand* (c. 1922) broke with the late nineteenth century *stri-upyogi* (useful for women) genre. It addressed women as protagonists and active subjects of Indian society and of the movement for national regeneration, not only symbolically, but also as empowered individuals, by making women equally knowledgeable about all sorts of political, economic, social and historical questions. Furthermore, the journal played an important role in introducing and popularizing a notion of the right to feel, highlighting tensions between individual and society, and requesting a renegotiation of social and family norms.<sup>73</sup> Incidentally, Orsini notes how this genre gave rise to a sentimental literature that had much in common with commercial films, thematizing tensions between individual aspirations, normative ideals, and social rules in a blend of romance and social critique. In the Urdu sphere of the period, the issue of social reform

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<sup>72</sup> Orsini, Francesca. *The Hindi Public Sphere: 1920-1940, Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 284.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 266-275.

for Muslim women also predominated. The question of *purdāh* (veiled seclusion) was especially salient within the *ashrāf* community, the *raison d'être* of middle-class Muslim identity itself. The emergence of similar critiques by Muslim women themselves were fewer, a development reflecting the decline of Urdu presses during the period. By the 1920s and 1930s, several notable *ashrāf* women made the decision to leave *purdāh* and their writings were made public.<sup>74</sup> Many *ashrāf* women echoed their male counterparts regarding the backwardness of the Muslim community in relation to Hindus.

The *haff r* text emerges in the wake of a decade in which *tawā'ifs* were both increasingly punished by the legal instruments of the colonial state for their perceived immoralities, and ostracized within political discourses of Muslim selfhood, within nationalist public spheres of the period. It is an *akhlāq* text that redefines civilized behavior. As prostitutes were being pushed out by legislation and conservative moral norms, *haff r* resuscitates the *tawā'if*, not as a redemptive figure, but as the voice of reason, who calls for a re-evaluation of ethics, by questioning patriarchal political leadership, and by placing the onus of sin on those who, from business, politics, and even from the pulpit of knowledge and from the seat of the court of law sell *akhlaq*, sell faith.<sup>75</sup> Here, the *tawā'if* is recast as a civilizing figure. She is cultivated not simply because she can perform the ethics of the stylistic (*adab*) in dress, speech, and manners, but she is *civilized* because she makes an argument for striving towards a just, humane world, in

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<sup>74</sup> Some of the most ardent statements against *purdah* by Muslim women came from Rashid Jehan and Ismat Chughtai, women central to the Progressive Writers Association, a left-leaning group which emerged in the 1930s. There has been considerably little work done on the history of Muslim women leaving *purdah* in early twentieth century colonial South Asia. Of note, the standard text on Muslim women's reform in colonial India is Gail Minault's *Secluded Scholars*, in which the examples she cites are far from exhaustive, as most of the women were from families discussed throughout, are daughters of reformers or women educated at their schools. Two forthcoming publications will emerge this year which for the first time closely examine Muslim women's autobiographical writings: Sunil Sharma, Cioban Hurley's co-edited book on Atiya Fyzee, and Cioban Hurley's book on Muslim women's autobiographies (titles?)

<sup>75</sup> Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, *Laila Ke Khutut*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition published by Daruladab, Punjab, 1932. Reprint, (Lahore: Almatbata-ul-Arabiya, 2004) p. 98.



which women are subjects with rights and because she seeks to free women from the tyranny of sexual hierarchies. In this sense, the *tawā'if*'s salon makes a return as the space from which lettered, *sharīf* men are to be educated—wherein ethical comportment (*adab*) in dress, speech, manners, must necessarily be conjoined with a renewed notion of ethical conduct (*akhlāq*) in behavior, character, and moral sense. The *tawā'if* is recuperated from the margins and heralded as a civilizing figure.

That it is from the peripheries, from the *tawā'if*'s interior compartments, that the ethical world is re-centered as civilized, is poignantly illustrated also in Ghulam Abbas's 1940 Urdu short story, *Ānandī* (City of Joy). Though a detailed analysis is outside the scope of this chapter, I raise it here in order to briefly point out how the critique of commodification went hand in hand with redefinition of civilization within the Urdu literary sphere. In *Ānandī*, the prostitutes—the *zanān-e-bāzārī* (lit. the women of the *bazar*)—of an un-named city are banished by the municipal authorities who see them as a threat to the moral order of their society, and the women are forced to reside on a stretch of barren land several kilometers away from the city center. As the prostitutes begin to rebuild their home, a whole world of commodities follow suit: upon the heels of the laborers contracted to reconstruct the *kothā*, (who also repair a nearby well and the ruins of a mosque), come the water-sellers, food vendors, tong-wallahs, flower, tobacco, and incense hawkers, fruit and vegetable traders, and so forth. By happenstance, one of the laborers sees smoke rise out of the tomb of a forgotten saint, which lies not far from the new residence: it is dressed up by a local mendicant (*fakīr*), built anew by the prostitutes themselves, and people begin to visit it regularly from the nearby village to hear the musicians who sing at the shrine. The hustle and bustle increases as the women's wealthier clients begin to arrive in carriages and cars, leading some locals to begin to build shops beneath and around the *kothā*. Soon, the barren

stretch of land turns into a thriving commercial town, and businesses follow. Some decades later, it has become a populated city but its original name, *Husnabad* (City of Beauties), named after the *tawā'ifs* who first built their home there, is changed to *Ānandī* (City of Joy), and shortly thereafter, municipal authorities begin to contemplate forcing the prostitutes out of the city. This circular tale, in which the edifice of the city is built by the very women who are pushed onto its margins in fact, by a whole world of subalterns illustrates how Urdu writers commented on the centers and peripheries of lived, ethical space by situating the *tawā'if* who exists not simply as a cultural symbol, but in actuality, interlaces moral conduct with commodification. The *tawā'ifs* in this tale are at the very center of civilized life that is civilized life begins with them. Abbas's tale is an extraordinary reversal of a much older theme within Islamicate understandings of civilization. In the twelfth century historian Ibn Khaldun's assessment which became a template for many classical Islamic theories of civilization the rise and fall of civilizations followed from the moral failings of the cosmopolitan, cultured people within urban centers, leaving them weak and thus, open to invasion by the uncouth, but god-fearing nomads who lived in the peripheries of civilized (i.e., urbane) life. For Abbas, civilized life begins and ends with the *tawā'if* whom the municipal authorities see as an unsightly and intolerable stain on the skirt of humanity, nobility, and culture."<sup>76</sup>

### **A Note on Social Transitions: 'Prostitute' to Performer**

The irony was that the further the *tawā'if* was pushed into the margins of public life, the more she came to preoccupy its center stage. It was because the upper-class *tawā'if*, along with the prostitutes of the *bazār* were increasingly driven out of the cities that they migrated in greater

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<sup>76</sup> Ghulam Abbas, *Ānandī* (City of Joy) Tr. by G.A. Chaussee, in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 18, 2003.

numbers to the princely states, such as Kashmir and Hyderabad, where they were appreciated for their music and art and could easily assimilate into court culture. By one *tawā'if*'s account, all these rules and regulations offended our dignity and our sense of pride. We had to cater more and more to *talūqdārs* from the *dehāt* (village) and *gorās* (white men). I began to accept invitations outside the city. I was invited by the Nizam of Hyderabad with the famous Akhtar Bai and was also the chief entertainer at the parties in the palace of the Nawab of Rampur.<sup>77</sup> This was corroborated in newspapers such as *Oudh Akhbar* which noted that under British rule the traffic [prostitution] is somewhat lessened; but the plan adopted by bawds now is to go into Independent states, where they can act as they please.<sup>78</sup> In some cases, the demi-monde *tawā'ifs* married into respectable families as they transitioned into *ganewālis* (professional female singers) such as Malka Pukhraj as well as Akhtar Bai.<sup>79</sup> It was because many *tawā'ifs* and *baijīs* received patronage in the courts of princely kingdoms in the early twentieth century that their credentials as female entertainers were re-legitimized, through association with classical culture, before they moved on to lucrative careers in theatre, radio, and film. The princes contributed funds to such national cultural activities as the All India Music Conference in 1918, and such patronage, along with the fact that many *tawā'ifs* also began to live in the *gharānās* (households) of musicians, lent this class of women social legitimacy as *women of the stage*, as professional performers, as opposed to women of the *bazār* (prostitutes).<sup>80</sup> Women of the stage

<sup>77</sup> Veena Oldenburg. *The Making of Colonial Lucknow: 1856-1877* in *The Lucknow Omnibus* (New York: 2001).

<sup>78</sup> Oldenburg, Veena. *The Making of Colonial Lucknow: 1856-1877* in *The Lucknow Omnibus* (New York: 2001): 141.

<sup>79</sup> In Malika Pukhraj's memoir, there is no mention that she was a *tawā'if*, since the term by that point, had acquired the meaning of prostitute. Pukhraj served for many years as the favorite court dancer and singer for the Raja of Kashmir, before marrying into a respectable family. See, Malika Pukhraj, *Song Sung True: A Memoir* (ed. And trans.) Saleem Kidwai. (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003).

<sup>80</sup> In an interview with a *tawā'if*, residing in the red light district of Old Delhi, it was clear that she was not recognized as a classical vocalist although she could sing in the classical style. The primary distinction was in her training, and the second, the context of her performances. If a *tawā'if* has learned from a reputable *ustād* (teacher) of an established *gharānā*, then she can establish her own identity as being primarily a vocalist by profession. If she

were deemed far more respectable because they were performing their craft as an art— their bodies were not subject to commodification. In the early days of All-India Radio, most performers were recruited from the courtesan class, as well-known male vocalists were not prepared to have their music broadcast to an anonymous audience, and amateurs did not perform in public.<sup>81</sup>

Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, *tawā'ifs* played a central role in the development of new media and technologies, from the advent of the theater to radio recordings (and, as I later discuss in detail in the last section of this chapter, film). The musical performances of the coveted upper-class *tawā'if* were popularized, as she transitioned into a *gānewālī*. In fact, the Gramophone Company's first recording in 1902 was made by Gauhar J n, an upper-class courtesan of Calcutta. Between the 1890s and 1910s, while she continued to sing and dance in the homes of wealthy *zamīndārs* (landlords) Gauhar J n was also sought out in great demand by popular audiences. She travelled widely in India, often as a guest of patrons in Princely states, but also gave public performances, in which she would present ticketed programs, distributing an advance schedule of items to be sung in her concert. The early records of Gauhar J n are labeled "First dancing girl, Calcutta" "first" indicating her position as the premier vocalist in the Calcutta musical world. At the end of every single 78mm recording, she would say, "My name is Gauhar J n", announcing to the audience her public, popular persona as a *gānewālī*. Apparently, this announcement was necessary since the recordings were sent to Hanover in Germany for pressing the records and the technicians would assign proper labels and confirm the name by listening to these announcements at the end of the three minute

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cannot claim to be a disciple, then her identity will be that of a courtesan, if not a common prostitute. Daniel Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India: The Organization of an Artistic Tradition* (Detroit: 1980): 100-1.

<sup>81</sup> By the early 1950s, Sardar Patel, the then Minister for Broadcasting, after Independence introduced a ban on performers "whose private life is a public scandal." See Lalita DuPerron, "Humr": A Discussion of the Female Voice of Hindustani Music, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Feb., 2002), pp. 173-193.

performance. Yet, Gauhar J n's naming of herself in this way on the first records distributed in colonial India, testified to the shift from the *tawā'if* as a figure threatened with extinction to that is, as a courtesan of the old world, forced out of the spaces of respectability to her assimilation into the new, her popularization as professional singer. This naming also signaled a shift wherein the selfhood of the *tawā'if* could, in a sense, temporarily erase the connotation of decadence and moral depravity.

Gauhar J n recorded over 600 songs over the period 1902 to 1920, and sang in over ten languages. From 1903 onwards, her records began to appear on the Indian market, always in great demand. Thousands of copies were imported after being pressed at Hanover, were best-sellers throughout India. Moreover, the female voice was for the first time rendered as *commodity*. A woman's voice could now be heard on radios throughout India singing *thumris*, [*dadra, kajri, chaiti, bhajan, tarana*], which were performed at one time within the exclusive world of the *kothās* and the salons of the court, and for the first time, the *-kacha' gana* (song), a type of music popularized by Gauhar J n, became accessible to a broad audience. Incidentally, Gauhar J n also perfected the 3-minute song: that is, the music was rendered with greater speed, as the *tawā'if* shifted into a *gānewālī*. Simultaneously audiences could appreciate the *gānewālī* within a theatre, as a staged performance. This intimate alliance between the transitional figure of the courtly *tawā'if* to an independent *gānewālī* in the first decades of the twentieth century to a transition fraught with the end of the old world courtesan as doubly commodified was reflected back through ethical discourses within new Urdu literary genres. It was also during this period that middle-class women were entering the public sphere in greater numbers, and the female voice was also rendered as a critique of male-dominated social practices.

If within Hindi nationalist renderings, which adopted a discourse of a Mother India that heralded the woman as object of devotion and reproduction, then what is to be made of how the *tawā'if*, straddling between the lexicon of Mughal imperial sovereignty as well as at the helms of the emergent nation, was reworked as a figure of resistance from within Urdu literary expressions? The *tawā'if* as either social category or aesthetic representation, has no fixed meaning. For Hindu nationalists, and more broadly, the middle-class national narrative, she has been interpreted as representing a decadent Muslim subject that is antithetical and anachronistic to the national project— a narrative that provides a way to justify the subordinate position assigned to Muslims in contemporary India. For South Asian Muslims of the extant Mughal heartland, offers a way to make sense of this very position by beckoning to a luxurious past while also maintaining a historically positioned and distinct Muslim cultural identity.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, some key forces came to impact both the lives of *tawā'ifs* as well as the changing civilizational motifs which the *tawā'if* was seen to embody within realms of Urdu aesthetic reproduction: 1) the colonial state and an indigenous patriarchal elite, who set increasingly stringent penalties upon the social category of "prostitute" aimed at mainly lower-class women; and 2) the inclusion of certain "respectable" classes of women into the public sphere; and 3) the technologies of theater and cinema, which, in engendering newly organized spaces of the stage and the screen, altered the relationship between the *tawā'if* and her public world. During the 1920s, while the state continued to criminalize the lower-class prostitute, it also, for the first time, distinguished between the lower-class prostitute and the upper-class "singing and dancing girl." In the decades to follow, stage, and increasingly, cinema, became venues that offered lower-class women of the brothels an opportunity to improve their social standing. For upper-class courtesans, the cinema provided the possibility of

resuming a respectable profession if they could successfully transform into legitimate film actresses. It was a transformation that coincided with the migration of Urdu intellectuals to the Bombay studios between the 1930s and 1950s, gaining employment as script-writers and film lyricists. The long-standing relationship between the Urdu litterateur and the *tawā'if* was shaped anew: it is to this subject that I now turn in discussing the work of Saʿadat Hasan Manto.

### **Saʿdat Hasan Manto and an Oeuvre of Fallen Women**

In Saʿadat Hasan Manto's 1940 short story *Kāli Shalvār* (*Black Trousers*), the protagonist, a prostitute named Sultana, is forlorn: at the behest of her lover and pimp, Khuda Baksh, she has recently moved from the military cantonment town of Ambala, in Punjab, to the imperial capital, Delhi, where her business suffers tremendously. As the holy month of Muharram approaches, she realizes she lacks the outfit of traditional black clothes she needs in order to commemorate the month of Shiʿa ritual mourning. In the brothel nearby, her friend Mukhtar has recently acquired a new pair of black satin trousers which Sultana regards with jealousy. As Muharram draws closer, Sultana becomes increasingly anxious. She implores Khuda Baksh to somehow raise the money for a new pair of trousers, but he dallies on the matter, and ultimately refuses. Finally, she approaches Shankar, whom she had befriended one day whilst staring over her balcony overlooking the railway yard. Explaining to him that she is not asking for payment of her services, Sultana divulges to Shankar her problem: she asks him to give her a pair of black trousers as a gift. Shankar promises to provide her with the *shalvār* by the first of the month. Before leaving, he glances towards Sultana's cheap silver earrings and asks her to give them to him. She laughs as she asks him of what possible use her worthless jewelry could be, and hands them over. On the first morning of Muharram, Shankar arrives at

Sultana's doorstep as promised— looking unkempt, as though he has just gotten out of bed—and he hands her a bundle wrapped in newspaper: a pair of satin *shalvār*. Uttering only, "Here are your black trousers, I'll be off now," Shankar quickly disappears. Delighted by having received her new ensemble, but even happier because of the fact that Shankar kept his promise, Sultana changes into her outfit. That afternoon, she hears a knock at her door, and it is Mukhtar. As the two women greet each other, they are astonished to make a mutual discovery: Mukhtar recognizes her trousers, while Sultana sees that Mukhtar is wearing her earrings. The two women lie to each other about the origin of their new possessions, and the story ends with them sharing a brief moment of silence.

While narratives of sexual encounter and the subject of male sexual subjectivity abound within the remarkable body of work produced by the Urdu short-story writer Saʿadat Hasan Manto during his short life (1911-1955), it is the figure of the "fallen woman" (be she prostitute, mistress, or entertainer), which occupied the principal terrain of his oeuvre. The urban brothel in Manto's writing is often invoked as a metaphor of a society steeped in degradation, transparent commodification, and sexual exploitation. In featuring the fallen woman, her filial attachments, aspirations, and humiliations, the common prostitutes in Manto's stories appear not as objects representing the underbelly of society, but as individual subjects with a legible, real humanity, as opposed to a society which judges them as obscene. As Manto remarked, "we regard her as obscene, but we do not question ourselves of our obscenity."<sup>82</sup>

Born in the Punjab to a Muslim family of Kashmiri descent, Manto was reputed to be an undisciplined student; he barely made his way through school and college and finally had to quit Aligarh Muslim University after being wrongly diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1935. His early career began under the tutelage of a journalist, Abdul Bari Baig, from whom he learned about the

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<sup>82</sup> Saʿadat Hasan Manto, "Ismat Faroshi" in *Manto-Numa*, Sang-e-Meel, pg. 630.



classics of nineteenth century European literature, the works of Wilde, Maupassant, Chekov, and Hugo. Manto at first worked in journalism, writing radio plays, and publishing several short fiction writings before spending several years in Bombay film industry as a story writer for Imperial Film Company, Saroj Movietone, Filmistan Studios, and Bombay Talkies. It was during his years in Bombay, when he met and befriended many intellectuals of the Progressive Writers Group— Ismat Chughtai, Rajdinder Bedi, Krishan Chander, and K.A. Abbas. At first, he was loosely associated with the group, and although he would have enduring friendships with many of its writers, he quickly distanced himself from the organization, especially as he became the target of attack in literary circles for the perceived obscenities in his short stories. In the 1945 meeting of All India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA) in Hyderabad, members of the group attempted to pass a resolution against obscenity in literature, which was explicitly addressed towards Manto and Chughtai, who had made sexuality a central theme within their work. Such calls for curtailing perceived ‘obscenities’ in short stories came from those members of the association who argued that writings which foregrounded sexuality, instead of featuring the struggles of peasants and laborers, constituted literature which lacked purpose, ‘literature for literature’s sake’.

In the canon of Indo-Pakistani Urdu literature, Manto’s name has become virtually synonymous with the issue of ‘obscenity’ in literature. He was the most prolific Urdu writer of the late colonial and post-colonial period, publishing well over two hundred short stories, in addition to numerous plays and essays. A controversial figure on account of his flippant dismissal of *sharīf* propriety, Manto was rebuked not only by both the colonial Indian and Pakistani states, but from intellectual contemporaries, and the broader social milieu of which he was a part, for writing short stories which criticized middle-class sexual norms, the gruesome

violence of Partition, and antagonistic social attitudes towards fallen women. Accused by a literary public of writing stories which celebrated perversions and sexual deviancy, Manto dealt like no other upon the subject of masculinity and its relationship to respectable society, through his rich descriptions of the sexual body. Very public storms of controversy followed the publication of his short stories *Thanda Gosht* (Cold Meat), *Dhuān* (Smoke), *Kālī Shalvār* (Black Trousers), *Khol Do* (Open It), and *Bu* (Odor). Two of these short stories, *Khol Do* and *Thanda Gosht*, deal specifically with Partition violence, and along with the brute aphorisms in his *Siyah Hashiye* (Black Margins), are well-crafted expositions that shock the reader into staggering confrontations with the tragic, sexual violence that accompanied the transfer of populations across newly constructed borders of India and Pakistan. The court cases launched against Manto in 1949-50 for the Partition stories made him the first writer in Pakistan to be tried for obscenity. Besides defending himself from lawsuits over the alleged obscenity of his short stories, Manto enjoyed, and tirelessly nurtured, the reputation of an intellectual nonconformist whose style of social realism provoked controversy, debate, and vehement disagreement. In his essays and memoirs, Manto represents himself as an iconoclast, unfettered by the constraints imposed upon writers by literary conventions or political ideologies. At the same time, he took great offense that his work would be at all compared to pulp or popular culture: as a serious writer, he saw himself as an *adīb*, very much a part of the new literary culture, *adabiyat*. In an essay where Manto documents his transition to life in Pakistan and the court cases he faced there, he describes the courts of law trying him for his purportedly filthy stories, as themselves decrepit, filthy places to be avoided:

I had been to these courts before, in connection with my last three cases [before Partition]. They call the place district courts, but it is a squalid place. There are flies, mosquitoes, insects, and dust, everywhere. You hear the clatter of ancient typewriters, the jangling of shackles worn by prisoners brought by the police for

their court hearings. There are these rickety wooden chairs, mostly with one leg missing and their cane seats sagging and torn. In the rooms, the plaster on the walls is peeling off. The grounds, devoid of any green, look like the bald head of a wretched and grubby Kashmiri [Manto, incidentally, himself was Kashmiri]. Burka clad women sit on bare, dust-covered floors. People curse and shout. Inside, magistrates, sit at cluttered and dirty tables, hearing cases and, at the same time, chatting with pals sitting next to them. It is not easy to describe this place in words alone. Everything is strange here - the atmosphere, the language, the jargon...May God keep everyone away from these courts.<sup>83</sup>

In the past two decades, Manto's work has enjoyed renewed interest: in India and Pakistan, contemporary playwrights and theater groups have re-situated the author's work on the stage in the service of progressive politics; in the scholarly domain, his fiction has become the subject of numerous interpretive analyses, especially from within the fields of Urdu literary studies and comparative literature.<sup>84</sup> As per the latter, one of the most provocative arguments thus far about what Manto's writing signifies in relation to the wider political context of national modernity, has been that of Aamir Mufti's, who suggests that the figure of the woman in his stories stands in opposition to the virtuous wife and mother of the Indian nationalist imagination. Mufti argues that for Manto, "the form of improper love of which [the prostitute] is the figure makes available possibilities of selfhood and human attachment which are denied í by nationalism" that she exposes the claim for purity of the "national family" of the "chaste maternity" of the nation.<sup>85</sup> He suggests that we consider Manto's entire oeuvre as "a series of literary attempts to dislodge, from within, the terms of the attempted nationalist resolution of the question of collective selfhood and belonging," going on to claim that, "Manto turns the Urdu short story itself a "minor" genre that is made to do the work in Urdu of a "major" one, and renders an account of

<sup>83</sup> Saadat Hasan Manto, "Zehmet-e-Mehr-e-Darakshana", in *Manto Nama*, Sang-e-Meel, pg.

<sup>84</sup> See, Allok Bhalla, ; Daniela Bredi, M.Asaduddin, Priyamvada Gopal,

<sup>85</sup> Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2007, pg. 201

national modernity inscribed with displacement and difference.<sup>86</sup> The problems of this assertion notwithstanding—especially given the fact that the short story was not by any means a minor genre in this period, but was the principal genre of fiction writing in all Indian languages including Urdu during this period—I wish to engage with this argument about nationalism, Manto, and his oeuvre of “fallen woman” from a historical perspective.

What needs to be considered is that the way in which the figure of the woman (in particular, the fallen woman) is depicted in Manto’s stories, depends to a large extent upon the specific cultural and political contexts in which he was writing. In addition to his short stories about fallen women (*Shardā*, *Merā Nām Radhā Hai*, *Sarkandon Ke Pīche*, *Mahmuda*) Manto wrote essays about the issue of prostitution itself (*Ismat Faroshī*, *Gunāh Kī Betiyān*, *Gunah Ke Bāp*). There is a marked difference between the prostitutes in short stories such as *Hatak* and *Kāli Shalvār*, which depicted women of the brothels subordinated by urban regimes of social hygiene, to the fallen women who appear in narratives that feature communitarian, Partition violence (1947-8), (*Kalma Pardhiye*, *Dilli Ki Ek Ladki*). Furthermore, these writings are entirely distinct from the non-fictional accounts of the demi-monde class of Bombay actresses—often times negatively tainted by the *ashraf* with the brush-stroke of *tawā’if*—about whom Manto waxes nostalgic in the early 1950s, which I discuss in the following section.

Most of Manto’s stories about fallen women, focus upon the lives of ordinary prostitutes, and portray the bleak world of urban slums: this is not the world of cultivated, cultured courtesans. Manto’s first short story to come under the scrutiny of the censors was *Kāli Shalvār*, a narrative laden with symbolic overtures about exchange, commodification, and pollution in the context of the intense governmental regimes of urban social hygiene in colonial Delhi. The life

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<sup>86</sup> Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) p. 178.

of the main character, Sultana, is historically situated. A relatively well-to-do prostitute who once worked in the Ambala army cantonment where her clientele was made up of mostly British soldiers, her life becomes one of poverty after she follows her lover-pimp, Khuda Baksh, to Delhi where her business declines. She is convinced by Khuda Baksh to move there in the first place because the city is not only perceived as a place of thriving opportunity, consisting of many wealthy men (*laat sahib*) as potential clients, but is home to the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya, in whom Sultana is said to have much faith (*bahut aqīdat rakhti thī*). What Sultana faces in moving from the provincial outpost to the urban slum of the colonial capital, is indicative, *not* as Mufti suggests, of ÷a reorientation of life expectations along national lines,÷ but rather, of the extensive, and almost inescapable reach of imperial regimes of urban social hygiene. Manto describes the prostitutes÷quarters that have been instituted by city regulators to prevent them from ÷making little enclaves everywhere÷are all alike, and how Sultana cannot differentiate her own flat from the others: ÷the houses were identical, in long rows, along the streets.÷<sup>87</sup> In fact, the only way Sultana can make out her flat from the others is by reading the shop signs on the first floor of her building, ÷Soiled Clothes laundered here÷ as opposed to the signs, ÷Coal sold here,÷and ÷Meals Prepared for Travelers÷beneath the flats of other prostitutes. Sultana is at first alienated by a spatial order that so restricts the prostitutes to one quarter of the city, limiting their mobility, and stands in stark contrast to how she was able to move freely while living near the cantonment: she is often alone, and finds little comfort in visiting her friends. As I discussed earlier, since the early 1920s, local authorities throughout India had been passing Acts to prevent prostitution, through a series of legislation, Suppression of Immoral Traffic Acts (SITA). By the late 1930s, the local legislative bodies of Delhi were under increasing pressure by the imperial government to eradicate prostitution, and as Stephen Legg has argued, it was Delhi÷s unique

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<sup>87</sup> Saadat Hasan Manto, *Li Shalv rö* in *Manto Nama*, Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, 2001, pg. 661

political and administrative set-up that created the need to tailor the colonial disciplinary surveillance of the cantonment regulations to a civil, municipal sphere. Given the inability or unwillingness of the municipality to register prostitutes, many cantonment women were encouraged to move to the city, but once there, their presence created a perceived social and biological risk to the urban population that had to be addressed by new regulatory measures.<sup>88</sup> Legg points out that while many of these policies were in line with local initiatives, they were combined by measures that had their origins in London, Geneva, and other places in which the threat of the prostitute to the population had already been tackled. By the time Manto was writing this short story, the Chief Commissioner of Delhi had just passed the SITA regulations in 1939.

In *Kāli Shalvār*, the warehouses, railway tracks, and engines are metaphors for the prostitute's body, as the site of male traffic, and in describing Sultana's alienation, he links her sexual labor to the mechanical world around her, as well as to technological regimes of hygiene:

When the tracks gleamed in the sunlight, Sultana would look at her own hands on which blue veins just like those tracks, were standing out. On that long and open ground, all kinds of engines and trains would keep going through. Sometimes here, sometimes there. The huffing and puffing of these engines could be heard all the time. When she would get up in the morning a strange sight would meet her eyes. In the dim light, the engines would be spewing thick smoke which looked like fat and heavy men trying to lift themselves sky wards. Then sometimes, when she would see a lone carriage moving by itself on the tracks after being shunted there by an engine, she would think of herself. She would think that she too had been left on the tracks of life after being shunted thereby someone and she too was moving alone all by herself<sup>89</sup>

While the railroad and railway lines marks Sultana's place within the city, segregating her from the rest of the urban population, they also serve to show how Sultana embodies the city itself, as

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<sup>88</sup> Stephen Legg, "Governing prostitution in colonial Delhi: From Cantonment Regulations to International Hygiene (1864-1939)", *Social History*, Volume 34, Issue 4, November 2009 . p 447 ó 467.

<sup>89</sup> Saadat Hasan Manto, *Kāli Shalvār* in *Manto Nama*, Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, 2001, pg. 663-664

a terrain that regulates human traffic. Manto is critical of this urban modernity, for the railway tracks spread out like a web in front of her, with steam and smoke rising in places [and] was one big brothel (*chakla*).<sup>90</sup>

In the urban slum of colonial Delhi, Manto suggests that the prostitute's humanity lies in her attempt to follow outward ritual obligations of devotion. Sultana and the other prostitutes in the story are the ones who are concerned with religious rituals. What drives the narrative is Sultana's desire for the *kāli shalvār*, the garment worn to signify purity of devotion during the month of mourning, the black color representing the somberness of the occasion. The blackness of the garment invoked by Manto, however, is symbolic also because it carries the connotation something having been soiled—the color *kāla* in Urdu and Hindi signifying at times even humiliation (i.e., *munh kala karna*: to blacken one's face). Ultimately, the real prostitute in the story is neither Sultana nor Mukhtar, (prostitutes by profession), but turns out to be Shankar, who promises to bring Sultana the coveted item of clothing. He is able to do so by exchanging it for sexual favors, and in the end, he swindles both Sultana and her friend Mukhtar, by his pretence of love (in the act of giving of gifts). Manto exposes the *kali shalvar*, the symbol of religious ritual obligation and purity, to be a farce: after all, there can be no religion in the brothel as Shankar tells Sultana: "There's not a chance that anyone can be either Hindu or Muslim in a place such as this. *Pundits* and *maulvis* if they venture here shall all become *sharif*."<sup>91</sup> It is exchange and commodity which lies at the heart of the short story, *Kāli Shalvār*. Manto's short story here is not about nationalist discourse, but about how the prostitute negotiates her place within the oppressive regimes of late colonial urban modernity.

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<sup>90</sup> Saadat Hasan Manto, "Kali Shalvar" in *Manto Nama*, Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, 2001, pg. 663-664

<sup>91</sup> Saadat Hasan Manto, "Kali Shalvar" in *Manto Nama*, Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, 2001, pg. 667.

Scholarship in the domains of comparative literature, post-colonial studies, and Urdu studies which has taken Manto's writing as a focal point in examining the relationship between nationalism, progressive literature, and gender, has rightly privileged his short stories about Partition violence and the gritty lives of slum-dwelling prostitutes in their analyses. Many of Manto's explicitly sexual narratives describe the bodies of men and women in detail, as they are laid bare, as intimate encounters are open to public scrutiny, appearing as a flagrant challenge to middle-class norms of respectability. As Priyamvada Gopal has observed, it was Manto's forays into the relatively uncharted and unmarked terrain of masculinity, as lived experience and as social category, which accounted for the furor generated by some of his most well-known short stories in both progressive and less radical circles. Manto sought to expose the moral contradictions of national patriarchies by constantly alluding to how masculine identity relies on the power of the male gaze and body to penetrate the gendered other: this masculinity is a self-reflexive one, and thus within his stories, the burden of scrutiny is on the character of the state and its male citizens. Manto's short stories threaten the very cultural codes by which masculinity is seen to seek its legitimacy, by laying bare the male body. Thus, in *Khushiya*, when a pimp scolds one of his prostitutes for opening the door in half-dress, he is humiliated when she responds, "What's the harm, it is only you Khushiya,"; in *Thanda Gosht*, the body of Isvar Singh seeps out blood and the confession to his lover of having sex with the corpse of a dead woman he abducted in Partition riots; and then there is the middle-class youth Ranbir in the short story *Bu*, in which his erotically charged encounter with a dark-skinned tribal woman, leaves him unable to think of anything but her scent even as he lies next to his pale-skinned, newly-wedded wife. *Bu* in particular initially caught the gaze of the censors because of the allusions early in the story about Ranbir's sexual frustration and the lack of "loose" Anglo-Indian women stationed in the



military cantonment. In all of these narratives, Manto is explicit about the failure of male subjects to conceive of women as anything but objects for sexual consumption and violence. The narratives of Partition violence lambast the culmination of this failure, for in spite of winning independence from colonial rule, *õ*man was still slave in both these countries<sup>92</sup> slave of prejudice<sup>92</sup> slave of religious fanaticism<sup>92</sup> slave of barbarity and inhumanity.<sup>92</sup> While I do wish to pursue a more rigorous appraisal of Manto's fictional short stories about the bedraggled prostitutes of *Hatak*, *Mera Nam Radha Hai*, and *Sarkandon Ke Peeche* (where the body of the prostitute is cut up and prepared for consumption), such a project is currently outside the scope of this chapter of the dissertation.

A great deal has been written about Manto's fiction, but nothing has been said about his non-fictional musings in his collection *Ganje Farishte (Bald Angels)* (1952). It contains several biographical sketches of celebrities and personalities in Bombay cinema whom he had come to know, many of which were about actresses and female entertainers. I argue that these accounts reveal much about home and belonging amongst a class of displaced Urdu writers and poets in the city: Manto's nostalgia for forms of sociability and friendships in Bombay is apparent, and the demi-monde actress<sup>92</sup> often tainted as a *tawã'if*<sup>92</sup> was central to his sense of belonging in the city. The accounts are poignant reflections of a politics of intimacy, and show that as Manto critically challenged the sexually conservative *sharîf* attitude of the middle-classes, he also sought to depict himself as an urbane gentleman in relation to what he saw as the crude culture of the film world.

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<sup>92</sup> Saadat Hasan Manto, *õMurli Ki Dhun* in *Ganje Farishte*, in *Sang-e-Meel*, 2001 edition. Pg. 128

## Behind the Screen: Remembering Bombay After 1947

Between 1939 and 1947, Manto lived and worked in Bombay, earning his livelihood as a script writer in the burgeoning film studios. He made the painful decision to migrate to Pakistan while he was working for the Bombay Talkies. His account of why he left Bombay for Pakistan appears in an essay about the actor Shayam, entitled *Murli Ki Dhun (Murli's Tune)*. Murli is another name for Krishna, the ideal lover in the Hindu pantheon of deities, so the title is symbolic in terms of understanding the events surrounding Hindu-Muslim communitarian violence. Reflecting upon his decision to leave, Manto wrote:

Those daysí thousands of people í were being killed every dayí Shayam and I were sitting with a Sikh family that had migrated from Rawalpindi. The members of the family were narrating the tales of their woes which were very depressing. Shayam couldn't remain unaffected by them. I could easily understand the disturbance that was shaking his mind .When we left that place I asked Shayam, "I am a Muslim. Don't you feel like killing me?" Shayam replied very seriously, "Not nowí .but when he was telling me the atrocities committed by Muslims on them I could have killed you." Hearing this from Shayam gave a big blow to my heart.ö<sup>93</sup>

Manto then narrated the immediate reasons behind his decision to migrate, discussing the communitarian tensions that had engulfed the Bombay studios as well:

óí When Ashok Kumar and Wacha got the control of Bombay Talkies the important positions all went to Muslims. This resulted in a wave of hatred among the Hindu staff of the Bombay Talkies. Wacha received anonymous letters in which he was threatened with burning down the studio or killing important people. Wacha and Ashok did not give much importance to these letters but being a sensitive person and a Muslim I was giving due importance to the situation and many times I mentioned my concern to Ashok and Wacha advising them to relieve me from Bombay Talkies. Actually Hindus were thinking that whatever was happening in Bombay Talkies was due to meí But they [Ashok and Wacha] would say "Are you insane?" I was really insane perhaps. My wife and children were in Pakistan when it was a part of India. From time to time some Hindu-Muslim riots would take place in that areaí But what this new name had made of that piece of land was beyond my comprehension. What this self rule? I couldn't

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<sup>93</sup> Saadat Hasan Manto, "Murli Ki Dhun" in *Ganje Farishte*, in Sang-e-Meel, 2001 edition. Pg. 128

understand which country was mine ô Hindustan or Pakistanô and whose blood was being spilt so callously every single dayí ö<sup>94</sup>

This personal story of how Manto left Bombay is coupled with his nostalgia for the heyday of Bombay cinema that characterized many other pieces of *Ganje Farishe*. Even while nostalgic, the essays were extremely critical of the film industry, specifically the commercialization of cultureô a critique which was shared by several other progressive Urdu intellectuals even as they participated in the production of popular cinema. The collection contains psycho-biographical essays about the popular actresses of the period, such as Noor Jehan, Naseem Bano, Sitara Devi, and Nargis. These women were not courtesans themselves, but their position as actresses in the studios was tied up with a debate in *sharîf* circles about whether or not respectable middle-class women should enter the industry. Some believed that middle-class women shouldn't be prevented from acting since their presence in the film world would oust the *tawā'ifs* from the studios, while others argued that for a middle-class woman to enter films was tantamount to becoming fallen woman. In his essay, *Sharîf Auraten Aur Filmy Dunya* (ôRespectable Women and the Film Worldö), Manto remarked that the entire debate was rather ridiculous: after all, the reason why prostitutes were entering the film world was precisely because they were being pushed out of the *bazār* in the cities.

Narratives about the demi-monde class of courtesans encapsulate an entire genre of Indian cinema, and representations of the *tawā'if* in a wide range of films testify to the continued urge to situate an old Mughal culture within the body of the destitute woman.<sup>95</sup> I turn to the 1958 film, *Kālā Pāni (Life Imprisonment)* (1958), before discussing what the emergence of new technologies bore in relation to Indian nationalist modernity, Urdu, and Muslim identity. In the

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<sup>94</sup> Sa'adat Hasan Manto, ôMurli Ki Dhunö in *Ganje Farishte*, in Sang-e-Meel, 2001 edition. Pg. 132

<sup>95</sup> Mukul Kesavan, ôUrdu, Awadh, and the *Tawā'if*: the Islamicate Roots of Hindi Cinemaö in *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State*, ed. Zoya Hasan, Kali for Women, 1994.

film, protagonist Karan (Dev Anand) must seduce a *tawā'if* of Hyderabad, Kishor L 1 (Nalini Jaywant), in order to obtain a letter proving his father's innocence for a court judge in Bombay. Karan's father was framed for murdering a *tawā'if* in 1943, and to procure his father's release, Karan masquerades as a cultured Urdu poet so he can surreptitiously retrieve the letter from Kishor L 1, who has been using it to exact a bribe from the actual murderer. Karan cannot fully reconstruct the historical narrative, the truth of his father's innocence, from simply searching through old newspapers that report the crime: rather, Kishor L 1's *kothā* constitutes the genuine, tangible archive and Karan's quest for justice in the fast-moving political world (of courts, trials, jails, government offices, and investigative journalism) is mediated through the aesthetic realm (of Urdu poetic couplets, the composition of *ghazals*, donning the stereotypical apparel of the respectable Muslim gentleman of Lucknow on his daily promenades). As Karan secretly rummages through the courtesan's trousseau searching for the letter, Kishor L 1 sings *Jab Nam-e-Mohabbat Leke* (*While Taking the Name of Love*). What is striking about the performance is its disjointed music: the musical score seems to be composed of two very different songs, cutting up and dividing one other as the screen shifts its attention between two women. The register of the music moves unevenly and abruptly between Kishor L 1 who sings in a slow meter and tempo about an old world, lost love, and memory, to a speeded up version of the song in which her cabaret counterpart sings of forgetting the past, living in the moment, and the futility of true love. Here is a jarring contrast between the courtesan Kishor L 1 who represents an old civilizational order, surrounded by musicians playing instruments such as the sitar and *tabla*, to the spritely dancer. The latter mocks the refinement of the old world salon as irrelevant. She prances amongst blaring orchestra trumpets, piano, and her clients' dandies who hyperbolically imitate forms of decorum associated with the salon of an upper-class courtesan and the scene captures

the transition of the *tawā'if* from her likeness to the old-world courtesan to the new cabaret singer and film actress.

The *tawā'if* did not exist within the world of films solely as representation. As literary narratives were transformed into filmic ones, the *tawā'ifs* moved from the salon-like *kothās* of the extant Mughal world not only onto the stage and in radio, but also became film actresses. Between the 1930s and 1950s, film studios were full of this demi-monde class of women who either had links to the culture of courtly performance, or whose mothers may have been courtesans themselves. This uneven transition, from salon to stage to studio became the subject of Urdu short stories, novellas, and films as in *Kālā Pāni*. It was a narrative which bespoke an uneasy modernity. That the *tawā'if*, and the world she represented, was frequently invoked in discussions of modernity within Urdu aesthetic realms, as the embodiment of nostalgia for a past Mughal imperial identity, was not a new phenomenon. What was new, however, was how the rise of new technologies and medias shifted the terrain upon which the *tawā'if* enacted meanings of nostalgia, pleasure, labor, and ethical comportment (*adab*) a development that coincided with the years immediately leading up to, and following Partition. The *tawā'if*, in this sense, was not so much wedded to the land (space), but to an old world, signified through the temporal reconfigurations, both imagined and real. Thus, the emergence of a female voice, both in the modality of its commodification through radio and its staging within the public sphere, may have influenced to some extent the way Qazi Abdul ḥaff r redefined ethical conduct within Urdu literature in the early 1930s. In the following decades, the cultural and social universe of *pardāh* underwent yet another transformation as the term began to also refer to the cinema screen. The emergence of this new *pardāh* impacted not only the way in which *tawā'ifs* were being

represented as they transitioned into film, but also shaped reflections by intellectuals about commodity and pleasure within the Urdu sphere.

In a much of modern Western literature, cultural representations of the prostitute indicate her status as a paradigmatic figure: she is seen as source of social chaos and disruption. In Susan Buck Morss's reading, the prostitute of nineteenth century Paris constitutes the female counterpart to the figure of the *flâneur*, Walter Benjamin's term for loitering, street-walking personages. If the *flâneur* loitered, and for Benjamin, the *flâneur*-as-writer was the proto-type of the author as mass producer, diverting readers from the tedium of the conditions of urban life, then as Buck-Morss suggests, all women who loitered risked being seen as whores.<sup>96</sup> "Like the *flâneur*", writes Buck-Morss, "the whore stood on the brink of extinction in the twentieth century precisely when her characteristics began to permeate all erotic life" under the domination of commodity fetishism. In the colonial Indian context, the *tawā'if* also occupied the role of the *flâneur* in representing a particular mode of Muslim modernity.

The transition that occurred as *tawā'ifs* moved into the world of film emerged as technologies of film were undergoing rapid change: it was during the 1930s when the concept of the playback singer was first introduced. In later films this phenomenon became far more widespread, but the female entertainers who first entered the film studios, many of whom belonged to courtesan backgrounds, would sing as well as dance and act. Film magazines became increasingly popular, as well, and biographical portraits of new actresses were sold and distributed on cards and posters. Simultaneously, it became more important to state that these portraits were authentic, as film albums cropped up in English, Urdu, and Hindi, denoting the

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<sup>96</sup> Buck Morss, Susan. "The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering" in, *New German Critique*, No. 39, Second Special Issue on Walter Benjamin (Autumn, 1986), pp. 99-140.

pains undertaken by self-styled artists to procure original prints.<sup>97</sup> By the 1940s, not only did the number of recorded songs increase, but they were released on record labels— one could listen to these songs everywhere, at home and in public places.

One woman whose life represented this transition was Jaddanbai (years)— a woman whose original name is difficult to garner, and is widely reputed to have been a close to Jawaharlal Nehru. Unlike contemporary singers such as Begum Akhtar and Malka Pukhraj, she did not marry into an *ashraf* family. By birth a courtesan, Jaddanbai was well known in Allahabad and Calcutta as a specialist in the musical form known as *thumri*. She moved to Bombay in the 1930s, establishing herself as a film producer, music director, and actress. Upon composing the music for the film, *Talāsh-e-Haq* in 1935, Jaddanbai became the first female music composer of Indian cinema. By 1936 she started her own film company, producing films featuring her daughter Fatima Rashid as a child artist, who was given the screen name, Nargis. Nargis went on to become the most famous actress of early post-colonial India, well-known for her role in *Mother India* (1955). Jaddanbai soon became a Bombay institution, attracting many of the leading figures of the film world to her home and to the studio where she worked. She made financial donations to the left-leaning Progressive Writers Association, and was described by one veteran film director as an intellectual.<sup>98</sup> Jaddanbai and others of this demi-monde class were adjusting to the circumstances of being at once celebrated, but also devalued, in a society which increasingly saw the *tawā'if* as a corrupting influence on middle-class morals. After all, it was due to financial trouble that she had her daughter act in films. In many ways Jaddanbai represents the courtesan's transition from the lyrical Umr   J n as nostalgic literary imagining

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<sup>97</sup> *Cinema Stars Album*, Lahore, 1933: Urdu F 1165/1. IOR, BL. Here the author advertises portraits for the home, while claiming how he made strenuous effort to obtain original portraits and biographies of the stars, "and make them interesting and to put them in dignified form— business had been a secondary consideration since I wanted to make it artistic..."

<sup>98</sup> Kidar Sharma, June 5, 1997, Rediff interview.

and the anonymous Laila of the stage, to the Bombay film heroine. This shift of courtesan to singer, as well as the migration of Urdu intellectuals into the film industry, formed the cultural milieu of the Bombay film studio. As in Europe and America, radio and film technologies in India drew petty-bourgeois intellectuals from various diasporic communities to its ambit for employment, most notably the Urdu writers associated with the Progressive Writers Association.

Aamir Mufti has read the literary-historical transition from Muhammad Hadi Ruswa to Saadat Hasan Manto from the semiotics of the courtesan to those of a "common prostitute" as a trajectory of the development of national experience that Partha Chatterjee has spoken of as the movement from "the moment of departure" of nationalist thought to its "moment of arrival." In this reading, Mufti notes that if the courtesan in *Umrā'o Jān Adā* is to be read as a supplement to the nation-Mother at nationalism's moment of departure, in Manto's bedraggled prostitutes we encounter its re-inscription at its moment of arrival.<sup>99</sup> The elevated figure of courtesan is stripped of the appurtenances of style and is reduced to an "ordinary prostitute," a move which Mufti suggests, demonstrates how Manto counters the realm of national bourgeois respectability and its familial elaborations of national belonging within the brothel, its own unique resources of affect, attachment, and freedom.<sup>100</sup> Two notes here are in order: in neatly charting a direct narrative from the colonial (Ruswa) to post-colonial (Manto) narrative, Aamir Mufti privileges nationalism as the pivotal analytical frame of reference through which to understand the formation of modern Muslim selfhood. Critiques of national bourgeois respectability within the Urdu literary sphere were already well in play prior to Manto's musings about prostitutes, as Q z °Abdul haff r's criticisms in *Laila's Letters* illustrate. Secondly, Manto's biographical sketches of film actresses suggest that he had a far more ambivalent understanding about the

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<sup>99</sup> Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) p. 198.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.



relationship between the enigmatic courtesan and the ordinary prostitute. In this sense, it is not the brothel that is articulated as the space of home, and reflections on minoritized and national identity, but the Bombay film studio.

Manto's biographical sketches can be linked to the Urdu tradition of writing *tazkirās*, but the subjects he takes up resonate with writings about culture and commercialization by Jewish intellectuals in Germany during the same period, such as Walter Benjamin, Adorno, Norbert Elias and Simon Kracauer. Benjamin had chosen the nineteenth century Paris arcades to reflect upon the capitalist origins of modernity, because these forms of industrial luxury were in decay in his own time. Similarly, Manto chose the studio in its metaphor as the upper-class *kothā* (salon) as a space from which to make critiques of society and commodity, though the post-Partition context infused such writings with nostalgia for a time wherein relationships were not dominated by religiously informed cultural chauvinism. Manto's essay on the famous actress Nargis, Jaddanbai's daughter, emerges from his experiences as a screen writer during the studio era of the film industry during the 1930s and 1940s. It was in this period that the Indian *masala* film, which combined drama, song, dance, and action, was created. The world of the film studio was a social space in which the courtesan's salon was re-enacted. Like the intimate gatherings held by courtesans in their establishments, where aristocrats rubbed shoulders with merchants and outlaws, and where poets were always welcome, the film studio and its auxiliary realms offered a space of social intimacy between writers, actors, actresses, musicians, studio technicians, and directors. It is in this context that Manto first encounters Jaddanbai, developing an informal relationship mediated by his niece's friendship with Jaddanbai's daughter, Nargis. Nargis went on to become one of the icons of the Indian cultural imagination (Mother India). That the daughter of a well-known courtesan would come to be remembered as the heroic

Mother India, undermines binary distinctions between inner/outer, feminine/masculine, spiritual/political, private/public in discussions of nationalist discourse which is seen to resolve the issue of the mother as dominant trope of the nation from the nineteenth century onwards.

In his essay on Nargis, Manto describes an innocent, lonely, middle-upper class teenager, who in many ways is no different from his *purdāh-nashīn* (veiled) nieces; it is only the acting lessons she receives from her mother that gives Nargis's film performances as a desirable woman its believability, since she wasn't taught how to sing. When Manto's nieces anonymously ring up the actress, she is impressed with their Urdu, talks for long hours with her secret admirers, and is invited to their home. Upon their visit, Manto reveals his pleasure in being able to converse with Jaddanbai about the scandals between *tawā'ifs* and princes, as well as the state of the film industry, without having to use formal address. Furthermore, he is impressed with Jaddanbai's broadmindedness, when his sister-in-law, not knowing that their visitor is an esteemed courtesan remarks:

“May God keep one safe from them (*tawā'ifs*). Whomever she clings to neither keeps his religion nor his worldly possessions: destruction of one's world, one's wealth, one's health, and one's honor. í what more can I say: the cause of all diseases is just one disease and that is the *tawā'if!*”<sup>101</sup>

Manto is extremely embarrassed by his sister-in-law's faux-pas, since it does not belong to the world of the cultured, whose speech and diction are supposed to contain decorum and tact, especially amongst one's guests. The instance of intimacy between Jaddanbai and Manto, acknowledged by sidelong glances about the sister-in-law's comment, reflects how a Manto sought to be perceived, as an urbane intellectual. The ideal of a cultured intellectual contrasted to the í flourished during the Bombay film studio era: the writer saw himself as a cultured literary persona, endowed with true artistic merit because of his ability to converse in proper Urdu

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<sup>101</sup> Saadat Hasan Manto, “Nargis”, in *Ganje Farishte*, Sang-e-Meel Edition, Lahore, 2001. Pg. 186.

diction, despite having the trappings of a modern English education. As an urbane intellectual, it is significant that Manto implied that the distinction between high art and popular culture was analogous to the distinction between the upper-class courtesan and the ordinary prostitute. Manto's descriptions of female entertainers losing their authentic selves on the silver screen are as much sociological archetypes of the feminine (i.e. the homely, the vamp, the school-girl, etc.) as they are musings about the beloved. In this schema, the film actress, Nargis is likened to the courtesan, because both share the ability to convince others that their emotions (i.e. especially that of being in love) are real. However, what Manto finds distressing, in fact, at some points, obscene, is *the lack of authenticity*, a certain *banāwat* (artificiality) of the screen actress. For Manto, this artificiality is played out in the schism of the actress's psyche between reality and fantasy, and reflected back on to her social world, which destroys the possibility of genuine intimacy.

At the end of the essay, remarking on Jaddanbai's death nostalgically, Manto situates Nargis on the screen— the term screen being the same as the term for veil (*pardāh*). He remarks that the sadness he sees in Nargis's eyes is a result of her being split from both her past and from her desire— a phenomenon which destroys her childlike innocence, since she knew that playing the artificial game of love again and again, would only leave her in a desert of loneliness. When friends of Manto persuade him to introduce them to her, he calls at her home, only to be received by a Nargis who, upon seeing her fans, changes her demeanor altogether: her excessive politeness which Manto calls *filmī* is disappointing for him.

This notion of artificiality and excessive politeness was not an issue for the late nineteenth century Ruswa, belonging to the generation after the revolt who sought to align *sharafat* along... Although he was concerned with the authenticity of the *tawā'if* as a purveyor of

high culture, his perception of the *tawā'if* as a figure who wore many masks, was a point of intrigue not obscenity. Hence, for Ruswa, acting polite was still part of being respectable, but for Manto acting polite is a farce that either hides one's indiscretions or is demonstrative of social distancing, the antithesis of intimacy. Manto shares a great deal with Q z °Abdul haff r, in that there is a new kind of concern for the self, where politeness as separate from morals is actually a form of hypocrisy, and social intimacy is re-cast in differently moral terms. For Manto, the question is, "Must one give up one's true self in exchange for a perceived social status?" This question of exchange is at the heart of his broader critique of society, which is why the prostitute, in much of his other writings, becomes a figure of necessary obscenity: as an object of exchange herself, she is a metaphor for how *sharīf* "respectable" men prostitute themselves in the name of *adab* and exchange their true selves for symbolic capital, all the while making the prostitute into the repository of social blame. Unlike Ruswa, who has no qualms about extracting Umrao Jan's story for potentially didactic purposes while exchanging poetry for knowledge, Manto's nostalgia is inflected with a different understanding of exchange, where in order for intimacy to be genuine, it must be freed from the constraints of symbolic capital. Manto's critique also differs from Q z °Abdul haff r, even though both are concerned with the place and function of commodity and the place of male desire. Whereas Q z °Abdul haff r's is a text which overtly seeks to reform society, Manto does not approach society with a reformist agenda. (In fact, the only time he claims that his writing is "reformative" is in defense of his writing when questioned by the state.)

Yet, Manto is re-deploying an older tradition of *adab* that authenticates this critique; he turns the concept of *adab* on its head to satirize *ashraf* social attitudes towards exchange and commodity: he transforms a notion of *adab* from meaning correct behavior leading to moral

refinement of one's inner self, to an *adab* that means an outer correct behavior that is deceptive, artificial, giving no indication of one's true inner self. Additionally, *adab* itself is critiqued by Manto as commodity. At the same time, it is only through Manto's identity as an *adīb* (man of letters) that makes the criticism authentic. Since the concept of *adab* is fairly broad, I should specify: Rosalind O'Hanlon has suggested that one notion of *adab*, *mirza'i*, emerged as a novel code for elite masculinity in the late seventeenth century because of a new class of gentry who were attempting to assimilate their own social styles to those of court elites: O'Hanlon points out that the *mirza* was somewhat of a bricoleur, assembling his own forms of self-cultivation in the commodities he knew about and consumed, norms of comportment, literary leanings, and sexual preferences<sup>102</sup> but critics of *mirza'i* worried that because all sorts of inferior people were calling themselves *mirza*, they were interpreting its codes of behavior in sometimes unorthodox and transgressive ways.<sup>102</sup> In a sense, Manto is a *mirza*-like figure himself, for whom gentlemanly refinement is a state of mind where there is stronger emphasis personal self-cultivation of the individual.<sup>103</sup> Manto's criticisms of upper middle-class (*ashraf*) masculinity, as well as his proximity to demi-monde culture, can be read as the redeployment of the language of *mirza'i* towards different historically situated ends.

In the late seventeenth century, *mirza'i* may have been up for satire, but in the late nineteenth, it is deployed as an authentic last vestige of Mughal cultural and political power. In Manto's works, the kind of *mirza'i* that Ruswa represents is up for satire. Manto wrote the scripts for over a dozen films, including Sohrab Modi's *Mirza Ghalib*. In this film, the story of nineteenth century Ghalib, as Urdu's greatest modern poet is re-written, reflecting Manto's *mirza'i*. Manto had distanced himself from the Progressive Writers Association; he often

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<sup>102</sup> Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India', in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 42, No. 1. (1999), pp. 84.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 83.

critiqued communists of having double standards, as his writing was accused by leftists as lacking purpose, and pornographic. In the film, Ghalib emerges as somewhat of a maverick: he walks out of the court of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah, muttering under his breath, *õKya qadrdanon ki mahfil haiõ* (How wanting in appreciation is this gathering) when his poetry is not applauded. In actuality, Ghalib would never have behaved in such a manner, especially considering the respect he had for Bahadur Shah Zafar as a poet in his own right, and such an action in the 1850s would be considered quite disrespectful.<sup>104</sup>

For Ruswa, what was immoral was the historical moment preceding the 1857 rebellion, a world of aristocrats that must be freed from libertine excesses. Like Sharar's differentiation between morality and manners, Ruswa is also concerned with a decline of morals as a result of women who defied *purdah* and entertained men in public as men who ultimately lost their empire to the British, who were also entertained by *tawa'ifs*. However, in Manto's writing, the concept of immorality is not separate from manners, and is re-located on the double-edged meaning of *purdah* itself referring to both the screen and the veil, and used by Manto to describe a world that commercializes fantasy, relegating what he calls reality, to a subordinate place in the psyche of the actress. Much in the way that Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, envisions the *tawa'if's* demands for justice voiced against the state and society who scorn her as a criminal as a civilized one, Manto blurs the boundaries between the *sharif* and the *ajlaf*. In one of his last short stories, *Peshawar se Låhore Tak (From Peshawar to Lahore)*, a young man named Javed is travelling to Rawalpindi by train, when he falls madly in love with a sophisticated young woman in the compartment next to his, and resolves to disembark only when she does. Each time the train comes to a halt at a station, Javed steps out, passes by the *zenåna* compartment, to catch a glimpse of her in the hope

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<sup>104</sup> Akbar Hyder, "Ghalib and His Interlocutors", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*. Vol. 26, No. 3, 2006.

of striking up a conversation. In Javed's eyes, the young woman is clearly from a good family, and is of *sharīf* background: she is dressed in satin and chiffon clothes, eats delicately, and is well-mannered. Javed wonders why she isn't in *purdah* (veiled), and why she is travelling alone in the third-class compartment, but this ultimately matters little, for he is already besotted. After a few brief conversational exchanges, he has resolved to marry her. Upon reaching Lahore, Javed decides to escort the young woman home, with the intention of finding out her name and address so he can send a marriage proposal. They share a *riksha* from the train station, and Javed imagines to himself how happy his mother will be when she meets the beautiful young woman he has chosen as his bride. When Javed asks the woman where she wishes the *riksha* to drop her off, she answers unassumingly in chaste-accented Urdu, "Hira Mandi," which is Lahore's red-light district. Javed is shocked, and asks, "You live, *there*?" The young woman answers politely in the affirmative, and then invites him to her *mujrā* performance in the same well-mannered way that she had spoken to him earlier. The story ends with a disappointed Javed returning to the train platform to purchase a ticket back to Rawalpindi, thinking to himself that he had already seen her perform. To be *sharīf*, here, is nothing more than an act and is one that the *tawā'if* has mastered: thus, *sharāfat* is not indicative of any authentic personal virtue. In fact, the *tawā'if* comes away appearing more *sharīf* than Javed himself, who is obsessed with the woman's physical appearance, fantasizing about her, and following her every move. The story blurs the lines between being civil and the uncivil, for in having the protagonist mistake the *tawā'if* as a respectable woman, Manto questions the social boundaries between the *sharīf* and the *ajlāf*.

Manto's essays about the film industry are not only a nostalgic record of the Bombay cinema, but about his own disillusionment with what he comes to see as artificial. Manto finds fault with the popular because "anyone can become an artist." Yet, at the same time the Bombay

film studio for Manto is what the courtesan's salon was for Ruswa, though it is nostalgia twice removed. On the one hand, Manto is nostalgic for a world lost after due to Partition, viewing the studio as a once utopian social space, corrupted by the political violence which had forced him to make the decision to leave. On the other hand the very descriptions of actresses and singers contain older nineteenth century resonances of the cultural trope of the *tawā'if*, which lends him his authenticity as an urbane intellectual. I've also argued that the intimacy afforded by the Bombay film studio can be read as the basis for satiric commentary about urban forms of respectability. The courtesan's salon, no longer a lavish establishment, is replaced by its imagined likeness and is experienced as a dispersed house of pleasure— pleasure now can be obtained only through a self-conscious intimacy, closeness, and genuine encounters. These encounters contain within them, however, their own disillusionment, since intimacy is destroyed by *ācting* as a form of exchange. Manto perceived Bombay as his home, and was part of a general trend of migration amongst several leftist writers of the period who formed a cultural milieu there at times shaped by re-imagined Indo-Persianate traditions. In this sense, the resuscitation and reformulation of the *tawā'if* and the urbane intellectual, are elements of an emergent cultural politics of Islamicate cosmopolitanism: a politics that can be productively read against various forms of more properly political nationalism and anti-colonialism.



## Chapter 3

### Modernist Literary Ethics and the Challenge to *Sharīf* Culture, 1932 – 1947

To struggle for the homeland's (*vatan*) good? No one has a clue what to call that bird, the homeland's good much less, struggle! To sit as they do in the *zenana* (women's quarters) and spin cotton on a spinning wheel, is that the good of the homeland? Or like Gandhi, the search for truth, or joining the council members and ministers, are these for the good of the homeland? Or doing social reform and participating in conferences for the untouchables, is that for the good of the homeland? Or working at a government job, is that for the good of the homeland? Or setting up a Hindu Mahasabha or the Muslim League, is that for the nation's good? Every single person has *some* prescription (*naskha*) for the nation's good every single person *knows* that he is endeavoring for the nation's good. Truly it is the limit looking to them, and taking their cue, even the British government has started to say that *it* is for the good of the Hindustan homeland!<sup>1</sup>

The damage done by colonial powers to the heritage of conquered peoples is irreversible; yet racial memory is a collective storehouse that time and history cannot eradicate. ó Ahmed Ali<sup>2</sup>

The nation-states of India and Pakistan were brought into being through the consolidation of numerous oppositional social and political forces, including the establishment of various political parties, increasing trade union activism, rising peasant agitation, and the creation of a plethora of women's organizations. Even as such activities were impacted by the contest of British imperialism and Indian nationalism, their promulgation indicated that a wide range of projects were embarked upon as the shift from colony to nation took shape. The AIPWA (All-India Progressive Writers Association) was one such transformative project: it was a utopian endeavor upon which Urdu intellectuals from Muslim backgrounds had the most and disproportionate, influence. Progressive literary culture in British India during the decades leading up to independence and partition emerged both in opposition to the demands being made by the dominant strands of Indian nationalism, as well as in contrast to movements for reform in *ashrāf* society. Whereas *ashrāf* elites were primarily concerned with the reform of society,

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<sup>1</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, *London Ki Ek Raat (An Evening in London)*, first published in 1936. (New Delhi: National Book Depot, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Ali, *Twilight in Delhi*, Introduction (1994)

Urdu progressives challenged *a priori* elite social status: the formulation of their critique began at the level of class. Furthermore, the Urdu progressive intelligentsia were not shaped by a strictly institutional context, but constituted a critical anti-colonial intellectual culture that materialized between vernacular literary associations and at the edges of leftist political parties.<sup>3</sup>

The decolonization era, from the 1930s through the early 1950s, was marked by attempts by the Left (made up of a diverse range of Communists, Marxists, and Socialists) to acquire hegemony over the nationalist movement.<sup>4</sup> It was this context that made possible a broad scope of historical tasks to be imagined— that it would be possible, essential even, to take up the types of radical ventures that the Progressive Writers Association placed at the very heart of its agenda.<sup>5</sup> Echoing the sentiments of Sajjad Zaheer, the first General Secretary of AIPWA, that “it was the duty of our writers to struggle against reaction and ignorance in whatever form they manifest themselves in society,” Mulk Raj Anand specified that the goal of PWA was to liberate Indian society, “from the maligning imperialist archaeology on the one side and from its misuse by reactionary elements in our society, whether they are the narrow nationalist revivalists, the priest-craft, or orthodoxy.”<sup>6</sup> The utopian project of the anti-colonial progressive intelligentsia was framed by the task they set before the writer: social realism, an explicitly mirrored reflection of society and its injustices. This involved objectives that went well beyond a nationalism defined solely in terms of the relationship between colonizer and colonized. It included struggles against a wide range of social and political forces: religious extremism, fascism, and the

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<sup>3</sup> When I say institutional context I mean that Urdu progressive culture took root neither from within a university setting (i.e., Aligarh, Osmania), nor from the auspices of the religious seminary (i.e. Farangi Mahal), nor through the efforts of Congress Party to expand its Muslim constituency (Mass Contact Campaign).

<sup>4</sup> Shashi Joshi. *Struggle for Hegemony in India: The Colonial State, the Left and the Nationalist Movement Vol. 1-3*. Sage Publications: New Delhi. 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Priyamvada Gopal, “Decolonization and the Progressive Writers Association” in *The Nation Across the World: Postcolonial Literary Representations*. Ed. Harish Trivedi, Meenakshi Mukherjee, OUP, New Delhi, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, “A Note on the Progressive Writers Association,” in Sudhi Pradhan, *Marxist Cultural Documents*. 1979.

conservative sexual politics of one's own society. Thus, as Urdu progressives articulated anti-colonial nationalism with internationalism (i.e., wider communist and socialist struggles), they assertively confronted Islamic conservatism in their own communities, drawing inspiration from Muslim cultural traditions, even as Hindu majoritarianism was making demands that excluded Muslim communities from the life of the emergent Indian nation.

As the Indian nationalist movement was reaching its zenith, the question of how to build a progressive, civil society was being debated and popularized most vociferously by intellectuals writing not in Hindi, but in Urdu.<sup>7</sup> This is poignant given the contentious relationship of Urdu to Indian nationalism at the time: as the colonial state demanded that Indian languages be standardized in line with a cultural policy that called for the centralized control of language, communitarian language-politics were aggressively designating two distinct histories to Hindi and Urdu.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the Indian leftist cultural movement could *not* have emerged without directly enlisting the cultural lexicon of the *ashraf*. AIPWA was formulated in large part through a long-standing question from within the Indo-Muslim intellectual tradition: is there a better way to practice ethics?<sup>9</sup> *Adab* and *akhlāq*, cultural conceptualizations of the ethical (in conduct, comportment and character), formed the principal terrain of the Urdu literary and moral universe; accommodating both religious and secular perspectives, these inter-related concepts played a

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<sup>7</sup> This is not at all to suggest that Hindi intellectuals did not exhibit similar concerns. Hindi writers such as Rahul Sanskritayan, Ramvilas Sharma, Yashpal, and Rangey Raghav also wrote with utopian and radical visions. The poet Nirala, for instance, wrote *Mein Todti Patthar*, about poor women breaking stone under the high summer sun on the road, and it is considered the first free verse poem of Hindi. Overall, however, Hindi vernacular discourse of the period was much more conservative in that it was not characterized by social realist projects, as were their Urdu counterparts.

<sup>8</sup> The designs for All-India Radio emerged while major constitutional reforms brought popularly elected provincial governments, mostly under the Congress, in 1937. British authorities kept control of broadcasting as a central power; news broadcasts were prepared in English and translated into selected Indian languages, which left little room for linguistic variation, even while a compromise was attempted to be worked out between proponents of Hindi versus Urdu broadcasts. See David Lelyveld, "Colonial Knowledge and the Fate of Hindustani" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (Oct., 1993), pp. 665-682.

<sup>9</sup> By situating *adab* and *akhlāq* as part of the Islamicate tradition, I do not mean to suggest in any way that is that these concepts are limited in any way to problematic category, "religious."

pivotal role in defining AIPWA's early vision. Alongside their vested interest in anti-colonial activity, progressives discussed and debated institutional changes that were to take place at different levels of society. Since most Urdu progressives came from *ashraf* backgrounds, I begin by showing how such changes were put into practice as they radicalized *adab* and *akhlāq*.

In this chapter, I discuss two political interventions made by the Urdu progressive intelligentsia: the first was an approach which instantly developed into a debate about obscene literature, central to the confluence of *ashraf* society and AIPWA. Progressive Urdu political culture was inaugurated by an event on the margins of an emergent nation which prompted intellectuals to strategically question as well as define, the terms religion, aesthetic and ethics before the colonial state and bodies of Muslim cultural and political authority. These efforts were later conjoined with affecting politics through poetic performances meant to instill progressive culture for the masses. These two formulations of progressive politics demonstrate how the Urdu intelligentsia of this period both looked forwards, adopting revolutionary narratives of progress, but also towards the past, participating in the cultural universe of the *ashraf* literary milieu. This chapter tells the story of how, owing to the emergence of working class politics, the growing influence of socialist ideas, women's movements, and the increasing importance of the economic question under the leftism of the Congress, the progressive Urdu intelligentsia transformed notions of ethical conduct held by their *ashraf* contemporaries, by placing politics at the very center of Urdu aesthetic expression.

### ***Angāre: Burning Embers***

The establishment of the AIPWA was catapulted by the publication of the pamphlet, *Angāre (Burning Embers)*, its ensuing controversy, and subsequent proscription (1932-33). It

was an event that ignited a dispute about ethics and political authority within Muslim society. An indictment of conservative middle-class Muslim norms, *Angāre* consisted of nine short stories and one drama by Sajj d Zaheer, Ahmed Ali, Rasheed Jeh n, and Mahm d-u-Zafar. All of the authors were English educated and had ties to Lucknow, most came from upper-class backgrounds, and with the exception of Ahmed Ali, all were active members of the Communist Party of India.<sup>10</sup> Sajj d Zaheer, the most prolific, who would later go on to become the Secretary of the Communist Party of Pakistan, had only just become Joint-Secretary of the All-India Congress Socialist Party in early 1932, as part of a collaborative effort with leftist groups to radicalize the Congress Party. The *Angāre* Four as they came to be known, were formative to the organizational apparatus of AIPWA, and were amidst the earliest signatories of the manifesto of the Progressive Writers; the document was first written in English and circulated among a group of Indian students living in London, who were tracking the developments of anti-fascist cultural fronts in Europe. These intellectual and political activities were still in their infancy when the *Angāre* controversy erupted in Lucknow.

*Angāre* upset the values that social reformers of Aligarh and Lucknow advocated as definitive for *ashrāf* society. It completely invalidated the notion of a public sphere in which prominent men of the *sharīf* milieu appointed themselves as the sole custodians of moral authority. The stories of *Angāre* vehemently denounced the conservative sexual politics of the middle-classes and mocked religious and political authority within North Indian Muslim society, drawing attention to the marginalization and oppression of women, as well as to the problematic

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<sup>10</sup> Ahmed Ali would eventually part ways from this core group. From the beginning, progressive litterateurs were a diverse group, though the hegemony of communist party members within the organization quickly became grounds for heated debates about toeing the party-line. For more, see Zeno, *Professor Ahmed Ali and the Progressive Writers Movement*, Carlo Coppola *Ahmed Ali in Conversation: Excerpts from an Interview* both in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 9, 1994, as well as Ali Sardar Jaffri *Taraqqi Pasand Adab* (Progressive Literature), Munshi Ram Manohar Lal Oriental and Foreign Booksellers, Delhi, 1950; and Sadat Hasan Manto *Taraqqi Pasand Walon Kyun Nahin Sochte* (Why Progressives Don't Think) in *Manto Numa*, Sang-e-Meel, 2002.

of masculine subjectivity. For instance, in Zaheer's *Jannat Ki Basharat (Apparitions of Heaven)*, an esteemed Maulana of Lucknow, having rejected his young wife's advances in order to offer prayers, falls asleep dreaming of beautiful seductresses offered by God as a reward for his piety, for never allowing the light of his faith to be corrupted by the rust of reason (*-aql*).<sup>11</sup> As the Maulana approaches the last of these naked *houris* of paradise, each of whom emerge from the gilded windows of palatial delights, his reverie is broken by his wife's laughter, for the *houris* he is in fact fondling, is the Quran.<sup>12</sup> Another short story in the collection was *Jawānmardī (Young Manliness or Perfect Chivalry)*, by Mahmuduzzafar, which opens with an arresting image: a newborn's head wedged between its mother's bony thighs as she lies in the throes of death. *Jawānmardī* is narrated from the point of view of a young neglectful husband who views his ill, bedridden wife with contempt; to uphold his honor and disprove family gossip about his male inadequacies he takes his wife to the mountains and impregnates her. Following her death, owing to both her subsequent weakness and the husband's absence, the narrator incriminates himself as the very epitome of *jahālat* (ignorance /backwardness).<sup>13</sup> Social and sexual backwardness reappear as main themes in the one-act play, *Pardé ke Pīche (Behind the Veil)*, by Rashid Jehan, herself a physician, who condemns the practices and beliefs within the *zenānā* as endangering the health of women. The female protagonist, Muhammad Begum, is suffering under the pressure to produce a male heir, bearing children year after year to the detriment of her body. *Pardé ke Pīche* show-cases the *begamatī zabān* (women's language) of the *zenānā*, publicly: Muhammad Begum reflects upon her pregnant condition following an illness which

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<sup>11</sup> Khalid Alvi. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, Laal Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995 pg. 121.

<sup>12</sup> In the only existing Urdu version of *Angāre*, publishers continue to censor the word Quran in the last sentence of the short story; readers are directed to a footnote that reads, "the name of a book."

<sup>13</sup> (That Mahmuduzzafar criticizes marriage practices, does not depart from many reformist tracts, for the backdrop a typical tale wherein the male hero complains that he had never fallen in love with his wife, since they were travelling in two different spheres of life, my wife in the narrow and dark alleys of an older era and I in the clean and broad roads of the new times.)

confined her to the bed for months and explains, òin here, whether a wife is in good health, or whether she lies dying, men care only for their carnal desire (*nafs*).<sup>14</sup> When the woman doctor is called in to inspect her, she suggests that Muhammadi Begum turn to using birth control.

The authors of *Angāre*, then, heralded literature as a means of òsocial actionö, their writings, a modernist exercise that aimed to òenlightenö a middle-class community whose moral discourses were sharply condemned for being put into play solely at the behest of elite patriarchs. These writers not only saw themselves as part of the community they were denouncing, but the stories went beyond an attack on traditional sexual and social mores, and anticipated the self-reflexivity of progressivist discourse by singling out the failures of the figure of the intellectual, reformer, and modernizer.<sup>15</sup> The *Angāre* authors simultaneously broadened the definition of society by incorporating the notion of inclusive òcitizenshipö into their literature. Whereas the focus of the nineteenth century Urdu novel was exclusively tailored to a genteel milieu in which the *zuāfa* (lit. weak, referring to slaves, youth, women) appeared as either marginal, or as a problem to be managed by the *sharīf*, *Angāre* de-stabilized *sharīf* narratives by placing the òsubalternö òprivateö *zuāfa* at the center of the narrative, as *persons in their own right*. At stake, as the furor over *Angāre* would go on to demonstrate, in tandem with the issue of sexual exploitation, was the question of rightful, political representation. Questions relating to how upper-class communities, both Hindu and Muslim, dealt with marriage, inheritance, and child sexuality entered into the realm of state politics as a rights-based discourse emerged in the late 1920s. Indian feminists welcomed this new universal language of rights to forge a collective

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<sup>14</sup> *Nafs* refers also to a *sufi* concept of òthe carnal soulö or the base part of the soul, which must be controlled in order to achieve greater spiritual status. I have translated it here as carnal desire, since it fits with the directness of Muhammadi Begum's language: elsewhere, Rasheed Jehan has this character describe the woman of the *zenana* as a dead body destined for either hell or heaven, for she is nothing but *ðhalwaö* (a type of desert) to be consumed by her husband. Rasheed Jehan displays the female protagonist's views on the irrelevance of religion.

<sup>15</sup> Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation, and the Transition to Independence* (New York: Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures, 2005) p. 38.

political and legal subjectivity as women, and argued that they ought to be offered legislative protections by the state rather than be left to the regulations of caste and religious communities.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, though minority representation had for at least two decades been an issue for Muslims in debates between the colonial Indian political leadership, by the early 1930s, the question of separate electorates dominated the discourse of the nationalist intelligentsia in a new way. Between 1930 and 1932, heated debates at the Round Table conferences in London between Ambedkar and Gandhi, over the possibility of separate electorates for "untouchables" had begun to occupy center stage in anti-colonial public life. These debates were crucial to the emergence of a constitutional democracy. Shabnum Tejani has recently argued that the communal and caste questions were not separate, but intimately intertwined, and that by 1932, the way in which the "Depressed Classes question" was eventually resolved "by retaining untouchables within Hinduism while simultaneously reaffirming the minority status of Muslims" marked out majority and minority populations. "It was the relationship between "class" and "community" and the place they would occupy in India's emerging constitutional democracy that would determine how Indian secularism came to be defined."<sup>17</sup> These new conjunctures impacted the structure of the literary experiment of *Angāre* as a political intervention: how to represent the marginalized. The under-represented had to be assigned a name, and be marked out.

The subaltern, then, appears in the very title of the short story, *Dulari*. In it, a domestic servant (Dulari) runs away from the family who employs her, after having an affair with the son of the family, a prominent social reformer. She is spotted in the prostitutes' quarter, forced to return home, maligned by the family for having neglected her chores, and then humiliated by the

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<sup>16</sup> Mrinalini Sinha. *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950*. Indiana University Press, 2008.



very social reformer who was her lover. He introduces his bride to Dulari as her new mistress, and the story ends with Dulari running away again. The ending explicitly suggests that the tyranny of *sharīf* reform leaves Dulari with no other option but to escape. By turning *sharīf* men into subjects in need of reform (instead of ideals of reform) in a language that brazenly exposed the excesses of the patriarchal body for public readership, *Angāre* had transgressed acceptable notions of propriety enshrined in *sharīf* culture. As it did so, *Angāre* highlighted the failures of the political leadership of a minority community during a period when it was claiming to represent all Muslims.

The progressive literature that followed in the wake of *Angāre* was referred to as *naya adab* ó new literature. *Adab*, which simultaneously means literature, etiquette, and ethical conduct, was a shared cultural universe that included within its fold members of various religious communities. This was reflected in the fact that the longest running and one of the leading Urdu literary journals of the day was *Zamana* (*The Age*) founded and edited by Munshi Daya Narayan Nigam (1882-1942), a Hindu literary personality originally from Kanpur. In his capacity as a leading Urdu litterateur, Munshi Daya Narayan Nigam introduced a large number of young Urdu prose-writers and poets on to the literary stage. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, *Zamana* published poetry and articles by prominent Urdu poets and writers such as Akbar Allahabadi, Brij Narayan Chakbast, Firaq Gorakhpuri, Muhammad Iqbal, Tilok Chand Mahrun and Josh Malihabadi. Writers from Hindu backgrounds continued to write in Urdu well into the mid-twentieth century, and many, like Firaq, Premchand, and Narayan Nigam himself, were to lend their support to AIPWA as Sajjad Zaheer began to organize writers in the mid-1930s upon his return from London. The literature of Sajjad Zaheer and other writers of his

generation, however, were foregrounding new and revolutionary values into *adab* (literature), beginning with the *Angāre* pamphlet.

If *adab* referred to, generally, the outward aesthetic expression of an internal ethical state of being, then *Angāre* modernized *adab* as an ethical practice by imputing into literature a program of social justice where the *ajlāf* (lower orders), the *ām log* (ordinary people) and the *zuāfa* (weak), had to be liberated from the injustices of *sharīf* hierarchies. Concepts of justice and equity for ordinary people had never been entirely alien to notions of *akhlāq* and *adab*; neither was social equity neglected in the works of nineteenth and twentieth century *ashrāf* litterateurs, nor that of the *ūlema* for that matter. An example of this comes from a late nineteenth century tract by the Muslim scholar and theologian, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (1863-1943), who wrote prolifically about Islamic ethics:

I responded to a letter once which included a question from the servant (*mulāzim*) of a wealthy nobleman (*ra'īs*). The question was, is it correct practice to bow down before my master (*aghā*) as I greet (*salam*) him? Now, had I responded in the affirmative, the answer would most certainly be wrong; and if I responded in the negative, it would come to the attention of the nobleman, and I would be accused of advising his servant to be without manners (*be-adab*). I responded by saying that if he [the nobleman] should become angry because his servant does not greet him by bowing, then it is certainly incorrect.<sup>18</sup>

This was in line with many traditional nineteenth century tracts on ethics, as decisions were made on a case by case basis, especially in reference to the relationship between inferiors and superiors. However, what made the *Angāre* collection different was the view that the *ajlāf* should be liberated entirely from existing constraints of subordination because they were individuals with *rights*. The writers' central concern was with the question of economic disparities of the lower-classes. Ahmed Ali's *Mahāvaton Kī Ek Rāt* (*The Night of Winter Rains*), for instance, narrates the story in first person, of a poor widow who questions the existence of

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<sup>18</sup> Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, *Adab al-Mu'asharat*, (Delhi: n.d.).

divine will by pointing to oppressive class divisions which allow the rains into her hut. This type of critique was in part influenced by a 1930s discourse of Indian society in which the arguments and vocabulary became decidedly economic oriented, in the context of mass mobilization efforts.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, it would be an oversimplification to argue that traditions of Islamic ethics had nothing to do with the project of the *Angāre* writers. Ahmed Ali, for instance, was well-versed in Arabic as well as English and Urdu, and would produce an authoritative translation of the Qurʾān into Urdu. While class became a central feature of the new project of social realism in literature, which the *Angāre* authors heralded as the mainstay of their endeavors, progressive authors also owed much to notions of realism which predominated in the works of the older generation of Urdu litterateurs.

Nowhere is this more explicit than in Munshi Premchand's presidential address, *The Aims and Purpose of Adab* (Literature), to the first All-India Progressive Writers' Association meeting in Lucknow in 1936. The leading doyen of Hindi and Urdu literature, Munshi Premchand, did not deliver his address in English: he delivered his speech in Urdu (to the chagrin of some of his Hindi compatriots), but spoke extensively about the role of *akhlāq* in the *adab* of social realism. *Adab* continued to be a shared concept across religious lines. The speech drew heavily from Persianate notions of *adab*: the role of the *adīb* in Premchand's view was to bring *akhlāq* and *adab* together, and his duty is to be the conveyor of knowledge (*'ilm bardār*); he must enlighten and empower his fellow human beings by bearing the message of humanism (*insāniyat*) and respectability (*sharāfat*).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For more, see Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*. Oxford University Press, Delhi: 2002. Orsini shows how the Gandhian emphasis on mass movement and the success of socialism in Russia fostered a view of a society that was egalitarian, where conflict and difference were acknowledged and explained chiefly in economic terms, and where labor was given a particular dignity.

<sup>20</sup> Munshi Premchand, *Adab ki Garz-o-Ghayat*, Reprinted in *Guftagu*, 1969.

Premchand's notion of realism depended to a great extent upon his understanding of the inter-related concepts of *akhlāq* and *adab*. While seeing the two as inseparable, Premchand clarified the distinction:

Ethics and literature share the same desired end and purpose (*akhlaqiyat aur adabiyat ki manzil-e-maqsood ek hai*), and it is only in the manner of their presentation (*tarz-e-khitāb*) where they differ. Ethics (*akhlaqiyat*) attempts to influence the intellect through proofs, counsel and guidance (*nasīhaten*). Literature (*adab*) has chosen the condition (*kaifiyat*) of things, the circle of emotion (*jazbah*). Whatever we see in life, whatever transpires upon us, those experiences and those wounds enter into our imagination and become a movement in the inquiry of *adab*.

Thus, Premchand asserted, literature (*adab*) which does not bring spiritual and intellectual satisfaction, "move people to action," and provide fortitude of spirit so that individuals can become triumphant (*fatāh*) in the pursuit to overcome difficulties, was useless. Drawing inspiration from poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal, and quoting his Persian poetry at great length, Premchand declared that the era of poetry that pines in separation from the beloved, was over. "Now we are in need of art in which there is the message of action (*-amal ka paigham*)" argued Premchand, "and like Iqbal, I too say, 'I am not satisfied by simply resting between the boughs, far from the pleasures of flight.'"<sup>21</sup> Premchand went on to say that, "the times demanded that the *adib* take the risk of stepping into the new."<sup>22</sup> There were two distinctions with which the writer had to contend: one, had to do between language and literature, and the second had to do with narrative and life.<sup>23</sup>

It is significant, then, that even as *adab* was being radically modernized by the authors of *Angāre* in new ways the centering, as I noted, of the question of economic disparity and class

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<sup>21</sup> Munshi Premchand, *Adab ki Garz-o-Ghayat*, Reprinted in *Guftagu*, 1969.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. In Premchand's words, "now, *adab* (literature) has become the custodian of this service (*ne yeh khidmat apne zimme le li hai*) and it is based on taste and beauty. It (*adab*) tries to awaken a sense of taste of beauty (in us). *Husn-e-Akhlaq*. There is no human being who lacks this sense and there is no litterateur who lacks this sense (sense of beauty).

divisionsô it was a shared social and intellectual value, and one that did not always depart entirely from the existing reformist literature of the *ashrāf*. This is poignantly illustrated in Mahmuduzzafar's story which is a stringent critique of middle-class formulations of *jawānmardī* as masculine behavior dependent upon the subjugation of women. *Jawānmardī* here is inscribed in its own self-deprecation; the narrator purposefully distances himself from his wife and retreats into the world of "dirty and useless" manly pleasuresô cards, alcohol, and dancing girls.

Such a world had already been subject to extensive criticism in the late nineteenth century, such as in the novels of Deputy Nazir Ahmad, where the pleasures of the aristocratic pastô Persian poetry, kite-flying, and dancing girls, had to be expunged entirely so that *sharīf* men, like their Victorian counterparts, could properly and rationally, assume the role of community leadership. In Nazir Ahmad's 1885 novel, *Tawbat un-Nasuh (The Repentance of Nasuh)*, Nasuh is vested with the full authority of a patriarch, for "the man who is the oldest in this house is in the position of an emperor, and the house's other inhabitants, like subjects, are commanded by him" ö, whereas for Mahmuduzzafar, the problem with *jawānmardī* is precisely its complicity in power relations where women are subject to the arbitrary terms of male guardianship. For Mahmuduzzafar, it is not the domain of women that needs to be managed by disciplined housewives, but it is the world of men with all its attendant privileges, rights, and authority, which threatens to extinguish life itself. This significant difference in narrative tropes was due to the changes taking place within national and minoritarian political discourses. In the early 1930s, economic crises set the stage for mass nationalist agitations not held since the early 1920s; gender relations were also changing as more women were participating in public sphere within protests and rallies against colonial rule. Men such as Mahmuduzzafar were coming of age during a period of rising socialist and feminist movements, which were influencing Indian

National Congress politics. Meanwhile, the language of rights was also being adopted in the struggle for Muslim minority interests, which was represented mostly by elite service gentry.

At the same time, *jawānmardī* is closely associated with concepts of *adab* (ethical comportment) and *akhlāq* (ethical conduct). Referring to a cultural domain in which the codes defining manliness and norms of comportment for the male body is extensively elaborated (through manuals and poetry), its origins date as far back to the emergence of Indo-Persian court culture in North India during the period of the Delhi Sultanate. In Akbar's court, Persian texts such as the eighth century *Qābus-Nāmah*, advising men on how they should conceive of their relationship to the divine, while extolling the virtues of proper wine consumption, as well as Persian moralist Shaikh Sidi's *Bustān* and *Gulistān*, and Nasir-ud-Din Tus'i's *Akhlāq-i-Nāsiri*, were widely circulated. These texts, belonging to the genre known as *āmirr* for princes, formed the basis of sixteenth century *akhlāq* literature. They reworked bodily and sexual codes for imperial servants, accentuating the prospects for moral and human perfection in all of the homologous worlds that men inhabited *as governors*: the kingdom, the household and the body.<sup>24</sup> These texts also advised men on how to behave with their superiors, inferiors, and their peers. Influenced also by specific *sufi* concepts of the spiritual champion, *jawānmardī* was a specific kind of ethical ideal in the Persian context: the outward beauty of youth (*jawān*) was a reflection of one's inner manly characteristics of gallantry, chivalry, and bravery (*mardī*).<sup>25</sup> As it was disseminated through the Mughal imperial courts, *jawānmardī*, as a form of ideal manhood,

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<sup>24</sup> Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal India' in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol 42, No. 1.(1999), pp. 47-93. For more on *akhlāq* literature, see Muzaffar Alam, *Languages of Political Islam: India 1200-1800*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Arly Loewen, *The Concept of Jawanmardi (Manliness) in Persian Literature and Society*, PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 2001. Treatises such as *Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi* circulated also within the Ismaili Indian context of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, where the *mu'min* (believer) was exhorted to become a real *jawanmard*, mystical knight. See also Michel Bovin, 'A Persian Treatise for the Ismaili Khojas of India: Presentation of the *Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi*' in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*. Ed. Alam, Delvoye, Gaborieau. New Delhi: Manohar Press, 2000.

transcended differences of law, religion, caste and region, before becoming specifically associated with a north Indian model of patriarchal and heterosexual male virtue.<sup>26</sup> The notion of *jawānmardī* in the late nineteenth century was stripped of its association with any secular virtues as positive, and subjected to a meaning of gallantry relegating men to a world of guardianship over women.

It is this last notion of *jawānmardī* that Mahmuduzzafar defies almost entirely. He not only assumes a didactic posture towards the purportedly gallant man, but it is an entirely self-reflexive one, revealed to the reader as a confession. 'I am the cause of my wife's death; it is I who brought her pain and sadness: the barbarity/ignorance (*jahālat*) and ineptitude (*himāqat*) of men is limitless. But even saying this, that I was the victim of *jahālat* and *himāqat*, is not quite right; actually, I was trapped within the claws of arrogance (*ghurūr*), which is what I now confess.'<sup>27</sup> The power of this story emerges from Mahmuduzzafar's understanding that reformist discourses are themselves organized by ideologies and patriarchal power. That is why the husband cannot exculpate himself from moral responsibility simply by reversing the gendered terms of civility, (where men are *jāhil*-backwards, ignorant, and stupid).

The dominant strand of late nineteenth and early twentieth century reformist discourse had been managed through an interpretation of Islamic civilization in which men were necessarily the harbingers of moral stewardship in the home. Mahmuduzzafar, however, directs the reader immediately to the question of power: the arrogance that comes with being given *a priori* authority over the world of women enervates any claims to moral conduct. Power corrupts. The commentary on male subjectivity in *Jawānmardī* not only draws from reformist, didactic *akhlāq* literature, but also shifts into a mode of self-reflexivity whereby the young husband

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<sup>26</sup> Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal India' in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol 42, No. 1.(1999), pp. 47-93.

<sup>27</sup> Khalid Alvi. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L 1 Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995.Pg. 181.

enters the *zenānā* not to reform its inhabitants, but to draw attention to his own weakness. In crossing into the space of the *zuāfa* to expose one's weakness, rather than one's strength, is to allow for the possibility that men can influence the lives of the less franchised of the domestic realm by resisting familial prescriptions of child marriage and exchanging them for companionate marriage. Furthermore, the social realism of *jawānmardī*, in particular the extraordinarily intimate descriptions of the gendered body as violated, in this crossing, became the source, like several stories in the collection, of controversy. On the one hand, Mahmuduzzafar resists the language of patriarchal power as an arbitrary sovereignty; however, patriarchy is at the same re-inscribed by placing the onus of moral responsibility upon the *jawānmard*, and silencing the woman through her death. Progress, for Mahmuduzzafar, is only possible if women share the same rights and privileges as men, and men are reformed enough to accept this proposition in theory and practice.

### **The Provincialization of Lucknow and Aligarh Elites**

The publication of *Angāre* struck a nerve amongst *ashraf* elites. Between January and March of 1933, *Angāre* received a host of angry responses from the Urdu press, many calling for the proscription of the publication. Why were the reactions to *Angāre* so harsh? After all, *Angāre* stories like *Jawānmardī* shared the reformist thrust of contemporaneous literature of the period, such as the text I discussed in the previous chapter, *Laila Ke Khutūt*. By closely examining *Angāre* in its historical context, I suggest a new way to write about the formation of twentieth century debates regarding what has constituted permissible and impermissible expression within Muslim public sphere(s) in South Asia. Relevant here is Talal Asad's study of the formation of the secular, over the course of Western European history, which has alerted wide scholarly attention to the question of how secularism is a political *project* carried out by the modern state.



He defines secular society as ða modern construct based on the legal distinction between public and private, on a political arrangement requiring ðreligionø to be subjected by law to the private domain, on an ideology of moral individualism, and a downgrading of the knowing subjectí that all emerged in Western Europe together with the formation of the modern state.ö<sup>28</sup> While the ideology of secularism imposes its values as superior and absolute, the process of secularization whereby otherworldly concerns are deemed less important than issues of the here and now, was not specific to Europe. Indeed, the fact that it was over the grounds of *adab*ö a shared cultural universe and literary realm of the Indo-Muslim milieuö over which there was so much furor unleashed in a period of anti-colonial resistance, signals a tension between the process of secularization to which the *Angāre* authors were heirs, and the procedures of secularism.

The authors of *Angāre* did not use terms such as secular or secularism to describe their radical socio-political literary project. Secularism was neither an ideology that was part of the anti-colonial, nationalist agenda, nor was it a fully formed discourse against which the responses to *Angāre* were structured. Thus, the controversy was by no means a conflict between the ðsecularø credentials of early Progressives and the ðreligiousø responses of the Muslim middle-classes. This point is important for understanding why many leading *sharīf*, of whom some went as far as calling for violence against the authors, felt so threatened by *Angāre*.<sup>29</sup> The hostility of the Urdu press was due, in part, to the way in which the *Angāre* group had designated to themselves duties of societal reform formerly ensconced within a sphere belonging to *sharīf* social reformers: they challenged *sharīf* terms of ethical conduct in public life even as their

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<sup>28</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity Islam, Modernity*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) p 255.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmed Ali noted that ðWe were lampooned and satirized, condemned editorially and in pamphletsí Our lives were threatened; people even lay in wait with daggers to kill us,ö In Carlo Coppola, ðAngare: Enfants Terribles of Urdu Literatureö Annual of Urdu Studies, Vol 1 (1981) p. 61.

writings so closely approached an already existing reformist agenda.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, however, it was the context out of which *Angāre* had emerged: it was published in the wake of the increasing minoritization of the Muslim community at the state level. What *Angāre* exposed were the multiple layers of minoritization within the Muslim community— in particular, the disenfranchised *ajlāf* for whom, the *Angāre* authors adamantly asserted, existing notions of *sharīf* ethical conduct and *tehzīb* (culture) had failed.

Under these conditions, *Angāre* completely undermined the codes of civility embodied by Lucknavi *adab* and Aligarhian *sharāfat* (respectability) and in doing so, *provincialized* centers of cultural and political authority as pre-eminent examples of “Muslim backwardness.” These were codes that had thus far been implemented by the North Indian Muslim leadership. The irate responses to *Angāre* resulted from an interpretation of the text as an attack on *akhlāq* (ethical conduct) and *adab* (aesthetic expression)— viewed by *sharīf* elites of Lucknow and Aligarh as chief components of their *ashrāf* culture and civilization. Any further debate about ethical conduct, however, was cut short by the colonial state’s prompt proscription of *Angāre* under section 295-A of the Indian Penal Code for “deliberate and malicious act intended to outrage religious feeling of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.”<sup>31</sup> This was in spite of the fact that even the most vociferous anti-*Angāre* campaigners requested that it be banned under laws of obscenity. Significantly, even after the text was proscribed, the Urdu press continued to carry articles against the collection— some of which were compelled to prove beyond all doubt, that *Angāre* was *universally* an unethical text. Even as the *Angāre* writers were attacked for being irreligious and disrespectful, the members of the Urdu press sought audience in the power of the colonial state by expressing formidable opposition against the category “religion” being

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<sup>30</sup> Geeta Patel. *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings: On Gender, Colonialism, and Desire in Miraji's Urdu Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> Khalid Alvi. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L 1 Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995.

used legally or socially to affix Muslim identity. It must be noted, however, that rising communitarian expressions during the mid to late 1920s, also had a hand to play in the reception to *Angāre*. In 1924, the offensive pamphlet, *Rangīla Rasūl (The Colorful Prophet)*, published by an Arya Samaj activist Rajpal, provoked a response by Muslims in the Punjab; they were further upset by Rajpal's acquittal in the Punjab High Court for inciting religious intolerance.<sup>32</sup>

One of the most prominent critiques made by a diverse group of *sharīf* elites was that the stories went beyond the domain of the ethical (*akhlāqī*) and into the terrain of the obscene (*fahsh*). Betraying their fear that the 'dirty stories' might somehow find their way into the hands of 'respectable young girls and boys' the pamphlet was condemned as a corrupting influence. Since he frankly discussed the abuses of patriarchal power, revealing the illicitness embedded within codes of sexual decency in *sharīf* society, and then *publicly* explicated his views Sajjad Zaheer was accused of staining the *history* of Islam through acts of indiscretion.<sup>33</sup> However, it was Zaheer's upper-class *sharīf* family lineage that came under scrutiny and was invoked frequently, as an insult to injury on the name of Muslim community. How could a young gentleman from a respectable Lucknow family use such bold language in the public press? Over and above religious piety in many cases, it was a sensibility, a normative order of propriety as defined by elites of Lucknow and Aligarh that was transgressed. Even the harshest response, borne out from the newspaper *Madīnah*, calling the writers a 'bundle of filth' who ridiculed

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<sup>32</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 295.

<sup>33</sup> Only the first few responses to *Angāre* claimed that the authors were writing against Islam. An anonymous response dated 25<sup>th</sup> of February, was a poem, entitled, 'Angāre Sets the World of *Shariah* Ablaze' (*Lagadi Aag Angāre ne Duniya-e-Sharyat Mein*), which lampooned Sajjad Zaheer: 'You have made fly a grave mistake, tearing to shreds the rightful religion/How, after all, had it interrupted your non-religiosity?/Having published five stories of nakedness in the world, You have quite beautified Islam's most venerable past.' *Char chand lagana* [lit. to place four moons] is an idiomatic expression which refers to enhancing the beauty of the object in question, in the sense of dignifying, or raising its status. The poem also includes a verse in which Sajjad Zaheer is condemned for 'not having raised the banner of Islam' while in Europe. Khalid Alvi. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L I Kūñwan, Delhi, 1995. pg. 15-16.

religious beliefs and whose stories contained nothing intellectually modern except immorality, evil character and wickedness, claimed that there was something larger at stake than religion.<sup>34</sup> The article heeded Muslims to come to a decision about *Angāre*, for this matter is not merely about religion (*mazhab*), but about the destruction of *akhlāq* (ethical conduct) and *sharāfat* (respectability).<sup>35</sup> There was also always a broader audience that was being addressed: it was precisely because the Urdu language was not yet limited to a Muslim readership, and that a literate non-Muslim Urdu audience could access *Angāre*, that the responses went as far as decreeing it as antithetical to *sharīf* (respectable) identity. Since the authors of *Angāre* explicitly challenged the moral status of social reformers, putting the very foundation of modern *ashraf* society into question, the responses were framed as a corrective.

At the same time, not all responses were as harsh as the *Madīnah*. The news-weekly *Payām* from Aligarh, for instance, claimed that calls to proscribe the book were counter-productive, and that the attitude of religious leaders is exceedingly incorrect. How ironic, the *Payām* added, that the very people who claim the right of free speech from the Government are not willing to concede the same right to their countrymen.<sup>36</sup> Employing the language of democratic rights solely for the politics of self-interest was promptly denounced. The Aligarh elite and Lucknow's Urdu presses mobilized quickly to suppress calls that the pamphlet was an attack on religion. The text was charged with being unethical (*bad-akhlāqi*), and the angriest responses were from the Lucknow elite. Such condemnations had to do with how Lucknavi notions of propriety as defined by some quarters of the city's leading intellectuals, were seen to

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<sup>34</sup> Shabana Mahmud, 'Founding of the Progressive Writers' Association' *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 30, No. 2. (May, 1996) p. 449.

<sup>35</sup> *Madinah*, Bijnor, 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1933. Khalid Alvi. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, Laal Kufwan, Delhi, 1995.

<sup>36</sup> Mahmud, Shabana. 'Founding of the Progressive Writers' Association' in, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2. (May, 1996), pp. 447-467. Pg. 449.

be appropriated by the Aligarh vanguard, ignored by the All-India Shi'a Standing Committee, or undermined entirely by English-educated Indian Muslim communists who belonged to Lucknow themselves. It is really here where the crux of the debate lies. The most aggressive campaigner against *Angāre* was the editor of the newspaper, *Sach (The Truth)*, Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, who called for the proscription of the book not on religious grounds, but on ethical grounds, and in accordance with laws against obscenity. I quote the article at length:

A collection of short stories was recently published by a Shia youth of Lucknow, along with one female friend, and two other male friends. The language is *bazāri* [of the bazār], filthy, and the narration is unequivocally vulgar. Even after a thorough search, it is not possible to find any beauty of *adab* (literary taste) in it. Rather, one finds glaring faults of language and composition. It is not at all possible to take the name of this book in a gathering of respectable people [*sharīfoñ ke majmuā*]. The demand being made is that this book, by religious standards [*mazhabī haisīyat*], is heartbreaking and, that is why it should be censored. However, the truth is, that far over and above the religious sense, this book ranks, by ethical standards [*akhlāqī haisīyat*], as filthy and nauseating. The attacks against *sharāfat* [respectability], *tehzīb* [culture/civilization], and *akhlāq* [ethics] are present from beginning to end. And for even a person of good humor, whatever may be his principles, to peruse through this book is certainly not easy. There is at least one reference in the Indian Penal Code against obscenity [*fahsh-nigāri*]. If this filthy book does not qualify the Code's notion of obscenity, than the law, itself, is in serious need of modification. The demand that the book be censored is in line with the principles of this department of law, *but not because the book is heartbreaking due to hurting religious sentiments*, but in accordance to laws against obscenity. The young writer comes from a respectable family with a venerable lineage. Any respectable person can only imagine what must be passing through the hearts of his family members at this time. These poor creatures are worthy of our sympathy, and not any additional torment. The company of wicked people can succeed in turning even the most respectable [*sharīf se sharīf*] families into disrepute.<sup>37</sup>

Maulana Daryabadi mobilized agitation against *Angāre* by directly addressing a conservative section of the *ashrāf* elite, particularly the legal community, who were threatened that their definitions of *akhlāq* and authority over the Muslim social body were being undermined. More than the editor of *Sach*, a newspaper which prior to the *Angāre* controversy

<sup>37</sup> *Ek Sharmnāk Kitābō* (A Shameful Book), in *Sach*, Lucknow, 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1933.

had limited circulation and readership, Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi was one of the leading intellectual figures of his period, well-known for his writings on philosophy, poetry, and religion.<sup>38</sup> Originally from Barabanki, on the outskirts of Lucknow, he came from a family of *qāzīs* and his grandfather was known as a well-established *murshid*. The Maulana, however, broke with family tradition at a young age, refusing to utter *bismillāh* in a traditional public ceremony initiating children to the recitation of the Qurʾān.<sup>39</sup> After being tutored in mostly Urdu and Persian (and a smattering of Arabic) he attended Canning College in Lucknow, before going on to Aligarh for his M.A. While there, he became a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, subsequently publishing, in English, “The Psychology of Leadership” under the auspices of the Aristotlean Society. During this period (between 1912 and the early 1920s) he wrote essays highly critical of the ideas of leading seminary trained Muslim intellectuals, Shibli Naumani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Maulana Daryabadi claimed that he had always been a skeptic regarding his faith in Islam. It was only much later, after reading the works of writers as diverse as the satirical poet Akbar Allahabadi, theosophists Bhagwan Das and Annie Besant, philosopher Confucious, as well as the Bhagwad Gita, the life of Buddha, the *masnawi* of Rumi, and the English translation of the Qurʾān by Muhammad Ali Lahori, that Daryabadi felt he was able to square his faith in Islam with his ideas of rationality. In his own words, Daryabadi remarked that “Hindu philosophy and Yogic Sufism ultimately bridged my transition from *kufr* (non-believer) to *imān* (faith).”<sup>40</sup> He spent the remainder of his life studying and writing about Sufism.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Saleem Qidwai. *Abdul Majid Daryabadi: Hindustani Adab Ke Muamār*, Sahitya Akademy, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* 16.

<sup>41</sup> Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, described himself as more of a rationalist than a believer in Islam. While filling out forms for his B.A. examinations at Aligarh, under the category, “religion” he wrote, “rationalist” in place of Islam. Khalid Alvi. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L 1 Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995. p. 35.

The critique that *Angāre* launched of Muslim middle-class respectability undermined two particular urban coordinates of North Indian political and cultural authority that Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi embodied. The first was a notion of Lukhnavi *adab*. By the early twentieth century, Lucknow had come to represent the very fount of high Urdu culture in colonial North India. This idea was popularized, for instance, in Abdul Halim Sharar's account, *Lucknow: Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, published serially from 1913 onwards in the literary journal, *Dil Gudaz*. Sharar contended that Indo-Muslim culture and civilization reached its apogee in Lucknow; the civilized people who inhabit his city are the imperial subjects of Avadh, not aspiring democratic citizens. For Sharar, to belong to the respectable classes was synonymous with good manners and polished speech; it meant a mastery over social etiquette, such as how to deliver one's disagreements sharply yet with utmost propriety; or knowing when to withdraw from conversation or to pepper it with an apt poetic couplet; a reserved manner; in short, a rationalist, tempered civility he defined as *adab*. This idealization of *sharīf* culture found its fullest political expression in the fact that Lucknow had, by this time, become the headquarters of the Muslim League. *Angāre* also challenged traditional Aligarhian-styled reform, which attempted to universalize the values associated with the *sharīf* (gentry) as Muslim ones, cultivating over the late nineteenth century a specific ideal of public propriety. The *sharīf* man was defined by a set of social relations involving a pose of deference, but above all a matter of virtuosity within the highly restricted bounds of etiquette.<sup>42</sup> To lay bare the body of the *sharīf* patriarch, by locating it squarely within the private domain of the *zuāfa*, an insulting *sharīf* masculine subjectivity as susceptible to temptation, to pride, and to desire, and worse, as *irrational*, was equivalent to dishonoring the patriarch.

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<sup>42</sup> David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

*Angāre* was perceived as an *assault*. It had struck out at the standardization of *adab* and *akhlāq* by the *ashrāf* upper-class patriarchal authority, an authority which was sought hegemony over defining the codes of rationalist Muslim sensibility. Hence, the criticisms that followed sought to show that Sajj d Zaheer and his cohort were ömisguided youthsö whose writings were an öoutburstö, in short, that they could have been more civil about the entire matter instead of resorting to rebelliousness.<sup>43</sup> What *Angāre* had achieved was to push the didacticism of *adab* and *akhlāq* upon the reformers themselves, thereby challenging any hegemonic assertion of the *sharīf* over the Muslim community. That is why the ethical stance of *Angāre* was lambasted most aggressively by the Aligarh-educated elite and Lucknow's prominent *ashrāf* in the Urdu press. In this sense, *Angāre* did not so much tear at öthe vulnerabilities of religious feeling,ö as it upset something else: a deeply rationalist order in which personal ethics could not be separated from the symbolic virtues that had been assigned to the city.<sup>44</sup> The economically-oriented discourse of the *Angāre* authors was formulated, in line with their contemporaries, (such as Maulana Hasrat Mohani) against any contradiction between Islam and Marxist concepts of social justiceö and punctured existing *sharīf* notions of culture. These conservative *sharīf* ideas of culture were not bound to religious precepts, but to specific social and urban contexts.

Lucknow and Aligarh represented moral collectivities, led by the *sharīf* patriarchate, upon which specific values of civilization associated with the gentry had been built. The writers of *Angāre* were faulted for purportedly adopting the linguistic register of the *bazār* as opposed to the language of the *sharīf*; the language of *Angāre*, critics fumed, was vulgar and low

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<sup>43</sup> *Angāre ki akhlāqī haisiyat (The Ethical Status of Angāre)* first published in the newspaper, *Sarfaraz*, February, 1933 in Khalid Alvi's *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L I Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995.

<sup>44</sup> Geeta Patel writes that öpublishing *Angāre* tore at the vulnerable religious feelings.ö Terms such as ñreligionö and ñreligiousö need to be unpacked here. Civilizational concepts articulated both secular and religious concerns.



(*āmiyāna*).<sup>45</sup> If *Angāre* had accused reformist leaders for being irrational, then the *sharīf* responded in kind, by claiming that the young authors had abandoned the polished *civilisé* of their class, becoming uncouth and barbaric in the process. The debate, then, had to do with two overlapping, yet differing conceptions of civilizing the Muslim community. Civilizational concepts embodied in *akhlāq* (ethics), *tehzīb* (culture), *adab* (etiquette), and *sharāfat* (respectability) occupied a distinctly central place in the production of *sharīf* identity as opposed to religion [*mazhab*] as such. For the *ashraf*, it was *adab* and not *mazhab* that defined and guided definitions of ethical conduct and ideal moral behavior. As Mushirul Hasan has shown, the concepts of *adab* and *akhlāq* were being altered by Muslim figures in the Congress nationalist movement. Men such as Hakim Ajmal Khan were exponents of liberal-humanitarian ideology, ensuring that the application of the concept of *adab* was not restricted to one single community. Central to their conception of *adab* was the notion that virtuous citizens could be helpful, respectful, and trustful towards one another, even if they differed on political and religious issues.<sup>46</sup> The Indian community that the Urdu progressive intelligentsia represented by the *Angāre* four had in mind was also tolerant of opponents. However, the Urdu progressive intelligentsia pushed the meaning of *adab* into an alternative sphere of virtue and action: it was not simply that they emphasized the grievances of the lower-classes and the marginalized as politically legitimate, but they did so by using new aesthetic standards of realism which, in Aijaz Ahmed's words, did not construct fixed boundaries between the criminalities of the colonialist and the brutalities of all those indigenous people who have had power in our own society. No

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<sup>45</sup> The term, *ām* which means ordinary and common, referring to the ordinary *people* as opposed to the *khās* (the special) is here used as an adjective *āmīyānā* low, base.

<sup>46</sup> Mushirul Hasan, *From Pluralism to Separatism: Qasbahs in Colonial Awadh* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 170.

quarter was given to the colonialist; but there was none for ourselves either.<sup>47</sup> It was because the literature of *Angāre* broke with the aesthetic standards of an existing ethical order that caused the furor.

This is why Maulana Daryabadi's anger was not restricted to the writers. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, he put the blame squarely on the publishers, the Jamia Press, in an article entitled, 'The Patron of Filth', demanding, 'Show me even four pages of that entire book in which the language is correct, the composition is without fault, where there is some literary beauty, and some sense of ethical character!'<sup>48</sup> Yet, not only was the article published *after Angāre* had already been proscribed, but it began by a lengthy quote from one of *Angāre*'s short stories! It is noteworthy that Maulana Daryabadi's rancor towards the Jamia publishers was due in large part to the fact that the Press had earlier rejected his work for publication in one of their magazines.<sup>49</sup>

Maulana Daryabadi and the *Angāre* authors both conceived of *adab* (as aesthetic) and *mazhab* (religion) as two separate domains of ethical practice. Daryabadi was defining *adab* in relation to a public ideal, ethics as a universally shared universe made up of collective societal obligations that may surpass *mazhab*, but not the codifications of *ashrāf* hierarchy. The litterateurs were also defining *adab* in relation to a public ideal – but one that questioned *ashrāf* hierarchies by re-orienting *adab* into the domain of social justice. The controversy around *Angāre* turned into an explicit struggle for authority on the part of the Aligarh elite and Lucknow's local leadership – each wanted to have the last say on the text. If Lucknow was the penultimate symbol of Muslim sovereignty for the *sharīf*, then *Angāre* succeeded in turning even the most respectable of Lucknow's families into a source of disrepute. The point was reiterated by UP (United Provinces) Council Member Hafiz Hidayat Husain, a barrister who petitioned the

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<sup>47</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso Press, 1992) p. 118.

<sup>48</sup> Sach, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1933. *Gandagī ka ek Qadar Dān* (The Patron of Filth). NMML.

<sup>49</sup> Khalid Alvi. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L 1 Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995.

governor's council that the book be banned for obscenity.<sup>50</sup> For him, too, the problem was that Sajjad Zaheer was hobnobbing with the lower-classes and then writing the language of the low and vulgar (*avām*) into a body of literature that was to be read by the 'respectable classes.' Husain claimed that the only reason Sajjad Zaheer was allowed into leading literary circles in the first place was because his father was a widely respected barrister. Otherwise, 'his place is that of the vagabonds of Lucknow' the same backwater thoughts...and 'in accordance with artistic principles, these short stories are nothing more than the absurdities of this class.'<sup>51</sup> Progressives challenged the idea that *sharīf* reformers could be the sole custodians of Urdu language and literature, hence the controversy was over who had the authority to dictate the limits of good and bad aesthetic, and by extension, the boundaries of normative *ashrāf* behavior.

The rebellious *Angāre* four had openly condemned a group of *ashrāf* orthodox social reformers, intellectuals, and patriarchs. They had mocked the ethical conduct of leading authorities, taking to task their definitions of *adab* and *sharāfat* by satirizing public displays of piety and propriety as no more than a thin veneer covering the leadership's complicity in oppressive social practices. That such criticisms of authority were taking place, was certainly not a new phenomenon—the satire of social and political authority could virtually form an entire genre within the Urdu literary world. It was the specific direction that the *Angāre* authors took the debate—by replacing culture and society as the central categories and precepts of *sharīf* reform, with those of economic position and class. It was this particular question of class in relation to community from which the authors articulated their concerns, that was threatening to the existing authority of *ashrāf* reformers. The Progressives' direct critique of oppressive class

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<sup>50</sup> Upon Husain's petition to the home minister, Nawab Sir Ahmed Sayyid Khan began the proceedings against *Angāre*. The proprietor of Nizami Press, was called to the court, where he apologized for hurting the sentiments of the Muslim community and brought the remaining copies of the text to the Lucknow city magistrate, where they were subsequently destroyed. Khalid Alvi. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L 1 Kunwan, Delhi, 1995. pg. 16

<sup>51</sup> Alvi, Khalid. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, Laal Kunwaan, Delhi, 1995. Pg. 20

divisions, as we shall below, were sought to be delegitimized by their opponents. They attacked the *Angāre* authors in ways which were already all too familiar: by categorizing progressive notions of ethics as being informed by a Western education, and therefore at odds with Muslim culture. The contours of this controversy, was not entirely unlike those that had surrounded Sir Syed Ahmad Khan a half century prior.

### **The Politics of Modernization, the Ethics of Civilization**

The authors of *Angāre* were condemned as uncivilized because they were seen to have exchanged their *sharif* identities for Western ones. In a satirical play published in *Kashmaf Nāma* in February 1933 entitled *Let Us Eat Fire* the *Angāre* writers are represented with their names modified and a character description of each which uses English words: *mistr segar, ek fashionable sahib* (a fashionable *sahib*), *mistar memad, ek ashīq mizaj jantilman* (a romantic gentleman), *ek ap-tu-det professor* (an up-to-date professor) and *mis razida, ek ledi daktar* (a lady doctor). The names were written with retroflex *t* and *d*, a characteristic usually reserved for English names. In the accompanying cartoon, the four authors are depicted as foolish heathens relegated to hell, fashionably attired in western clothes, but fear on their faces as they prepare to eat fire.<sup>52</sup>

It was because they were English-educated elites, that they were perceived as threatening. This is in part why they were viewed as “Westernized” in the context of colonial rule, and the condemnations elicited were those of displaced anger that could not be aimed directly at the British.<sup>53</sup> The most vehement responses were reserved for Rashid Jahan. As a woman, she faced most of the ire, as well as threats of violence, threatened with having her nose cut off and acid

<sup>52</sup> Carlo Coppola, “The Angāre Group: Enfants Terribles of Urdu Literature,” *Annual of Urdu Studies*, v.1, 1981.62.

<sup>53</sup> Geeta Patel. *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings: On Gender, Colonialism, and Desire in Miraji's Urdu Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

thrown on her face.<sup>54</sup> The *ashraf* male elite were unable to accept the fact that a woman of their own community was writing about the female body in such frank terms. Arguably, it was because Rashid Jehan, as a woman, had adopted a masculine, rationalist, Western bio-medical discourse in her condemnation of *sharif* patriarchy which made her the target of hostility.<sup>55</sup> Yet, Rashid Jehan did not solely privilege this in her stories. It was her exposé of *begamati zuban* (women's language) into the sphere of respectable public discourse, that is, the ways in which she brought the *zenana* into the reading public that was seen as particularly threatening. One article likened her writing to the speech of whores and if the letters of whores are not published in the press, why should these short stories be?<sup>56</sup> Inspired by the rising tide of women's writings in the previous decade, Rashid Jehan pointed out the double standards by which *sharif* women were forced to live. However, unlike mainstream women's writing of the period which sought to free women from hierarchies through legislative means, Rashid Jehan went one step further by shaming patriarchs for their lack of honor as in the short story, *Dilli Ki Ser (A Tour of Delhi)*. The story is told from the point of view of a veiled woman who travels by train for the first time only to experience discomfort and humiliation as her husband leaves her alone at the railway platform under the gaze of onlookers, as he disappears to chat with his friends. Such intimate portrayals of the restricted mobility of women emerging from seclusion, written by an English-educated woman of their own community, was particularly hard to hear for a class of men who had failed in achieving their stated aims to re-establish central Muslim political authority, in the aftermath of the Khilafat Movement. Sajjad Zaheer was also a target of anger, but this was expressed in different terms: seen as young, inexperienced, and rash, he had

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<sup>54</sup> Priyamvada Gopal. *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation, and the Transition to Independence*. (New York: Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures, 2005) p. 32.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Sach*, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1933. *Gandagi ka ek Qadar Dan*. NMML.

abandoned the domain of *sharāfat* by laying bare the problems of middle-class Muslim society for open view. When Abdul Majid Daryabadi remarked that Sajjad Zaheer could not apologize to the Urdu presses, as he õhas perhaps left Hindustanõ, it reads as a pun indicating Zaheerõs literal outside-ness (via his education and travels in Europe) to Lucknowõs most venerated values as defined by the *ashrāf*.

These themes, albeit muted, were also echoed by literary critics. Professor Muj b of Aligarh University writing under the pseudonym -Mø described Zaheerõs stories in relation to the other short stories in the *Angāre* collection, as analogous to European women. Zaheerõs fiction was -a beautiful European womanø walking in the company of not so beautiful women (the other short stories), thus giving the impression that Zaheerõs writings were more deserving of attention than warranted. õFor women to engage in these kinds of ruses (*chāleñ chalāna*) is understandable,õ bemoaned Muj b, -but I was not aware short-story writers also adopted such methods. *Angāre* í is the first attempt at this sort of thingí for good writers this method is simply not acceptable.õ<sup>57</sup> Muj b went on to say that it would have been far better if Sajjad Zaheer alone presented his õflights of fancyõ before adding that *Angāre* was written with the intention of õriling up Muslimsõ by attacking their present society, ideas, and principles. Muj bõs criticisms of *Angāre* had to do with the *methods* in which criticisms of society were being articulated, for õcertainly, to give insults (*gāli dena*) is one form of expressing oneõs thoughtsí but everyone knows how far giving insults actually can take us: after all, there are plenty of ways to mock or to make funí It is a shame that the writers did not take this very important fact into account.õ<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Jamia*, February 1933 Issue. In Khalid Alvi. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L 1 Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995. Pg. 25.

<sup>58</sup> *Jamia*, February 1933 Issue. Alvi, Khalid. *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L 1 Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995. Pg. 24. The nature of the debates also reveals the impact of the colonial context. It is notable that Mujeeb was a friend of

Again, the critique leveled here, is that the authors of *Angāre* had not deployed the *propriety* expected of a writer. Mujib's article was banned by the administration at Aligarh. The editors of Lucknow's Urdu presses had raised such a storm, that ultimately, a prominent member of the Aligarh University court, Navab Isma'ul Khan Khaznadar, put an official end to both *Angāre*, as well as its literary critiques, from being sold or published on campus.<sup>59</sup> Hence, even though Aligarh's *Payam* had earlier called for "religious leaders" to refrain from attempts to ban *Angāre*, the university administration relented to the Lucknow Urdu press when the possibility of the book becoming a subject for classroom discussion arose. The anger over *Angāre* provided an ample opportunity to argue over who could claim the authority symbolically associated with terms of Lucknawi *adab*. The Lucknawi elite were ultimately pushed aside, existing only as hollow emblems for the new terrain of ethical conduct. Perhaps, this, more than anything else, explains Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi's anger. In fact, so much so, that he summoned all his resources and had the newspaper *Sach* publish one final article against *Angāre*.

Over one month after the Government Gazette had announced that *Angāre* had been proscribed, Maulana Daryabadi published the article, "Bad Manners, Not Bad Faith" claimed, contrary to actual evidence, that the leading literary figure of the day, Munshi Premchand, "though being Hindu, after perusing through the first few pages of *Angāre*, was disgusted by its lack of etiquette/proper behavior (*bad-tameezi*), low form of mockery (*past-mazaaqi*), its likeness to the world of the *bazaar*, (*bazaariyat*), its obscenity (*fahsh-pasandi*), and dirty language (*gandi zubani*)."<sup>60</sup> The article claimed that Premchand was not shocked by *Angāre* due to religious principles, but that it was his respectable sensibility (*jazbat-e-sharāfat*) that had been

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Sajjad Zaheer; Abdul Majid Daryabadi interpreted Mujeeb's likening of Sajjad Zaheer to a beautiful European woman, as praise.

<sup>59</sup> Khalid Alvi *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L 1 Kūnwan, Delhi, 1995. Pg. 28.

<sup>60</sup> *Sach* (Truth), April 21, 1933. NMML "Bad-aqīdgi nahīn, Bad-tamīzi."

disturbed. By condemning *Angāre* as having transgressed a civilizational order, Maulana Daryabadi was communicating his own views of religion and rationality to his audience. He insisted that the *Angāre* authors were cultivating a modernizing project at odds with civilization.

Maulana Daryabadi's call for proscription based on obscenity must also be read against its marked opposition to *Shi'a* newspapers, which called for the proscription of *Angāre* on religious grounds. The statement made by the Central Standing Committee of the All-India Shi'a Conference that the pamphlet "wounded the feelings of the entire Muslim community" objectionable from stand points both of religion and morality, convinced the colonial state to ban *Angāre* under 295-A of the Indian Penal Code which stipulated a fine or prison sentence for any individual who "attempted to insult religion or religious beliefs." That Shi'a authorities wanted to ban *Angāre* on religious grounds was most likely due to their status as a minority within a minority (religious) community. As opposed to Maulana Daryabadi and authorities of Aligarh, who were against affixing *religion* as a category that defined the Muslim community, the representatives of the All-India Shi'a Conference and newspapers had more at stake in defending religion as opposed to universal ethical conduct. The Shi'a newspaper *Sarfaraz*, published the most articles against *Angāre* on the grounds that it offended the *religion of Islam*, particularly laws of blasphemy. In February of 1933, an anonymous poet penned "*Angāre* Sets the World of *Shariah* Ablaze" denouncing Sajjad Zaheer as a "tormentor of the prophet's grave." Particularly suggestive is the line, "had my leader (*imām*) not disappeared, even then, our hands would have reached to murder innocence," an oblique reference that not only lumped together blasphemy and murder as against Islamic law, in effect criminalizing Sajjad Zaheer, but placing the onus on the sinner, rather than the absent leader. Such alarm was likely due to the fear that one of their co-religionists, Sajjad Zaheer, a communist and Marxist,



had not only openly criticized Muslim society, but called negative attention to the Shiʿa community. By claiming that the pamphlet was hurtful to all Muslims on religio-legalistic grounds, Shiʿa authorities were positioning themselves as speaking from within the larger Muslim community. It was an opportunity to assert that they did not fall outside the purview of Muslim society. This was all the more poignant given the fact that a disproportionate number of North Indian Muslim leftists came from Shiʿa backgrounds, a development that has been attributed to the relatively privileged position enjoyed by Shiʿa elites of the *qasbāhs*.<sup>61</sup> If on the one hand the writers of *Angāre*, who were mostly Shiʿa, had denounced the authority of a *qasbāh* that was Aligarh as provincial, then on the other, they were seen to have turned their backs on their Shiʿa co-religionists.

The response by the *Angāre* authors to calls that their publication be proscribed was in English and not Urdu. In the article, “Shall We Submit to Gagging” published in *The Leader* from Allahabad, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, Mahmuduzzafar wrote:

“...the stories of my friend S. Zaheer are concerned chiefly with the criticism and satire of the current Moslem conceptions, life and practices. His attack is directed primarily against the intolerable theological burden that is imposed from childhood upon the average Moslem in this country— a burden that leads to a contortion of the inquisitive or speculative mind and the vital vigours of both man and woman— the authors of this book do not wish to make any apology for it— They only wish to defend the right of launching it and all other vessels like it---they stand for the right of free criticism and free expression in all matters of the highest importance to the human race in general and the Indian people in particular. They have chosen the particular field of Islam, not because they bear it any special malice—but, because being born into that particular society, they felt themselves better qualified to speak for that alone. They were more sure of their ground there.”<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Khizar Humayun Ansari, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought Among North Indian Muslims (1917-1947)*. Pg. 125-26.

<sup>62</sup> *The Leader*, Allahabad, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1933. Khalid Alvi *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, L I Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995. Pg. 101-102.

This response was directed towards the colonial authorities who had banned *Angāre* in line with policies that dictated what constituted 'religious intolerance.' It was a strategic response. If while addressing the Urdu reading public with *Angāre*, the litterateurs were seeking to free *adab* from unjust social hierarchies, then before British colonial authority, they argued that *personal ethics* were sovereign, presupposing a realm of democratic politics and citizenship. Meanwhile, the English language press, which had reported news of the controversy, did not come out in support of *Angāre*, and there was at least one newspaper, *The Star*, which published a piece against the collection.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the *Angāre* authors were trapped between the discourses of *adab* and *akhlāq* as defined by conservative *sharīf* elites, and the expediency of the colonial state, which foreclosed all discussion on ethical conduct within the Muslim public sphere by relegating it into the narrowly defined and state sanctioned category, 'religion.'

It is from within this field of limitations that the formation of a 'League of Progressive Authors' was first announced in an implicitly national appeal, to those who share the goal of 'bring[ing] forth similar collections' both in English and the various vernaculars.<sup>64</sup> Mahmuduzzafar was responding to the colonial state by adopting the language of liberalism: the individual's right to free speech. By describing 'the average Moslem' as subject to the weight of religious belief, he strategically adopted the language liberal democratic principles to voice opposition to the colonial state's ban, just as strategically as he had made claims about civilizational virtue encapsulated in *adab* (and *jawānmardī*) when addressing his vernacular community. The *Angāre* four and their staunchest opponent both exercised ideologies of reason in their ideas of reform, which sought to bring Muslims out of 'superstition.' In fact, as far as 'religion' was concerned, both the progressive (*taraqqi pasand*) authors, as well as the social

<sup>63</sup> *The Star*, 1933, in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML).

<sup>64</sup> *The Leader*, Allahabad, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1933. Khalid Alvi *Angāre*, Educational Publishing House, Laal Kuñwan, Delhi, 1995. Pg. 101-102.

reformists, shared a fundamental vision in their intertwined political and ethical assessments about Muslim society. In evaluating the moral failings of Muslim society, both groups distinguished between, what Ayesha Jalal has referred to as, religion as marker of social difference, and religion as faith (personal or individual belief). As opposed to religion, it was ethics, whether delineated through the category of culture, or whether expressed through that of class, that formed the principal terrain out of which Muslim society was being evaluated.

The *Angāre* authors, however, found themselves doubly trapped. On the one hand there was the language of secularism introduced by the colonial state which pushed religion into the sphere of tradition and the anti-modern; on the other, there were the conservative *sharīf* reformers, who sought to assert their values as hegemonic Muslim ones, as tried to rescue religion from the colonial state by privileging the category of culture. Put another way, the Muslim progressive intellectuals during this period found themselves wedged between their professed universalism (derived from doctrines of socialism and working class internationalism) and the historico-political necessity of addressing the minority question. It was in this context that the *Angāre* authors had introduced into *adab* (as literary aesthetic) the right to free speech, trumping the meaning of *adab* as public ethics— even as this public ethics was the cornerstone of their critique. An emergent Indian nation was intimately linked to aesthetic articulations and re-interpretations of Muslim reform.<sup>65</sup> This was the beginning of *naya adab* (new *adab*).

### **Poetry as Political Performance: The Progressive *Mushāi'rahs***

On a warm day in the summer of 1939, the president of the Rural Poets' Association stood before an audience of peasants of the United Provinces and announced, "we have long sung both the true and false odes of gods, goddesses, saints, yogis, prophets— but now, the time

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<sup>65</sup> The references to newness flood the Urdu magazine and print culture of the period: journals like *Naya Adab* (New Literature), *Naya Daur* (New Era), and *Ajkal* (Nowadays) point to the issue of a modernizing ethics.

has come, not only in this country (*des*), but the world over, for us to sing about the sorrows and pain of the nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine men out of a thousand.<sup>66</sup> In the struggle for leftist hegemony over the nationalist movement, progressive intellectuals, poets, and artists organized indigenous poetry readings and theater, and the *mushā'irah* played a significant role in articulating popular political demands, as Urdu progressive poets harnessed the cultural practice to stage a politics of resistance against both the colonial masters as well as the elites of their own communities. The *mushā'irah* was already a powerful vehicle in disseminating a discourse of collective Muslim identity cultivated over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Such poetry performances were increasingly patronized by political figures, local leaders, university professors and administrators, as well as poets of high literary standing in the decades approaching independence. Ambassadors and diplomats attended *mushā'irahs*, and often times, the assemblies were held in conjunction with a conference of a well-established *anjuman* or a political meeting.<sup>67</sup> Local literary organizations such as the *Bazm-e-Adab* (Gathering of Literature), which emerged from the Anglo-Arabic Oriental College, as well as national institutions such as All-India Radio, were central to the dissemination and transmission of *mushā'irahs* during the first half of the twentieth century. There were *mushā'irahs* in aid of the Red Cross Society, and those organized by the All-India Women's Association for famine relief in Bengal.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Dehāti Shaiyron ki Kanference Ka Khutba-e-Sadarat*, in *Hindustan*, July 3, 1939. NMML.

<sup>67</sup> See Dawn newspaper: Delhi Mushaira, March 20, 1944: Delhi, March 20 ó The 7<sup>th</sup> annual Mushaira of the Bazm-e-Urdu, New Delhi was held in the Arabic College Hall on the nights March 18 and 19. On both the nights, the hall was packed to capacity. Besides high officials of the Government of India, the Consuls General of Iran and Afghanistan attended the function. The first sitting was presided over by Dr. Maulvi Abdul Haq. On the second night the Honorable Sir Sultan Ahmad was in the Chair. He opened the proceedings with a short note on the origin of urdu -ghazalø Among the prominent poets who took part were: Maulana Hasrat Mohani, Mirza Saqib Lakhnavi, Jigar Moradabadi, Ravish Siddiqui, and Semab Akbarabadi. Dawn, 1944, NMML.

<sup>68</sup> Dawn, November 6, 1943: Women's Mushairah in Aid of Bengal Relief; NMML.

Premised upon a wide inclusion of Indians, these *mushā'irahs* were open to the public regardless of religion, caste, and regional affiliation. The *mushai'rah* remained a shared world, for anti-colonial activists within India and abroad. For Khalida Edib Khanum, the Turkish revolutionary and writer who was exiled in India, she visited a *mushai'rah* that allowed her to conceive of a shared culture between Hindus, Indian Muslims, and Muslims from Turkey:

Then came the *Mushaara*. The name took me to old, old Turkey, even before my time. I mean the time when bards with their stringed instruments sang in compositions in popular gatherings in café housesí it was held in a huge tent, so crammed that a great many were obliged to stand, for there were not enough places to sit. The Prime Minister, a Hindu, but himself a poet in Urdu, was to preside. He was in native costume: a pleasant old gentleman who squatted on the splendid sofa, smoked his hookah and listened to the poets with evident enjoymentí First there were the old-fashioned poems in Urduí It was evident that these old pieces were in Persian clichésí When the new-fashioned poets began I understood nothing. It was evident that the Persian clichés were being abandonedí Though I understood less, it was more familiar. It was the modern East.<sup>69</sup>

Many of the more popular *mushai'rahs* may have charged a minimal entrance fee. By the 1940s, a new poet-audience interaction was well in place, and *mushā'irahs* included poetry that commented on both political condition and social mores. In January of 1946, the *Bazm-e-Adab*, Anglo-Arabic College held a *mushā'irah* where ða rather comic situation was created when Bismal Shahjahanapuri recited his ðConnaught Placeð a lively satire on the ðwesternizedð Indian woman, which made it hard for some girl students occupying the front two rows to hide their embarrassment.<sup>70</sup>

During the same decade, the *mushā'irah* was further transformed by progressive Urdu poets who recognized its potential as an effective weapon in combating British imperialism, fascism, as well as a means to fight for the struggles of peasants, workers, and other oppressed

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<sup>69</sup> Adivar, Halide Edib. *Inside India: With An Introduction and Notes by Mushirul Hasan*. (New Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 150

<sup>70</sup> Dawn, January 26, 1946: Delhi Poets Give Recital; NMML.

classes. These goals found their fullest elaboration in the IPTA, (Indian People's Theater Association), formally established as an organization in 1943. Many leading progressive Urdu poets played a prominent role in broadening the reach of the association. Their *mushā'irahs* often cut across communitarian lines, offered a space to articulate political debate, and provided a forum that called for revolutionary change. They arose during a context of the most intense years of colonial repression, when open air meetings, processions, and demonstrations were prohibited. During this period, even as the *mushā'irah* was a social space which was being absorbed into *ashrāf* associational forums, it also went beyond a narrowly defined community of elite self-interest, and spoke to larger ideals of anti-war, anti-fascism, anti-colonialism. Popular poetry became a means of celebrating the achievements of ordinary people and such *mushā'irahs* cut across class lines. In a *mushā'irah* in 1943, hundreds gathered to listen to progressive poet Sahir Ludhianvi (1921-1980) recite one of his most popular *nazms*, "Taj Mahal" in which symbols of imperial grandeur and wealth were disparaged:

The Taj Mahal to you may seem, a mark of love supreme  
*(mazhar-e-ulfat*, lit. a shrine of separation),  
 You may hold this beautiful vale in great esteem,  
 My love, do meet me hence at some other place!

How odd for the poor folk to frequent royal resorts,  
 'Tis strange that the amorous souls should tread the regal paths  
 Trodden once by mighty kings and their proud consorts.  
 Behind the facade of love my dear, you had better see,  
 The marks of imperial might that herein lie screened  
 You who take delight in tombs of kings deceased,  
 Should have seen the hutments dark where you and I did wean.  
 Countless men in this world must have loved and gone,  
 Who would say their loves weren't truthful or strong?  
 But in the name of their loves, no memorial is raised  
 For they too, like you and me, belonged to the common throng.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Sahir Ludhianvi, "Taj Mahal" in, *Kuliyat-e-Sahir Ludhianvi* (Delhi: Naz Publishing House, 1995).

The relationship between the poet and the public shifted as progressives experimented with the *mushā'irah* as a means of mass mobilization during the peak of the nationalist movement. This was a forum where both anti-colonial political resistance, as well as the struggle for legitimacy of leftist ideals was staged. The progressive *mushā'irah* redefined the role of the poet in relation to the audience as his peers: ostensibly, the people were now the poet's equals. In this context, the poet was a public servant. As a new sense of urgency regarding the project of raising consciousness amongst the masses in the context of war, the rise of fascism, and economic crises arose, in what ways were peasants, laborers, and women included within the new *mushā'irahs* as well as excluded? The inclusions and exclusions of those social groups most marginal to the leadership of Indian national politics became a key subject of literary debates within the Urdu progressive literary movement; the leftist Urdu literati developed a new kind of critical attitude towards the *ghazal*, so much so that there was a shift in literary form. Poets were now urged to compose their verse in the *nazm* format. The *ghazal* demands a language in keeping with a specific meter (*radif* and *qafiya*)<sup>72</sup>, while the *nazm* allows the poet to elaborate in a stream of consciousness: in the *nazm*, the poet often expands specific contexts and summons the listener to keep company as he or she discovers the poem in that process. Since the poets who presented their poetry before an audience had the potential to become wildly popular, there was a concern raised by progressives that the link between themselves and the audience not be broken by virtue of the poet's status— in particular, the braggadocio that characterized the *mushā'irahs* that took place in elite settings. The practice of receiving praise before one's peers in elite salon-like gatherings was a strong motif which continued well into the twentieth century. Shabbir Hasan Khan (1896-1982), popularly known by his *takhallus* (pen-name), Josh Malihabadi

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<sup>72</sup> See, Francis Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

(*Passion of Malihabad*) acquiring the title *Shair-i-Inqilab* (Poet of the Revolution) recalls the following in his memoir about the first *mushā'irah* he attended:

The morning after [the *mushā'irah*], I awoke, bathed, had breakfast, and as I was passing by way of my father's bedroom, he called out to me: "Come here, dear son." I very nearly fainted on the spot upon hearing my father's angry voice. And when, trembling, I entered his bedroom, he said, in a very serious tone: "Look here, *sāhib*. It is my heart's deepest desire, that you go before the world, live a long life, that you receive more wealth than I, that you attain greater status in life than I, that in every aspect of life, you advance to a greater position than I. But, listen to me very carefully: there is only one thing I cannot tolerate: that your poetry should outshine my own. In last night's *mushā'irah*, you received more praise than I. From now on, you are prohibited from going to a *mushā'irah* with me, it is completely prohibited. I swear by God, how can a son receive greater praise [at a *mushā'irah*] than his father? I will absolutely not allow this Ganga [river Ganges] to flow backwards, do you hear, son? Have I made myself perfectly clear?"<sup>73</sup>

Not only did the element of individual competition remain, but *mushā'irahs* could still be rather exclusive affairs: this one Josh described took place between elite poets in Lucknow. The poet's entire persona was articulated via competition before his peers regarding the worth of the couplets (*sher*) he composed. The progressive poet's role, claimed Sajjad Zaheer, should not be one of a sovereign holding court however – as progressives claimed was the case in what were called *ravā'itī* or "traditional *mushā'irahs*" – but rather be enablers of democracy and emancipatory politics. This perspective was a marked departure from the romantic holding of court that Farhatullah Baig upheld as the traditional *mushā'irah* in *The Last Flame of Delhi*. The *mushā'irah* was now being used to affect mass politics. In this context, civic virtue and ethics (*adab* and *akhlāq*) were interpreted in a new way, as Sajjad Zaheer's account of a *mushā'irah* in Surat in 1945 reveals:

Progressive poets should cheerfully oblige the audience, and not be coy and fussy like traditional poets at *mushairas*. Whenever I hear good, serious poets complain

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<sup>73</sup> Josh Malihabadi, *õPehla Mushairahõ* in *Yādon Kī Barāt* (Lahore: Maktabah-yi Shi'ar o Adab, Az fah shudah aid shan, 1975) p. 126.



about the stupidity and lack of comprehension of people who congregate at *mushairas*, I am really pained, for I think that on the pretext of complaining about the audience, these poets are, in fact, showing off their own superiority. Yes, it is true that at times, there is at times disrespect shown (*Yeh sahīh hai ke mushairon mein kabhi kabhi tehseen na shanasi hoti hai aur be-adabi ke muzahir hote hain*)<sup>74</sup>. not only should Progressives respect the views of the public, their attitude towards them should be friendly and amiable. If their poetry is not appreciated in a *mushā'irah*, Progressive poets should not show annoyance or sulk. Neither should they imagine that the audience is ignorant (*jāhil*) and stupid, or their own work is too fine and great for them to understand; for even if such is the case, then it was foolish of them to read out an inappropriate work at a *mushā'irah* in the first place. At any rate, if a poet is Progressive, and is faced with such an unpleasant situation, he should think seriously about what it was that caused the poem to be rejected—whether it was the unsuitability of the work recited, some weakness in it, or something not quite right with the recitation. Our people love their writers, and especially their favorite poets. They ignore their defects and weaknesses of character or manners (*akhlāq aur kirdār kī khamiyon aur kamzorīyon*). Therefore, if our poets respect (*izzat*) their audience, and in return for their affection offer them kindness and courtesy (*lutf o madaarat*), loyalty and devotion (*akhlās-o-‘aqīdat ki peshkash karein*), it would be in keeping with the norms of democratic/republican ethics (*jamhūri akhlāq*).<sup>74</sup>

Ethical conduct (*akhlāq*) was being redefined in line with a program for social justice associated with trade unions and labor movements, but as Zaheer would consistently remind his readers in his history of the progressive literary movement, these developments already existed within Islamic thought and traditions. Muslim socialist nationalists, such as Maulana Hasrat Mohani, had played a role in the Khilafat movement during the early 1920s, in arguing that there was no contradiction between Islam and socialism or Islam and communism. Following these intellectuals<sup>ø</sup>lead, Zaheer saw the progressive literary movement as an endeavor which sought to challenge the British imperialism and its sustenance of *feudalism* which victimized the poorer classes. Reflecting upon such developments, he remarked, *ā hadith* (saying of the Prophet) says:

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<sup>74</sup> Sajjad Zaheer *Roshnai*, 1953; Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, Trans, Amina Azfar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 173.

On the day of Judgement, God will say "Bring my friends close to Me." The angels will ask, "Who are Your Friends?" Allah will reply, "The poor and the destitute."<sup>75</sup>

In this context, the *mushā'irah* was reformulated so that the *adab* of friendship became the basis of a democratic *adab*. Sajjad Zaheer advises his contemporaries on the propriety of poetic performance, by expressing the need for a "friendship" between the people and the poet. This kind of advising was not entirely new, as it emerged out of long-standing precepts with the Islamic world about emulating virtues of kindness, affection, and loyalty between friends, in the mirror for princes genre which were re-circulated in *akhlāq* texts. Zaheer drew from notions of *adab* that had already been in circulation within pre-existing political contexts, yet at the same time, he departs significantly from existing formats of the *mushā'irah*. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had brought the audience into an informal terrain of interaction through his public speeches where *adab* was reformulated so there was greater intimacy between the audience and the speaker in relation to forging a collective Muslim identity; in his poetry, Muhammad Altaf Husain Hali had stressed the depravity of the aristocracy and the moral upliftment of the Muslim community, seeing the poor as having been exploited by the rich, a feature which he saw as contravening the precepts of early Muslim society; Farhatullah Baig attempted to recreate a sovereign locale for a collective *ashrāf* identity, one in which *adab* was at once satirized, but also being re-defined to include gestures of diplomacy that reflected the high politics of Muslim collective representation in the interest of safeguarding minority rights. All men understood *adab* in line with a reading of the past characterized by cultural decline. In such contexts, it was not British imperial rule which had to be upended completely, but for the *ashrāf* to have a greater share in that power.

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<sup>75</sup> Sajjad Zaheer *Roshnai*, 1953; Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, Trans, Amina Azfar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 81.

Progressive Urdu poetic symposiums reconfigured the concept of *adab*, by drawing on already emergent notions of democratic parlaying, but in a context of radical politics where the question of social and economic status acquired a new urgency as primarily an anti-colonial project. The latter's attempts to broaden the meaning of community were formulated in a context of mass-mobilization of peasants and workers, efforts which had begun in the late 1920s, as well as widespread debates about the centrality of economic reforms for the life of an emergent Indian nation. In the progressive *mushā'irahs*, there was a self-reflexive consciousness about the poet standing on a stage above the people: the poet's role was to stand before the people as an equal. This new definition of ethics within the political arena was based upon averting Congress hegemony over nationalist politics, by focusing upon substantiating the political rights of the economically disenfranchised, as well as acknowledging minority-based political interests without recourse to the class-based exclusivism of North Indian *ashraf* community. The cultural projects of progressive litterateurs expressed an urgency of change, by drawing from ideas of social change which their predecessors and contemporaries also expressed. The metaphor of the boat on the point of sinking, for instance, yet the political terms shifted as the past was now being read in terms of a social and economic devastation wrought by colonial rule. Progressives, as opposed to many of their poetic-literary fore-bearers, thought it an anathema for *adab* to include any loyalty to British colonial rule. Informed by widespread nationalist critiques that focused upon the consequences of the war in Europe for India, the colonial authorities and a 'passive bourgeoisie' were held responsible for vitiating the Indian people of their resources and lands.

Progressive *mushā'irahs* such as the one that commemorated the twenty-seventh anniversary of the Russian Revolution was held by the Secretary of the Friends of the Soviet

Union in Queens Gardens, Delhi in 1944, were meant to express solidarity with movements for workers' struggles internationally.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, working-class and *inquilābi* (revolutionary) *mushā'irahs* had become increasingly popular amongst the Urdu-speaking industrial workers of Kanpur, Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Calcutta. This coincided with widespread workers' strikes during the mid 1930s. For Marxist progressive intellectuals, the *mushā'irahs* revealed ebullitions from the hot-springs of growing peasant and *mazdūr* (workers) struggles on the basis of which we can already claim to possess a proletarian poetry as vital as exists anywhere in the world today.<sup>77</sup> Recalling the thousands of workers who had attended the progressive *mushā'irah* in Calcutta, the communist poet Ali Sardar Jafri noted that, "I personally welcome a large audience; a book of poetry at the most sells 2,000 to 3,000 copies, but thousands hear a *mushā'irah*. Think of the tremendous impact, and the quotability of Urdu is fantastic, the rapport tremendous."<sup>78</sup> Progressive poets such as Asrar-ul-Haque Majaz, Ali Sardar Jaffri, Kaifi Azmi, and Makhdoom Mohiuddin often presented their poetry in these settings. These poems were almost immediately recorded in leftist journals. Some of Majaz's poetry ran as follows:

The day we rise in revolt, will be the last day of this world  
 We will make our dreams into reality,  
 We are workers, we are workers.<sup>79</sup>

The following, for instance, became an anthem for the Urdu-speaking urban workers of Calcutta:

We are tigers, roaring as we stride,

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<sup>76</sup> Dawn, Dawn, Delhi, Saturday November 4, 1944; Mushaira to Commemorate Russian Revolution Day Delhi, Nov. 3. The Secretary of the Friends of the Soviet Union, Delhi, writes that on the occasion of the 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian Revolution, the Friends of the Soviet Union has organized a Mushaira on Sunday November 5 at 9pm at the Hardinge Library, Queen's College. Sir Syed Raza Ali (MLA, Central) has kindly consented to preside. Distinguished Urdu poets including Hafez, Faiz, Majaz, Taseer, Jazbi, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Ravish Siddiqui, Nehal Shakeel, Kaifi Azmi and others will participate in the function. The admission in the Mushairah shall be by tickets. Rates of the admission tickets is Rs. 10, Rs. 5, Rs. 2-4, and Rs. 1-2.

<sup>77</sup> Mulk Raj Anand (ed. Sudhi Pradhan) *Marxist Cultural Movements in India: Chronicles and Documents* (Calcutta: Santi Pradhan, 1975), p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> Anil Segal, *Ali Sardar Jafri, The Youthful Boatman of Joy* (New Delhi: Bhartiya Jnanpith Press, 2001) p. 125.

<sup>79</sup> *jis roz baghawat kardaingay, dunya mein qayaamat kardaingay / khwaboN ko haqeeqat kardengay mazdoor hain hum, mazdoor hain hum; Chingari*, 1938 NMML

Hovering like the clouds,  
Singing the melody of life,  
The red flag is in our hands.<sup>80</sup>

This politicization of the *mushā'irah* went hand in hand with organizing workers' unions and peasant collectives, ensuring that a vibrant labor movement was taking hold in working-class Muslim communities. Leftists such as K.M. Ashraf<sup>81</sup> who faced the ire of the administration when organizing workers in Aligarh<sup>82</sup> were pivotal to establishing *kisān sabhas* and trade unions.<sup>81</sup> The links between workers' struggles and radical student politics influenced the cultural climate of Aligarh. By the mid-1930s, progressive Urdu intellectual culture had taken an entire generation of students there by storm<sup>83</sup> it was an intellectual culture that resisted an increasingly authoritarian vision of the university administration, in particular, the demands that students display homogeneity of Muslim culture. The Muslim University Gazette repeatedly stressed the need for uniformity in dress, in speech, and in manners, for its students were considered to be the "the custodians of Muslim culture and religion in India."<sup>82</sup> After numerous eulogies to Aligarh as the Muslim community *par excellence* of India, and its students as builders of a moral collectivity, the Vice Chancellor asserted that he did "not much like diversity as a method of living" in his opening address in August 1935. In a long-winded speech, he stressed that students should strictly follow the codes of deference as laid down by the administration, before senior students, alumnae, and university authority.<sup>83</sup> He further stipulated that students who were not punctual in their prayers would be liable to a fine.<sup>84</sup> Aligarh's

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<sup>80</sup> *Sher hain chalte haiN darate huay / baadloN ki tarah manDlaate huay, zindagi ki raagni gaatey huay / laal jhanDa hai hamare haaTh meiN* Sajjad Zaheer *Roshnai*, 1953; Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, Trans, Amina Azfar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 144.

<sup>81</sup> *Hindustan: Muslim Kisan Sabha Kyun?* 1937 NMML.

<sup>82</sup> Muslim University Gazette (AIG) 1935 Roll No. 30; August 22, 1935 issue, pg. 2 NMML

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

administrative bodies intensified their campaign to define the ideal Muslim in accordance with a narrowly defined legal culture, increasingly militant in its uniformity. In the same year that AIPWA was officially established, the romantic revolutionary poet of Lucknow, Asrar-ul-Haque Majaz (1909-1955), graduated from Aligarh Muslim University, and bestowed his alma mater<sup>o</sup> which had, over the course of two generations, cultivated specific rationalist-legal prescriptions of *adab* and *sharāfatō* with a gift. The poem he penned in 1936 was entitled *ōNazr-e Aligarhō* (*Gift to Aligarh*), and verses of the *nazm* continue to be sung today. *Nazr* literally refers to a gift given by a subject to a sovereign as symbolic gesture of honor, and the sarcastic implications of this were not entirely lost on the Aligarhists who adopted Majaz's poem as the university anthem. There were several pointed verses of Majaz's original version which were removed, and to date the *taranna* exists in its censored form.<sup>85</sup> (I have italicized the censored verses)

This is my garden, and I am the nightingale of this garden  
 I am the overflowing sight of the Narcissus flower, I am the embedded tresses of a plant of sweet odor  
*Each moment here the worn-out wine is cast anew in a fresh wine-bowl (saghir-nau)*  
*Beauty drips from the blossoms, youth swells from the flowers.*  
 The light of the vault of the sacred territory of Mecca, that light glows here as well  
 In every corner of this desert, the stream of life is here as well.  
*In this idol-house (but-khana) of Islam, there are beloved idols (asnam) and idol-makers, too*  
*In this tavern (mai-khana) of civilization (tehzib), there are swords and wine-bowls, too.*  
*Here, the lightning of beauty strikes; here the rains of holy light (noor) fall,*  
*Each moment here is a song, each tear a pearl.*  
 Each evening here are the evenings of Egypt, each dawn here is the dawn of Shiraz  
 The pain of an entire world is found here, and the rhythms from all over the world exist here too  
*From this earth we rose in flight, we destroyed the stars of heaven's firmament*  
*We have whispered with Venus (Naheed), we have kept relations with Pleides (Parveen).*  
 In this gathering (*bazm*), we have thrown spears; in this gathering, we have kissed daggers,  
 In this gathering we have fallen in restlessness, in it, we have drunkenly swung to and fro.  
*Thousands of our defeats have come here, we ourselves having set everything ablaze,*  
*Then the entire world looked upon us, and it was us who put out this fire.*

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<sup>85</sup> Asrarul-Haq Majaz released only one collection of poetry during his lifetime, *Ahang*. Asrarul-Haq Majaz, *Ahang* (Lucknow: Maktaba Deen-o-Adab, Ameenudaullah Park, 1995 reprint) p. 66-68. (The collection was first published in 1943, but the poems were written earlier).

*Here we have scaled ladders, from here we have become the snipers  
 Here we have torn down (monuments); from here we have removed the crown (taj).  
 Each breath here is the effect of selfhood (khudi), each dream itself an interpretation,  
 Upon the hoofs and horns of policies (tadbeer), destiny (taqdeer) bows its head here.  
 Within this outmoded puff of hookah/garden (gulkidah), a fire is yet to blaze again,  
 Again the clouds will thunder, again lightening shall strike.<sup>86</sup>*

This *nazm* contains several verses which draw from a wide ranging vocabulary of Sufi mystical thought: the *bazm*, the quintessential gathering of mystics and lovers as the space of illicit desire, and drunkenness; the *maikhana* (tavern) is a space which is equivocated to the *but-khana* which refers at once to the idol-house, but also to the home of the beloved. The censured verses are the ones which refer to Islam as an idol-house and those which call for radical change within Aligarh, calling for a shift in university policy and leadership. This poem, like the collection *Angāre*, is a politicized literary intervention that aims at disrupting an older generation's definition of *sharīf* culture. Yet, the poem challenges *sharīf* authority without implicitly or explicitly referencing western modernity. Majaz had many allegiances: he was from Lucknow, was known as an ardent lover of Aligarh, was closely linked to Communist politics, and actively supported the demand for Pakistan. What made the verses particularly unsettling for Aligarh university authorities was that it adopted a radical revolutionary language which at once celebrated the diversity of Aligarh's Muslim student population, proclaiming admiration for the institution, while also deploying Sufi poetic and mystical discourses in open defiance of governing bodies. It calls into question which Aligarh is being praised: an older vanguard of elites or a new generation of radicalized youth.

The links between student politics and the workers' movement by the early 1940s introduced a revolutionary language to *adab*. Organizations such as trade unions provided the

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<sup>86</sup> Asrarul-Haq Majaz, *Ahang* (Lucknow: Maktaba Deen-o-Adab, Ameenudaullah Park, 1995 reprint) p. 66-68. (The collection was first published in 1943, but the poems were written earlier).

impetus through which *‘inqilabī mushā’irahs’* (revolutionary *mushā’irahs*) were staged by workers. The urgency expressed in the progressive political language by the early 1940s, had much to do with how India was being seen at once on the brink of economic collapse, as well as on the threshold of independence. Upon witnessing over ten thousand workers present at a *mushā’irah* in Bombay in November of 1942, Sajjad Zaheer commented:

The revolutionary significance of this assembly consists in this: It is the Muslim proletariat which has come out as the leader of the most significant and vital trend of modern Urdu literature – the proletariat has snatched the *mushā’irah* away from the decadent feudal and effete bourgeoisie. It has shown how our cultural heritage can be preserved, how it can be used as one of the most potent weapons to unite the people and strengthen and fortify their morale.<sup>87</sup>

As the *mushā’irah* was heralded as a cultural harness to political liberation for the masses, and *adab* was further transformed so that democratic equality was based foremost upon immediate expulsion of British colonial rule, the question of aesthetic standards in relation to popular expression became a point of debate.

Increasingly, the *ghazal* form of poetry was seen as an inappropriate means to articulate the workings of the peasant mind, or the worker’s mental level.<sup>88</sup> These remarks were in keeping with the Marxist telos adopted by progressives associated with the Communist Party, whereby the peasant and worker were seen to be in possession of revolutionary potential, but unable to express it without intellectuals who would assist them in developing a proper political consciousness. Poetry had to be reformulated so that it was robust, as opposed to effete: meanwhile, laborers were perceived at once as child-like but also, real men, as opposed to the bourgeoisie, whose life of leisure had rendered them lazy and debauched. Critiques of the

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<sup>87</sup>Khizar Humayun Ansari, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought Among North Indian Muslims, 1917-1947* (Lahore: Book Traders, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1990) p. 176

<sup>88</sup>Sajjad Zaheer *Roshnai*, 1953; Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, Trans, Amina Azfar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.



aristocracy had already found expression in the writings of H li, as well as Iqbal. Iqbal went as far as engaging with socialist ideals in his poetry, so in *Banda-e-Mazdoor Ko Ja Kar Mera Paigham De* (*Go to the Worker and Give Him My Message*), Iqbal lamented the condition of the poor and the working class, as well as how the capitalist cheated the worker: *makkar ki chālon se bāzī le gayā sarmayadār / intehā'ī sādgi se khā gayā mazdūr māt*. In Iqbal's 1935 poem, *Lenin*, Iqbal thought highly enough of the leader to have him be embraced by the gates of paradise, where Lenin then espouses a passionate denunciation of imperialism and capitalism, calling upon God to destroy them. Iqbal's poetry lent itself easily to Marxist concepts of social justice, and thus served as a mode of inspiration for progressive poets, who in turn aimed to simplify the language and to relinquish a great deal of Persian phrases present in the *ghazal*. Ali Sardar Jaffri recalled an incident when a *ghazal* was recited at a *mushā'irah* where the audience consisted largely of workers, and the poem used words which were not part of a popular linguistic register. After the event, a worker asked Jaffri if he could explain to him the meaning of an ornate phrase used by the poet, with Jaffri later commenting that the poet whom the worker adopts as his own, has greater responsibilities.<sup>89</sup> In Ali Sardar Jaffri's view, poetry should appeal to the masses, the overarching concern being that aesthetics were inseparable from the question of the economic and social enfranchisement. The voice of the worker had to be taken into consideration in the context of creating a new kind of leadership, as the political projects of student movements met with those of workers' unions. The following incident was recorded by another progressive writer, Krishan Chander, in the literary magazine 1939, referring to a literary gathering in Hyderabad:

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<sup>89</sup> Ali Sardar Jaffri, *Taraqqi Pasand Adab Tahrik Ki Nisf Sadi* (Delhi: Shu'bah-yi urdu, Dihli University: Taqsimakar Educational Publishing House, n.d.), p. 63-64.

Hari Mama, a worker from Bhopal, was quite involved in the trade unions. He wanted to remove all the veils (*pardah*) and look at the actual picture in a truthful light. I asked him, "How was the conference?" He said, "There were very few workers there. The next time you come here, I will take you to where the workers are. But the difficulty is this: you write very little for us poor men." I said, "No, we write for you only!" He said, "Wrong. You sit above us and look down towards us. Come down from where you are, amongst us. *Then* write, *then* we will understand." I became very agitated, "I don't understand what you mean!" He said, "That is fine. I also didn't understand so many things about your conference. If we cannot understand what we each of us are saying then how can we go forward together?" I asked, "Can you explain what you mean?" He said, "You are the *adīb* [writer], and I am the one who has to explain *meaning* to you?! Fine, listen. In your conference, there are many beautiful things that are said as though in our factories we are making silk and georgette. But at this time, we workers do not want silk or georgette. We want strong *kappas* (cotton) and sturdy cloth. When the entire world's factories belong to us, then we too will make plenty of silk and georgette. Right now, though, we want cloth that works for us, necessary for us (*apnī matlab ka kapdā chāhiye*)! You don't give us this cloth; you speak a great deal, but when it comes to speaking out at the moment of action (*asli mauqa*), you remain silent."<sup>90</sup>

It was within this wider context of workers' struggles that Marxist progressive intellectuals perceived the *ghazal* as belonging to a degenerate aristocracy, and it was eschewed in favor of the *nazm*.

### **Class, Gender, and the Sexual Politics of the *Mushai'rah***

Poetry had to be "simplified," and had to be "realistic" in order to be rendered useful. This was a highly gendered process. Marxist-progressive writers characterized the bourgeoisie as "effete" and feminine, as opposed to "strong" and "vigorous" workers, who were simultaneously romanticized as representing the authentic culture of India. Whereas in the late nineteenth century, the imagery and topos associated with the *ghazal* was bemoaned as morally illicit, poets

<sup>90</sup> Krishan Chander, *Adab Ka Naya Mood*, in *Adab*, March 1939, NMML; See also, Ali Sardar Jaffri, *Taraqqi Pasand Adab Tahrik Ki Nisf Sadi* (Delhi: Shu'bah-yi urdu, Delhi University: Taqsimakar Educational Publishing House, n.d.), p. 37-8.

such as Azad and Hali had not abandoned the structure and form of the *ghazal*, nor its Persianate influence (even as Persian was denounced). Their critical attitude towards the *ghazal* survived into the twentieth century, and was easily appropriated by Marxist literary critics and poets, many of whom departed entirely from its structure and form. Whereas *mushā'irahs* up until the mid-nineteenth century focused primarily upon the *form* of the poetry (rhyme, meter, schema), later *mushā'irahs* began to emphasize the socially transformative power of the content itself. However, it was the Marxist distrust of the *ghazal* that ultimately led to a greater valuation and use of the *nazm* form.

While Marxist-progressive litterateurs and poets attempted to read against existing narratives of decline, the telos of progress which pervaded much of the poetry was based upon a vision of the past that was tied to moral judgements about aristocratic decadence. The *ghazal* was criticized as a decadent form of poetry which, since it etymologically referred to 'talking about love to a woman', was accused of a *feudal degeneracy* not limited to a Muslim aristocracy alone. Since poetry was seen to be harnessed to mass mobilization efforts, the form that poetry took became all the more significant. Whereas critiques which have been deemed as 'Islamic revivalist' such as Hali bemoaned the state of contemporary 'culture', progressive Marxists articulated this criticism by emphasizing the category of 'class'. Like many of the *ashrāf* reformers before them, Marxist intellectuals perceived decadence in forms of poetry which purportedly betrayed realism for 'romance' though in the Marxist rendering, the decadence was attributed to the lifestyles of propertied classes, as opposed to its dismissal on grounds of it representing a 'degenerate Persian culture'. The chief criticism that many leading Progressives launched against the *ghazal* was that it was 'unrealistic', as opposed to, for instance, folk

culture, which in Zaheer's view expressed 'the peasant mind's attachment to realism.'<sup>91</sup> Chaste Urdu was now being defined as 'keeping close to the life of the people and their language that fresh blood becomes available in our literature' it becomes free from affectation, and its stock of words can be increased without impairing its intelligibility to the common man.'<sup>92</sup> In their criticisms of how the *ghazal* represented either feudal decadence or capitalist exploitation, Marxist-inspired progressives produced a new moral economy in politics and literature during the transition to national independence. Even as the vocabulary of this moral economy was new, in that progressives critiqued the cultural exclusivist rhetoric found in both nationalist politics of the Congress as well as within conservative strands of minoritarian organizations' this vocabulary drew substantially from existing ideas of modernity, namely, *ashraf* debates about reform and the historical failures of the modernizing elite. Furthermore, it was one that did not envision *qaum* to be the only way to think about the nation at this juncture.

The way of reform (*islāh-pasandi ka rāsta*) and the way of revivalism (*ahyāyat ka rāsta*) is wrong' the reason being that neither can fundamentally change the old system. *Islāh* (reform) is only desirable in those conditions if it helps us to make a revolutionary (*inquilabī*) change. We should certainly learn from history, the achievements of our ancestors (*islāf ke karnāmon*), and our cultural heritage (*tehzībi wārsay*)' ancient (*qadīm*), and past societal (*guzre hue māshī*), economic, political, and cultural eras cannot be brought back. However, the treasures of knowledge, skill, art, literature, and culture that our ancestors built with their physical, mental, and spiritual labor, and which are the source of our present civilization, are our most valuable assets. To protect these assets and use them wisely is an essential element of progress' It is only through them that we can meet the demands of our lives and of the present age, and create new culture' The [Progressive Literary] Movement should relate to the common people of the country' the laborers, the peasants, and the middle classes, and that it should oppose those who exploited and oppressed these people; and the literary effort should create awareness, unity and enthusiasm for taking practical steps among the people, and that it should combat all those tendencies that gave rise to despair' .This was possible only if we consciously took part in the struggle for the independence of the homeland (*vatan*), as well as in movements for the

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Sajjad Zaheer *Roshnai*, 1953; Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, Trans, Amina Azfar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 151.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 152.

improvement in the lot of the common people of our country (*mulk*)í . This does not mean that writers must turn into political workers, but it does mean that they cannot ignore politics.<sup>93</sup>

Muhammad Iqbal had already started to prefer the *nazm* to the *ghazal* as the format for poetry, but under the Marxist litterateurs, the critique of the *ghazal* was further elaborated. Ali Sardar Jafri (1913-2000) was one of the staunchest critics of the *ghazal*, claiming that the genre was òa product of Asian decadence,ö the basic theme of which was òromantic loveö and òwhereas courtly niceties do lend it a technical gloss, they also constrict its bodyö before adding that òthe *ghazal* was too fragile to move with the brutal mechanics of modern life.ö<sup>94</sup> Nor was Jaffri alone in this view. Josh Malihabadi, who would himself come to be heavily criticized for his frank autobiographical reflections about his love affairsö seen as perpetuating òfeudal decadenceö, also decried the *ghazal* as ònothing more than *guftagu kardan ba zanan*ö (engaging with women in small talk) stating that òspeech without thought is chatter, that *ghazal* poets indulge in endlessly addressing beloveds who don't existí the *ghazal* is an unnatural thing. It should be wound up.ö<sup>95</sup>

Within the dominant strand of progressive literary culture, the *ghazal* not only was viewed as degenerate, sorrowful, and ornate, but the idea of its triviality was linked to òwomen's speech.ö Although reformers throughout the nineteenth century had critiqued the *ghazal* as being illicit love poetry, and associated with the perceived moral depravity of homo-erotic content, it had never been explicitly associated with feminized speech. Marxists pushed this a bit further: the *ghazal* simply was not masculine enough to carry the political weight of protest against the

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<sup>93</sup> Sajjad Zaheer *Roshnai*, 1953; Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, Trans, Amina Azfar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 46

<sup>94</sup> Hameed Akhtar, *Rudad-e-Anjuman*, Minutes from Meeting of Progressive Writers, 1946-7.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

state. Such criticisms of the *ghazal* as defunct and debauched overlapped with the moralizing tenor which progressives accused their conservative contemporaries and fore-bearers of lauding. The critique of the *ghazal* as a feminine, and therefore weak poetic genre, stood in sharp contrast to the more explicit articulations in progressive manifestoes and journals, regarding the liberation of women, and their inclusion within the public sphere. That the *ghazal* was now tainted as *feminized*, and rendered as weak, spoke to how existing patriarchal ideologies informed the emergence of a new kind of masculinity in politics of the left: the *nazm* was heralded as having the strength to withstand *realpolitik*. Recalling a *mushā'irah* organized for handloom craftsmen in Malegaon, Sajjad Zaheer claimed that, "The *ghazals* were still attractive, the accounts of love and passion touched the heart, but fervor was created in a *mushā'irah* only when the good poems were recited, in which the poet attacked the oppressors, exposed hypocrisy, described the real condition of the masses, delivered a message of unity, action, and struggle, and predicted a future which was dominated by freedom, prosperity and justice."<sup>96</sup> One might compare this idealization of poetry as an instrument of social change, to how Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had opined that if Hali's *Musaddas* was recited in a *majlis* by courtesans, the very act of its performance would offset the morally dubious nature of that setting.<sup>97</sup> In Zaheer's discussion, the "good poem" of the *mushā'irah* is based on a form and structure having to do with concerns of social justice (i.e., "real condition of the masses") whereas for Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the content of the *Musaddas* sung in a familiar form, had to do with social reform.

In the second Progressive Writers Manifesto, written in 1949, the communist hegemony over the literary movement was asserting itself in even stronger ways, in a political context

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<sup>96</sup> Sajjad Zaheer *Roshnai*, 1953; Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, Trans, Amina Azfar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 260.

<sup>97</sup> (Ed., Javed Majeed, Christopher Shackleton), *Hali's Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 70.

wherein the activities of the CPI were increasingly curtailed by the nascent Indian state. The purpose of progressive poetry, the new manifesto declared, was to avoid versifying about *gham-e duniya* (the sorrows of life), and to put emphasis rather on *barāy-e dunyā* (hopes of the world) within poetry, linking anything which hinted of romance to a lack of political will, an absence of activism, given the acquired connotations of romantic poetry with an effeminate pining away. Some of this gendered posturing has had to do with the imprisonment of many Marxist progressive literati during this period: in letters to their wives (a detailed analysis of which is outside the scope of this chapter) written from prison cells, revolution was imagined in a romantic mode, while simultaneously emphasized in terms of a masculinized resistance to both the colonial authorities and to an Indian nation-state which was seen to bow down before the interests of capitalist classes. The letters spoke of separation, but these were also notes to their wives requesting that books be mailed to them in jail, so they could continue with the labor of translating their writings from English to Urdu. News about their comrades was also requested. In their absence, the wives of progressive writers served as substitute political organizers. Progressive notions of realism responded to existing narrations of Indo-Muslim decline as well as appropriating Marxist-orientalist understandings of the eighteenth century as a period of aristocratic debauchery. Meanwhile, even as progressive political agendas purportedly heralded women as subjects in their own right, the new guidelines of poetry and prose continued to be dominated by male poets and writers. As Priyamvada Gopal has pointed out, the deployment of the rhetoric of heterosexual masculinity in relation to radical literature of the time is not unusual ó similar issues were expressed in Popular Front literature in the US, which presented left ÷virile poeticsö in opposition to ÷effeteö modernism or bourgeois literature.<sup>98</sup> Progressive readings of

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<sup>98</sup> Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation, and the Transition to Independence* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005) p. 29

the past, particularly notions of decline, were intimately bound up with questions of masculinity and femininity, as the *nazm* was privileged over the *ghazal* as the more appropriate way to express political resistance.

The nation was being imagined in masculine ways. Ahmed Ali called for a "more virile national literature, pulsating with fresh blood and throbbing with new life" and Zaheer cast his utopia in terms of a "young man's world, full of love and the charm of a well-formed body and eyes which captivate."<sup>99</sup> Patriarchal ideologies were not restricted to metaphors and tropes, but also played a role in institutional practice. In Sudhi Pradhan's introduction to the three volume collection of documents relating to the PWA and the IPTA, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, Anil D'Silva, the first Secretary General of IPTA, a woman, is described as being a Ceylonese girl who is "self-willed" and "spontaneous" and seen to be having affairs "with the big guns of the Party."<sup>100</sup> As the *nazm* came to be seen by leftists as a poetic genre associated with freedom from certain *ashraf*-defined social hierarchies, the gender politics it seemed to espouse at times privileged a male-dominated space where women were to be liberated by the politics initiated by progressive men. It seems that for all their progressivism, many male Urdu writers seemed to have been unable to break out of the *ashraf* conservatism entirely. In Kaifi Azmi's *nazm*, *Uth Meri Jaan, Mere Saath Hi Chalna Hai Tujhe* (*Rise, Darling, You Shall Have to Walk With Me*) there is no ambiguity about the role of the female beloved: she is asked to follow the male progressive-leftist in his resistance against the political order. Indeed, her very freedom lay in this act. The entire *nazm* is framed as an imperative, the refrain being "you must" or "you shall have to" as the poet calls upon the female beloved to rise up and take her destiny into her own hands, towards freedom. Kaifi Azmi recited the *nazm* at a *mushā'irah* in Hyderabad in 1940:

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> Ibid



Fragrance comes from flying, open locks of hair,  
Not from within sorrowful tresses.  
There is another paradise,  
Which does not lie at the side of a man,  
It is upon that free manner  
That you must persist, be obstinate,  
In that which I burn  
You too must burn within that fire.  
Rise, my darling,  
You shall have to walk with me.

Until now, the chronicles of history,  
Has not even known of your worth [not given you respect]  
There is light in your eyes,  
Not only watery tears.  
You may have been defeated by fate,  
But never did you agree to it.  
You are a reality,  
Not simply an interesting story (*afsana*).  
There is an exquisite calamity (*qayamat*) in every mode (*ada*) of yours,  
Not just your youth.  
You must change  
That mild autumn wind (*punwan*) of your history,  
Rise, my darling,  
You shall have to walk with me.<sup>101</sup>

Even as the *nazm* proclaims that a woman's liberation lies not in the arms of the man, it also insists that, "the fire in which I burn, you too must burn with me." Such a directive is explicitly associated with the fire of revolutionary politics, yet one cannot but note its insistence of women joining their men in an honorable cause. The *nazm* also proclaims the beloved as a woman who is "not simply an interesting story, but a reality," demanding that the woman change her place in history and society, which have long denied her a voice. Yet, that subject position can only be transformed if she gets up with her male lover, with whom she must walk alongside in order to progress forwards, literally. Liberation is being heralded as a self-chosen act, yet it is

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<sup>101</sup> Kaifi Azmi

very much framed from the masculine subject position, where the male poet leads the beloved to her true destiny: himself. Much of this is consistent with progressive readings of the past which was depicted as *ōdarkö*, *ōasleepö*, and *ōpassiveö*. In presenting this new utopia, progressive litterateurs were drawing from notions of freedom that were attached to persisting national patriarchal ideals. This utopia of was about moving forward, and hence giving up any mode of sorrow or self-pity; while the *nazm* celebrates the woman as an independent, autonomous being, free from the constraints of seclusion and *purdāh* implied by free-flowing tresses, her liberation is only possible through her acceptance of a specific narrative of progress as defined by leftist men.

One of Ali Sardar Jaffri's most famous *nazms*, *Nīnd (Sleep)*, was first composed as a gift to his son in the late 1940s, while he was in jail during the Quit India Movement, before being recited in *mushāi'rahs*:

The night is beautiful, why does sleep evade me?

The day's gazes of indignation, is lost now in the shadows  
The sound of iron bracelets, the clanking of chains  
The sharp reverberation of prisoners' breaths  
The prison guards' deeds, their torrent of insults.  
The silence of helplessness, the complaints of silence, in the covered darkness  
The playful young dawn from the thorn-filled stars  
Has come and crossed the iron boundaries  
And in her tunic has brought the fragrance of the jungles  
And has brought me the coolness of the mountains

The night is beautiful, why does sleep evade me?

Her chest is a dark blue, and dark blue are her young arms  
Her forehead a galaxy, upon which rests a half-moon  
Her apparel of velvet darkness quivers  
The dark tresses of time, upon her shoulders of silence  
They bend down and release a fragrance upon the lips of the earth  
From the pearls of her teeth, soft dew-like kisses begin to laugh

The night is beautiful, why does sleep evade me?

The night, she takes her place in the swings of the moon  
And the stars of the sky within their tiny hands  
Begin to knit a magic  
The sounds of the crickets, are speaking a story  
Far from the jail, there is the sound of a wedding flute  
And the train rails sing a lullaby

The night is beautiful, why does sleep evade me?

Every night, the sleep from my eyes...  
Is unfaithful to me  
And every night she leaves the jail, leaves me all alone  
And in a neighborhood of Bombay, she goes and knocks on the door of my home  
And in the eyes of a small boy's childhood  
She mixes a dream made of sweet honey  
And in the guise of a fairy, she rocks his cradle, and sings a lullaby<sup>102</sup>

In this *nazm*, slumber is impossible, given the clanking of chains, the sounds of the prisoners wailing, the shouts of the prison guards. Slumber here is anthropomorphized into a female beloved, at once a seductress and a mother; slumber's seduction lies in the fact that the political prisoner cannot rest. Despite the fact that the night is beautiful, the material conditions of the jail elicit a constant alertness. Slumber has had a particular relevance in the narratives of Muslim decline as I discussed in chapter one (we saw this in Hali's *Musaddas* as well as in Iqbal's *Shikwa* and *Javab-e-Shikva*). In Jaffri's poem, it is the awareness of a wider world of injustices, which disallows slumber: the desire to sleep is countered by the stark realities of life around the prisoner within the jail cell. At the same time, the desire expressed here is to return to the home as the place of innocence. In this sense, the ethical choice is to *not* slumber, as the beauty of the night is coveted by the darkness of injustice and poverty. The world of the home is romanticized, and cast as a space of innocence. It is clear that there is no stark distinction

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<sup>102</sup> Ali Sardar Jaffri

between the home and the world in this nationalist rendering given the politicized aesthetic of Jaffri's poem, the beloved (or slumber) moves between the political realm of the jail cell, as well as into the home. At the same time, it is in the realm of the home, in Bombay's *basti*, where crickets chirp, the sounds of the wedding flute (*shehnā'ī*) can be heard, where the soft and slow-ness of a lullaby is present— a lullaby no less provided by train rails, a stock metaphor for progress and modernization. The home is rendered as the as a place that is static and unchanging save for the night as beloved fairy who rocks the child to sleep.

I have already discussed briefly in the introduction of this dissertation the issue of how nationalist ideology has been theorized by South Asian historiographical scholarship, and how Partha Chatterjee's formulation about Indian nationalist discourse in relation to the particularities of colonial rule generated outlined a particular reading of Indian nationalism promulgated by Indian elites. Arguing that the separation of the private/public, and the home and the world gender division provided a resolution between conflicting claims of nationalist discourse and modernization in colonial and post-colonial Indian society, Chatterjee elaborates a framework for understanding the formation of national identity through the dichotomy of gender in the Indian nationalist project of the nineteenth century. For Chatterjee, the separation of the domain of culture into two spheres, the "material" and the "spiritual" made it possible for colonized Indian elites to learn the superior Western modes of organizing material life and to integrate them into their own cultures without threatening the self-identity of their national culture. Science, technology, and rational forms of economic organization and modes of state-craft, which had given Europeans the power to conquer Indians, belonged to the material domain. Receiving knowledge and becoming educated from Western modes of thought and institutions, therefore, should not mean the imitation of Western ways in every aspect of life. Chatterjee then argues

that the discourse of nationalist elites links the material/spiritual distinction to the one between the "outer" and the "inner" who then apply the inner/outer distinction to the matter of day to day life separates Indian social life into *ghar* and *bahir* (home and world). In this schema, the world is the external, the sphere of the material, whereas the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's authentic identity, and while the world is a dangerous space where material interests are pursued, and where practical considerations reign supreme (the sphere of men), the home in its essence must be unaffected by profane activities, and woman therefore is its representation. According to Chatterjee, Indian nationalist discourse asserted that the English had failed to colonize the inner, essential identity of the East, yet in arguing that nationalist discourse was structured in such dichotomies, Chatterjee ends up reifying distinctions of public and private, home and world, as well as gender binaries in relation to Indian nationalism. In actuality, the issue has been much more complex. Not only do such distinctions fall flat given the role of the colonial state in the purportedly private realm of the nineteenth century as well as the intimate link between aesthetics and politics within Urdu poetics as I have shown in the previous chapters, but nationalist discourse itself was a varied phenomenon. Urdu anti-colonial progressive poetics drew sustenance from discourses of religiously-informed cultural accommodation.

Additionally, as many feminist historians have already pointed out, the notion of gender dichotomies structuring nationalist discourses make little sense when instead of examining the discursive nature of texts that proclaim women to be the bearers of tradition and symbols cultural/religious authenticity, we turn to the writings of women themselves. When one examines the conversations and debates around the progressive *mushā'irahs* of the 1940s (and indeed those which stretched well into the post-1947 period), we see that not only were poetic

symposiums the vehicles to popularize socialist and communist platforms, but they were intimately linked to gender and sexual politics during the shift to independent nation-hood. Within these spaces, as questions arose regarding the liberation of women from specific *ashraf* norms, progressive women writers noted how a male-dominated rhetoric prevailed. Such rhetoric did not go without critique, evident in Ismat Chughtai's essay, *Bombay Se Bhopāl Tak (From Bombay to Bhopal)*, an account of how a group of progressives travel by train to participate in a conference and stage a *mushā'irah* which I discuss at the end of this chapter.

In a 1972 interview with the literary journal *Mahfil*, Ismat Chughtai (1911-1991), reputed as one of Urdu progressive fiction's boldest social critics, rhetorically quipped, "Why write about somebody or something you don't know about?" What has typically drawn attention to Chughtai's literary prose was the frankness with which she wrote about the lives of women behind *pardah*, and her tenacious disruption of societal norms governing *sharif* middle-class Muslim women. She was one of the most prolific writers of Urdu literature in the twentieth century. Ismat Chughtai attended the first meeting of the Progressive Writers' Association in Lucknow, while she was working towards her B.A. degree; she had already begun writing in secret, and it was while in college that she published her first short story, *Fasādi (Troublemaker)*, in the prestigious literary magazine, *Sāqī*. Between 1939 and 1941, she taught at the Raj Mahal Girls' School in Jodhpur, and then went on to become Inspector of Schools in Bombay. A few years after the furor over *Angāre*, it was Ismat Chughtai who was at the center of a literary scandal: several angry letters flooded the Urdu journal, *Adab-e-Latif*, protesting the publication of her short story, *Lihāf (The Quilt)* in 1942. The short story was also not appreciated in many progressive circles: in fact, many members of the Progressive Writers Association sought to

include a clause about obscenity in rules about social realist literature because of the trials brought about by both Ismat Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto.

The story *Lihāf* was about the sequestered lives of women within an *ashraf* household, narrated from the perspective of a young girl who describes the intimate and sensual relationship between a mistress and her maidservant. It was charged with obscenity by the government for its depictions of female homosexuality, and established Chughtai as a writer and a feminist; unlike *Angāre* which remained banned for several years following its publication, *Lihāf* won its case in the Lahore high court. Chughtai was acquitted when her attorney argued successfully that the story could not be a corrupting influence given its ambiguity: when he asked the prosecution witnesses to locate the specifically find obscene words in the text, they were unable to do so. In fact, *Lihāf* made no clear reference either to sexual activity or to lesbian relationships per se, even though the short story remains one of the most suggestive depictions of homoeroticism in modern Indian fiction. It is left up to the reader what the child sees when she lifts the quilt under which lie her aunt and the maidservant in the penultimate passage of the story: "Allah! I dove headlong into the sheets of my bed! What I saw when the quilt was lifted, I will never tell anyone, not even if they give me a *lakh* of rupees!"<sup>103</sup> The short story has now been widely republished and has become one of Chughtai's most important works, signaling the emergence of her unique writing style with its awareness of the details of everyday domestic life. However, it must be noted that *Lihāf* was *not* a celebration of lesbian relationships; rather, the story is a tale which lends itself easily to homophobic reading of such relationships as "vices." Chughtai herself argued that the story was about the "sickness" which occurs in the households of respectable families, where women are neglected by their husbands and not allowed to forego the seclusion

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<sup>103</sup> Ismat Chughtai, *Lihāf Aur Digar Afsane* (Delhi: Saqi Book Depot, 2002).

of the women's quarters (*zenāna*).<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, *Lihaf* was significant since it heralded a moment of emergence for a generation of Muslim women that historian Gail Minault has referred to as "the daughters of reform" – middle and upper class *ashrāf* women in colonial North India, many of whom were born to mothers with some education, and who themselves, "grew up going to school, reading women's magazines, coping with accelerated social change brought on by the growth of nationalism, the Great War, and Great Depression."<sup>105</sup> As I explained in chapter two, women of this generation were increasingly involved in public life, taking an active role in the Indian nationalist movement.

Women of Chughtai's social background continued to venture into the high profile literary public sphere of cities such as Aligarh and Lucknow, where they were making demands upon predominant conservative as well as progressive assumptions about what could constitute legitimate subjects of literature and poetry. As Rashid Jahan had done in *Angāre*, Chughtai was declaring for herself the right to write about the female body, but she was going a step further by provocatively discussing its claims to pleasure and fulfillment. While the imperatives of modernization within *ashrāf* society explains the emergence of these women writers, their work engaged reflexively with modernity as an ongoing project in their own lives and in the lives of their communities as well as the Indian nation. Given how the discourses around the emergent nation-state was putting forth a rhetoric of filial allegiances, the gendered and class subject position of *ashrāf* women progressive writers and their relationship to national modernity was one fraught with tension. The middle-class background of these women is central to

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<sup>104</sup> See *Ismat: Her Life*, *Her Times*, Ed., Sukrita Paul Kumar and Sadique (Delhi: Katha Book, 2000) ; See also *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan*, Trans. Tahira Naqvi in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 15, 2000, Pg. 437. Ismat Chughtai writes: "In reality no one ever told me that writing on the subject I deal with in *Lihaf* is a sin, nor did I ever read anywhere that I shouldn't write about this 'disease' or tendency."

<sup>105</sup> Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 270.



understanding their experiences and interpretation of modernity. I am unable to examine in detail here how women experienced and engaged with the process of modernist self-fashioning (such as in Chughtai's self-styled autobiographical work, *Tehri Lakeer-The Crooked Line*). It is clear, however, that the work of progressive women writers such as Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Khadija Mastur, Hajira Masrur, Fehmida Riaz, Wajida Tabassum, and Parveen Shakir, was inflected by the question of what it meant to become modern not only as women but as professionals, as middle class, as Muslim, as Indians and Pakistanis, and as intellectuals with a desire to proactively induce social change.

Ismat Chughtai's commitment to the politics of social change was coupled with an interest in the everyday life of women, and she produced a body of literature that depicted the spaces between modernity as an all-encompassing historical project (the subject position of women in India's movement for independence) and as lived experience (the private musings of women upon quotidian subjects). In Geeta Patel's words, Chughtai was characterized by her demand "to disrupt the civil, to disrupt the ideas that constituted civility, to upend the notions that gave force to how women ought to be."<sup>106</sup> I wish to briefly examine how Chughtai's essay *Bombay Se Bhopal Tak*, takes to task not only patriarchal ideals of certain segments of *ashraf* society, but critiques communist prescriptions for progressive writers, specifically the "policy of the Party rigidly concluding that Progressive literature is only that which is written about the peasant and the laborer," and Chughtai's insistence that she never followed the orders of any party or the *Anjuman* [Association].<sup>107</sup>

In the essay, the train is a metaphor of the progressive movement, and of modernization—but this modernization is criticized because in spite of claims and gestures being

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<sup>106</sup> Geeta Patel, "An Uncivil Woman: Ismat Chughtai" in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 16, 2001, p. 346.

<sup>107</sup> Kumar, Sukrita Paul and Sadique, *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (Delhi: Katha Book, 2000).

made towards gender liberation and equity Chughtai recognizes and highlights the biases of Urdu male progressive poets. The journey begins in the cosmopolitan city of Bombay and ends in the provincial outskirts of the nation (Bhopal), as Chughtai questions the political discourses of liberation asserted by progressive poets. The journey from the city to the provinces is one that reveals the contradictions of male progressive discourse, for the further into the provinces they go, the more Chughtai discovers the backwards view of women her comrades hold. (The essay also recalls the train journey of Rashid Jahan's short story *Dilli Ki Ser*, where a woman in *pardah* is abandoned by her husband on the rail platform, and again alludes to the position of women within public spaces.) The self-styled comrades, with whom Chughtai travels, turn out to be not as progressive as they claim, as Chughtai observes the way in which women are objectified in radical poetry. As I have already shown, debates around poetry by Indian nationalists who belonged to Urdu progressive circles were imbued with a political character that went beyond any simple separation between private and public. The *mushā'irah* signaled a politicized aesthetic at the peak of the nationalist movement, a period where the nationalist discourse in India is said to have already distinguished between an autonomous private sphere of culture and religion. In the years shortly following independence, Ismat Chughtai self-consciously reflects upon her role as a progressive in relation to her peers, the poets, and the people at the *mushā'irah*, in her criticisms of how political space was dominated by men. In Chughtai's rendering, the *mushā'irah* and attendant progressive conference is constantly interrupted by domestic concerns. Furthermore, she is self-conscious of her role within this realm, as well as the failures of the progressive literary movement to move beyond discourses of social reform. Speaking to a group of women in Bhopal, she reflected:

They seemed so distraught by their present situation ' Tell us then, what should we do? they asked me. [I said] ' you're imprisoned in *pardah*! this *pardah*,

this illiteracy, this hunger and poverty, are all fruits of the same tree! we must attack the roots. Well then, what should we do to dig out those roots? they asked. I was stopped short in my tracks. They were testing me, but I performed so poorly I couldn't hope to pass even with a C; I was unable to answer this simple question of theirs. My head was lowered in shame. We don't have a program that we can offer to our youth, no path that we can point to and say, There! Follow it along. [I said], You should read literature, Woe to me! Why had I ever started preaching women's reform? Reform was not even my objective.<sup>108</sup>

Chughtai caricatures the male progressive poets, mocking their attempts to represent the people, given that their political concerns have less to do with mobilizing the masses, and more to do with their own desires and fantasies about being romantic revolutionaries. She critiques the use of particular tropes of Urdu poetry which objectify the beloved as a woman. Urdu poets (male or male-voiced) often adopted the persona of a lover, and as lovers appeared to be independent of their beloved; thus for most male poets, the separation from the beloved must be overcome, as love is either a sexual conquest or a transcendental experience. At the *mushāi'rah*, Chughtai problematizes the assumption that women can only be objects of desires, and not desirous subjects themselves:

-- Why, Josh Sahib and his tribe can praise a woman's beauty to high heaven and we cannot even so much as object, but if I, impressed by Josh Sahib's beauty, utter a few words he will threaten to get upset?  
 -- *Uffoh!* It is so difficult talking to you! Look, it isn't considered proper for women to exhibit their fascination with a man's looks.  
 -- So in your opinion women should only exhibit an interest in the looks of elephants and horses? I don't agree with you at all. A woman has the absolute right to praise a man's beauty. Krishan Chander has actually asked me to write an *afsana* (short story) or an essay on the subject of men's good looks and, you'll see, I will. As soon as I get a chance, I will broach, with great subtlety and delicacy, the subject of a man's nasal hair and show how the point of his mustache can kill more efficiently than the sharpest dagger. I will compare his beard to the clouds that swirl in the dark evening skies and tell how a woman's heart is trapped and flutters in its expanse like a wild pigeon. And just as a

<sup>108</sup> Ismat Chughtai, From Bombay to Bhopal, Tr. Tahira Naqvi and Muhammad Umar Memon, in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 15, 2000, p. 419.

thousand verses have been written in praise of a woman's *choli* (brassiere), its fasteners and button loops, I too will write about a man's *lungi* (loincloth) andô --*Hai, hai!* Safia interjectedí This is why people accuse you of obscenity.<sup>109</sup>

Ismat Chughtai is critical of the common tropes of Urdu poetry in which the beloved often appears as a feminine, while Saadat Hasan Manto's wife berates her for her supposed obscene remarks. In this rendering, male poets become the subject of her essay as she not only ridicules existing patriarchal codes which influence the ways in which poetry is being discussed, but sketches pen portraits of the poets themselves, who in her words are "strange creatures indeed" looking more like school boys than powerful orators.<sup>110</sup> Lastly, she is stunned to discover the sexism of her compatriots, as she becomes privy to "whispers followed by loud boisterous laughter", from conversations amongst the men from the progressive writers' conference, who were reciting poetry "based on the clandestine liaisons of men and women and an abundant variety of spine-tingling jokes about sexual brutality."<sup>111</sup> Chughtai reflects upon the progressive poets and their ties to a North Indian *ashraf* culture, which she sees as being trapped by a "mentality" of aristocratic debauchery, and comments about the violence during Partition:

I don't know why, but when I heard the men occupying themselves with this sort of thing I was reminded of the processions in the Punjab in which women were paraded naked; images of women being raped on the streets and of their horrifying destruction sailed before my eyes. Might not that and these bawdy jokes in the adjoining room have stemmed from the same desire to indulge one's sensuality? I wondered. í Nearly all the top-notch poets wrote this type of poetry and a recitation of them in private and intimate gatherings was regarded as the best means of relaxing and having a good time. And there I was who had all along believed this to be a pastime only for idle women who stayed at home. Men, I thought, must engage in serious discussions on politics and economics. People accuse Manto of writing smut. If he actually wrote down all that men do, he would be guillotined instantly. And if I were to write everything that respectable ladies listen to and narrate with great relish, only God knows what

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<sup>109</sup> Ismat Chughtai, "From Bombay to Bhopal", Tr. Tahira Naqvi and Muhammad Umar Memon, in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 15, 2000, p. 424.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid 421

<sup>111</sup> Ibid 425.

people would do to me. Broached in private, all this was regarded as light literature, but if brought out in the open, people held their noses in disgust like virtuous women! But how have those who profess to be the standard bearers of revolution come to terms with this mentality? I was unable to find an answer, which made my heart infinitely sad.<sup>112</sup>

For a writer who was repeatedly charged with obscenity from within both conservative and progressive circles for her concern with sexuality, Chughtai's target of satire is the sexual force of progressive poetry and the various poets who sublimate their desires in allusions to revolution. Chughtai is ultimately uneasy with pleas to 'traditions' of the erotic, demanding whether even diseases need to be carefully preserved, and is critical of the unexamined sexual politics of radical poetry. The question of 'obscenity' versus 'legitimate' depictions of sexuality thus was a persistent feature of contestation in debates within the AIPWA. Such debates emerged out of the particularities of a cultural universe of the *sharīf* – a social class who were consistently perceived by official colonial discourses as well as dominant Indian nationalist spokespersons, as un-modern and backwards: it was this particular perception that had to be negotiated and was the source of self-reflexive debates about morality within progressive discourses.

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<sup>112</sup> Ismat Chughtai, 'From Bombay to Bhopal', Tr. Tahira Naqvi and Muhammad Umar Memon, in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 15, 2000, p. Pg 426.

## Chapter 4

### Bombay Cinema as Archive Urdu, Urbanity, and the Radical Literati, 1942-1960

We want decent people to take an interest in [Bombay film] industry so that it becomes an instrument of social good rather than a *tamasha* (spectacle). But these people may be discouraged and kept away if you and other great men like you continue to count cinema among such vices as gambling and drinking. ó K.A. Abbas, "A Letter to Mahatma Gandhi" (1939)

Today I find myself living in Pakistan. It is possible that tomorrow I may go live elsewhere. But wherever I go, I will remain what Bombay made me. I will carry Bombay with me. That was the city I loved. That is the city I still love. ó Saadat Hasan Manto, (1952-3)

#### Introduction:

In recent years, the city of Bombay as a pre-eminently cosmopolitan place has been a persistent feature in narratives of its decline. In his vivid portrait of how film generated his desire for the city, Gyan Prakash notes that the cosmopolitanism of Bombay ödug deep roots, in my consciousnessö as a city which ömanaged to balance individual freedom and ambition with a robust sense of collective responsibility and order.ö<sup>1</sup> Arjun Appadurai has shown that Bombay has undergone a process of ödecosmo-politanizationö in his study of the transformations in housing and municipal planning projects in the post-independence period.<sup>2</sup> Events of the past decadeö the rise of the Shiv Sena, the demolition in 1992 of the Babri Masjid by proponents of Hindutva, the ensuing riots, and exodus of thousands of Muslims, marked a turning point in the cityö history as it was re-named Mumbai. Such events have led intellectuals of both left and liberal persuasions to question the cosmopolitan character of the city.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gyan Prakash, "The Idea of Bombay" in *American Scholar*, Vol. 75, Spring 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai," *Public Culture* 12(3): 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also (Ed. Jerry Pinto, Naresh Fernandes), *Bombay Meri Jaan* (Delhi: Penguin India, 2003).

Bombay cinema, as Rajni Majumdar has argued, can be read as the "archive of a city" that in the traffic between the "real" city and the represented cinematic city, cinema provides access to a range of urban subjectivities.<sup>4</sup> Following this, contemporary nostalgia for early post-colonial Bombay might be historicized by unraveling a paradox: the aesthetics of exile, despair, and urban decline associated with Urdu were integral to the formative period of conventional Bombay cinema, during the transition period of Indian nation building. Between the 1940s and 1950s, Bombay was a place where all sorts of crossings were possible and imaginable. A burst of radical creative and intellectual energies characterized the city: working-class movements intersected with the activities of leftist poets, writers, and artists. The city became a major hub for progressive intellectuals experimenting with popular media, as the film industry transformed the city into the cultural capital of India. The migration of progressive intellectuals to the city influenced Urdu's defining role as a "producer" of Bombay's cultural capital.

The widely proliferating aesthetic medium (film) of democratic aspiration was heavily influenced by the Urdu language. Urdu had a historical relationship to the space of the city as the privileged locus of working out South Asian Muslim notions of community, morality, and narratives of decline. At the same time, Urdu was being steadily marginalized in the decades of approaching Indian independence.<sup>5</sup> Even as language and linguistic controversies between Hindi and Urdu were approaching high decibel levels in the 1930s, a shared Urdu-Hindustani language persisted, transmitted through Bombay's film industry. How did progressive writers, in their re-interpretation of Indo-Persian culture and history, influence an emergent popular democratic sensibility during the peak of the Indian nationalist movement? Progressive Urdu intellectuals

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<sup>4</sup> Rajni Mazumdar, *Bombay Cinema: Archive of the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> The deteriorating institutional patronage of Urdu in post-independence India and the conflicts within Indian nationalist space regarding the role of the language have been well documented. See Ather Farooqui, *Redefining Urdu Politics in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

proffered some of the earliest reflections of Bombay's urban modernity— an urban modernity that was being staged in competition with dominant political idioms coming to frame the nation while simultaneously informing a new "Muslim-ness" in its minority form. Bombay cinema is a rich archive of Urdu in India, and the intimate relationship between Urdu and the nation within film production is also the story of how Muslim modernity found a "home" in Bombay. This "home" took on a new salience during Independence and Partition, as Muslims were forced to choose between staying in India and migrating to Pakistan. In most analyses, Bombay cinema is seen as principally concerned with speaking to the (Indian) nation. The "Muslimness" in these films is often analyzed in relation to the "secular national" that is, in terms of how the secular ideology of the nation was played out on film through the sympathetic depiction of a minority within the nation, the figure of the Muslim, and how the corrosion of secular ideals in national politics reflects the marginalization and demonization of Muslims in recent decades. If we consider not only the film as a text to be read in and of itself, but turn also to the wider historical context of the men and women who wrote and directed the films, and the networks to which they belonged— the PWA and IPTA (Indian People's Theater Association)— a much more complicated picture emerges.

### **The Lyricism of Democracy, Language, and the Lament for the City**

The intertwined genealogies of popular cinema in India and the film song— which distinguishes cinema in South Asia from other world cinemas— are inseparable from the struggles for independence from colonial rule in South Asia. Film narratives and music were rooted in political contexts where the question of national citizenship had acquired a pronounced urgency. With the onset of the Quit India Movement in 1942, theater and film were reworked by progressive intellectuals who staged political dramas in which the peasant, the laborer, and the



worker, were presented as key mobilizers for national independence. Meanwhile, the world of Bombay cinema drew inspiration from a myriad of sources: mythologies, folklore, and of course, an inexhaustible trove of modern Indian literature. To a great extent, such cultural mining was the result of the creativity of radical writers associated with the leftist-influenced AIPWA (All-India Progressive Writers Association), and its offshoot, the IPTA (Indian People's Theater Association). The influence of progressive writers upon film was both formal, suggesting a populist-vanguardism for the commercial industry, as well as economic, offering progressive Hindi and Urdu intellectuals employment as screenwriters and lyricists in Bombay.<sup>6</sup> The Bombay chapter of IPTA would even be closely linked to established film industry giants such as Prithviraj Kapoor.

By this point in the early 1940s, the PWA had already become a national organization; from 1936 onwards, the association broadened its scope across various regions in India so it was no longer a solely Urdu-based phenomenon, and linguistic chapters were established in Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi, Telegu, Malayalam, and Hindi. Even as Hindi writers were slow to join its ranks, by the early 1940s, the PWA included writers such as Yashpal, Upendra Nath Ashk, and Bhisham Sahni who played a major role in the movement in North India. However, it was precisely because the initial contributors of progressive writing belonged to the Urdu tradition and Urdu writers were disproportionately present in the organization, that the PWA had its most profound impact upon Urdu language and literature. This influence also stemmed from the fact that Urdu had come to have a vexed relationship with the Indian nation: the Urdu-Hindi debates about what constituted the national language had by the 1930s reached a fever pitch. The votaries of the PWA, however, kept insisting that Hindustani (Hindi and Urdu) was a shared language,

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6. Ashish Rajadhyaksha And Paul Willemen. 1999. Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema, 180. Delhi:Oxford University Press.

but were ultimately unable to quell the growing divide between Hindi and Urdu. The PWA did not succeed in coming up with a formidable educational institutionalization of Hindustani (Hindi-Urdu).

The irony was that Urdu continued to be the prominent spoken vernacular of North India as a language shared by Muslims and Hindus alike, *in spite* of the fact that the Hindi movement had acquired greater institutional momentum; meanwhile leading pro-Urdu Muslims, such as Maulvi Abdul Haque, insisted on Urdu as the national language of India. Stalwarts of the Hindi movement were bowdlerizing Persian and Arabic loanwords of Urdu and a thriving Hindi press and publications market was increasingly limiting the space available to Urdu as a national language. Urdu, which had to compete with both English and Hindi, was increasingly alienated from official national platforms in North India, and its press and publications market by the 1930s was spiraling into decline due to a lack of institutional patronage. According to Francesca Orsini, Hindi may have had the potential of becoming the new unifying language of a popular and inclusive understanding of the public, but it was the normative Hindi that prevailed as the dominant idiom for the nation: one that emphasized a Sanskritized Hindi, with its emphasis on polite and *shuddh* speech, exclusivist in that it was embedded within hierarchical social and caste relations.<sup>7</sup> The more fatal blow for Urdu in India came after Partition, when in the early 1950s, the Official Languages Act (1951) declared Hindi as the official language of Uttar Pradesh with no provision for Urdu in the very region where Urdu had developed as a lingua-franca. However, even as Hindi had made strong headway through educational textbooks and associations, the vast majority of people were not literate; meanwhile, as Urdu was declining in the official press and publications sector from the 1930s to the 1950s, it made its presence felt within cinema.

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<sup>7</sup> See Francesca Orsini, Hindi Public Sphere

As opportunities for employment within the Urdu public sphere dwindled, Urdu writers and poets began to work for the Bombay film industry, where they were hired on as screenwriters and lyricists. Urdu poets in particular were vital to the modes of transmission of the quintessential popular Indian film—the film songs—in their production, popularity, and poetics. As lyricists, they met with great success, to the point of dominating the genre for several decades. The songs from the 1940s and 1950s are now associated with a “golden age” of Bombay cinema. Almost all the well-known Urdu poets of the period, such as Kaifi Azmi, Sahir Ludhianvi, Jan Nisar Akhtar, and Majrooh Sultanpuri, composed lyrics which today evoke widespread nostalgia for early post-colonial Bombay life, and by extension, the early days of independent India throughout the first decade of the Nehruvian era. Even the verses of progressive Urdu poets whose involvement in the industry was not as sustained—Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Josh Malihabadi, Ali Sardar Jafri, Asrar-ul Haq Majaz, and Makhdum Mohiuddin—were transferred into songs. The influence of Urdu poets on Hindi film music ensured that the language continued to have a performative presence in the linguistic landscape of India; in turn, Hindi film music transformed Urdu poetry, harmonizing it with the cultural milieu of India.

Bombay cinema not only generated a new Hindustani language by reformulating the Hindi-Urdu diglossia as it was influenced by Urdu writers of the UP and other parts of North India, but it was shaped also by the linguistic diversity represented by those whom it employed. Actors, singers, directors, composers, artistes, and producers hailed from various regions of India: Parsis, Tamilians, Bengalis, Punjabis, and Marathis populated its studios and attendant financial institutions. One only has to revisit “legendary” names of the industry: Kishore Kumar, Guru Dutt, Shailendra, Mohammad Rafi, O.P. Nayyar, and SD Burman, to name a few of the several artistes who gave Bombay cinema its cosmopolitan luster. The film song itself was, from

beginning to end, the result of an untrammelled heterogeneity: Indians experimented with several forms of indigenous, intra-Asian, and Western forms of music—ranging from *ragas* to jazz. Musical teams such as Shailendra-Hasrat composed music to which lyricists provided poetic nuance, which led to propelling film narratives about idealized Indian citizens forward.

Urdu, however, bore a unique relationship to Bombay cinema as it became the dominant language of film. The dominance of Urdu within the film industry in this period can partially be attributed to the fact that the immediate precursor to cinema in Bombay was the Parsi theater, a much sought after form of cultural entertainment. These theaters belonged to Parsis, a class of entrepreneurial elites in Bombay, who, given their social interaction with colonial elites and exposure to English language theater, inclined them towards organizing the first modern theatrical companies in South Asia. The Parsi theater used Urdu as the primary language of its plays in the late nineteenth century, and as Kathryn Hansen has noted, “by adopting Urdu and the larger Indo-Muslim cultural heritage in which it was embedded, Parsi theater embraced more than a language or community, but acquired a new vocabulary of pleasure and one that had the advantage of lacking in territorial boundary.”<sup>8</sup> As the film-lyricist Javed Akhtar has noted, “the Indian talkie inherited its basic structure from Urdu Parsi Theater and so the talkies started with Urdu—Urdu was the lingua franca of urban northern India before partition, and was understood by most people. [Urdu] was and is an extremely sophisticated language capable of portraying all kinds of emotion and drama.”<sup>9</sup> Parsi theatre directors like Ardeshir Irani and Sohrab Modi were crucial in bringing Urdu into Bombay cinema, along with the extremely popular stage romances inspired by Persian legends such as Shireen-Farhad and Laila Majnun. The first Bombay talkie,

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<sup>8</sup> Kathryn Hansen, “Languages on Stage: Linguistic Pluralism and Community Formation in the Nineteenth-Century Parsi Theatre,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (May, 2003), p. 402.

<sup>9</sup> Javed Akhtar

*Alam Ara* (1931), a romance between a gypsy and a prince, was produced by a Parsi theatre company and director.

Meanwhile, working for the industry had become virtually the only form of gainful employment for Urdu writers and poets given the decline of Urdu presses and diminishing institutional patronage by the 1930s. That Urdu-Hindustani was the predominant language of cinema reflected its immense prevalence as the spoken vernacular of Northern India, shared between and across religious communities. So, even as it was banished from the official political platforms, Urdu flourished in the film industry because the majority of people understood and communicated in it colloquially. The songs that Urdu poets helped to compose during the 1940s and 1950s were extremely popular. The repertoire of shared cultural traditions through the Urdu language, *qissas* (stories), *dastans* (epics), and *ghazals* were transmitted through its poets and writers, who through their work in Bombay cinema asserted a kind of belonging to the nation in the face of being alienated from dominant strands of Indian nationalism. In this context, Urdu intellectuals debated the merits of deploying popular culture for political ends.

Historians of film in India have not yet adequately dealt with the migration of Urdu poets to Bombay, nor have there been many studies which have gauged the reception to the music during this era. Scholars of film history, political theory, and Indian civil society, have argued that the Nehruvian ideal of nationalism found its fullest ideological expression in the universe of early post-colonial Bombay film, within both its narrative and musical repertoires.<sup>10</sup> Still others have argued that the state played the most powerful role in determining the ideological contours

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<sup>10</sup> See (Ed. Ravi Vasudevan) *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jyotika Virdi, *Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (Rutgers University Press, 2003); Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987* (University of Texas Press, 1993).

of the Hindi film.<sup>11</sup> In Sudipta Kaviraj's reading, the central ideological component of these popular films was the deployment of the twin principles of political and social equality associated with democracy: namely, that urban living during the 1950s led to the breakdown of caste segregation, as well as to the dominance of modern ideals of romantic love.<sup>12</sup>

The example that Kaviraj cites as evoking the new democratic mood with poignancy while associating it with the city, was the 1956 song, *Yeh hai Bombay meri Jaan* (This is Bombay, my darling). In Kaviraj's reading, the song is characterized by an urban knowingness of the words, containing a radical rejection of the city's capitalist culture, a radicalism smuggled into vehicles of cheap commercial success, suggesting that petty bourgeois poets often produce a discourse of those marginalized in the city.<sup>13</sup> His argument has to do with what democracy has done to culture and the claim that, "the language, culture, and semiotics of dislike that ordinary people feel for their social superiors" emerge out of the "cultural structure of *representativity*."<sup>14</sup> That is, while Indian (Nehruvian) elites produced constitutional reforms aimed at destroying caste and feudal privilege, they were also sustaining class and capitalist inequalities. In short, for the subaltern classes, democratic expression would run into its limits in institutional contexts given the constraints placed on them by elites who managed the flows of capital. Thus, the film song became a unique repository of the *representativity* of Indian democracy, the penultimate space for the *vox populi*, as film media in India itself increasingly reflected an intensifying "culture of insubordination." Furthermore, Kaviraj has argued that the Indian vernaculars do not have room for the discourse of the individual citizen, "because of the

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<sup>11</sup> See M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, "Reading a Song of the City: Images of the City in Literature and Films" in (Ed. Preben Kaasholm) *City Flicks: Indian Cinema and the Urban Experience*, (Delhi: Seagull Books, 2004); See also Sudipta Kaviraj, 1998

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 155

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 157

insufficient spread of the social logic of *gesellschaft*.<sup>15</sup> As I pointed out in chapter one, the Indo-Persian, early modern Urdu poetic milieu has long provided a space from which individuals expressed dissatisfaction with the world of social and political authority, laws, norms of propriety, and a vast array of religious regulations, while locating their individual sense of belonging to urban spaces.

What were the specific historical conjunctures out of which Urdu came to find a home within the city of Bombay? One place to start is by examining what the city of Bombay meant for Urdu writers and poets. Their migration to the city paralleled those of many migrant communities across India—refugees from Bengal, laborers from Goa, workers from the Marathi villages, petty bourgeois shopkeepers from South India—all of whom came to make up the cultural diversity of the city. In chapter two, I briefly touched upon Saadat Hasan Manto's relationship to the city, in particular his musings of Bombay's upper-class film actresses as well as street prostitutes. In the summer of 1952, in an appendix to the short-story collection, *Yazid*, he recalled his years spent in Bombay between 1936 and 1948. At certain junctures of the narrative the city and the self are almost interchangeable:

Four and a half years ago when I bade farewell to my other home, Bombay I was sad at leaving the city where I had spent the hardest, the happiest and the most memorable time in my life. That strip of land which is Bombay had taken me, a footloose young man rejected by his family, into its vast lap and said to me, "You can be happy here on two pennies a day or on hundreds of thousands of rupees. You can also be the world's most miserable person, regardless of what you earn. It will be entirely up to you. Here you can do what you like; no one will speak ill of you. And no one will tell you what to do or moralize to you. No matter how difficult things become, you will have to deal with them yourself. You and you alone will take every important decision of your life, without interference or help. If you so choose, you may sleep on the street, or it is possible you may find yourself living in a palace. It will be of no consequence to me whatsoever. You may even leave if you like, or stay; but as far as I am concerned, it will not make a difference. I am where I am and will continue to remain where I am. I stayed in Bombay for twelve years. And what I am, I am because of those years.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 160

Today I find myself living in Pakistan. It is possible that tomorrow I may go live elsewhere. But wherever I go, I will remain what Bombay made me. Wherever I live, I will carry Bombay with me. When I left Bombay I was sad at leaving it. That was where I had formed the most lasting friendships of my life, friendships of which I am proud. That was where I had got married, where my first child was born, where my second child began the first day of her life. There were times in Bombay when I did not have enough to eat; and there were times when I was making vast sums of money and living it up. That was the city I loved. That is the city I still love.<sup>16</sup>

Such sentiments, evoking deep filial attachments to the city, were also produced through song which widely proliferated into the public realm. *Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jan* incidentally performed by an actor who had the good sense to name himself after a drink (Johnny Walker, or Badruddin Jamaluddin Kazi) was composed by the progressive poet Majrooh Sultanpuri (1919-2000). Majrooh worked with virtually every music director, composer, and musician in Bombay cinema and wrote hundreds of songs and popularized love-duets, his career as a lyricist spanned five decades, and he dominated the industry's music scene. Like many of his literary contemporaries, Majrooh epitomized the cultural world of the North Indian *ashraf*. Born Asrar-ul-Hasan Khan in Sultanpur, UP, he was educated in *Dars-e-Nizami*, in Arabic and Persian, before attending Lucknow's *Takmeel-ut-Tib* College of Unani Medicine, and establishing himself as a *hakim* (traditional physician). Upon reciting a *ghazal* during a *mushai'rah* in his hometown, he won immediate acclaim and began to write poetry seriously.

When asked about when he first knew that he was a poet, Majrooh claimed that it was *fitri* (natural), that it had been in me all along before narrating the tale of how he was expelled from *Dars-e-Nizami*. Like many a poet, he traced his creative aspirations to an act of rebelliousness. He had been arguing with a *maulana* about the merits of satire apparently, Majrooh refused to be disciplined by the good *maulana*, physically preventing him from raising

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<sup>16</sup> See (Trans. Khalid Hasan), *Stars from Another Sky: The Bombay Film World of the 1940s* by Saadat Hasan Manto (Penguin Books, 1993).



his switch, and thus humiliating him before the other students. While attending Lucknow's *Takmeel-ut Tib College*, Majrooh recited his first couplet, which mocked the codes of conduct that had been established for the *hakīm* (physicians), and the couplet very nearly had him arrested. Afterwards, he became a regular feature at *musha'irahs* throughout the UP.<sup>17</sup> The episode points to how poetry continued to function as a space from which to articulate individual sovereignty in the face of authorial demands. It was while reciting poetry at a Bombay *mushai'rah*, that he impressed film producer A.R. Kardar, who wanted to employ Majrooh as a film lyricist. Majrooh agreed, though reluctantly, and only after he was persuaded by his *ustād*, Jigar Mor dab di who told him that films were a good way to earn your bread and butter. Majrooh recalls, "Kardar Sahib employed me, and from then on, I belonged to Bombay, itself."<sup>18</sup> This belonging to Bombay was epitomized by Majrooh writing his first song for the film, *Shah Jehan* (1946) about the eponymous sixteenth century Mughal emperor, and his simultaneous adoption of communist politics. Shortly thereafter, he became involved with the city's trade unions, joining the many socialist *shayars* (poets) of the period.

Majrooh's output of song lyrics vastly exceeded his poetry which led some progressive literary critics to dismiss him as a *filmi shayar* (film poet), implying that he was an inferior poet. Such criticisms pointed to the apprehensions held by many leftist Urdu writers of the period regarding their role as producers of mass culture. The criticisms of commodification and commercialization from the Urdu literary sphere were based on distinctions being made between *duniya-e-adab* (the world of the literary) and *filmy dunya* (the film world). Attempts to carve out these worlds as independent of one another, even as they influenced one another, were induced by contemporary concerns about popular culture. These attempts had to do also with

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Nadeem Siddiqui, *Chiragh Magazine, Majrooh Number*, 1969, p. 404 (NMML).

<sup>18</sup> *Chiragh*, Majrooh Number, *Shakhsyat Aur Shayri Inteviu*, pg. 372 (NMML)

distinguishing the world of the cultivated from the world of the coarse or vulgar, embedded within *ashraf/ajlaf* differentiations, themselves historically bound distinctions. In the words of one writer, "Majrooh had to fight on two fronts. On the one hand he was trying to convince the traditional *ghazal* singers and poets to accept the new Progressive rules, on the other, his endeavor was to persuade the majority of Progressive writers to acknowledge the *ghazal* and concede its importance."<sup>19</sup> For Majrooh, employment in the film world allowed him access to both the new *duniya-e-adab*, the circles of progressive writers, and by extension, left politics. In 1949, Majrooh was arrested by the Government of India and put in Byculla Jail for reciting what was perceived as an "anti-Indian" poem before an audience of textile mill workers in Bombay. The poem had openly condemned Nehru's leadership, accusing him of "bowing down to capitalism": *samaraj ka das hai Nehru/marle saathhi jaane na paaye* (Nehru is a follower of the power-brokers/Watch out for him and don't let him go.) In the early years of independence, the statement was a bold indictment of Nehru. During the early 1950s, many Indian communists were arrested and radical socio-political organizations came under renewed scrutiny by the state, as it clamped down upon CPI spear-headed activities (whether perceived or actual). Majrooh was adamant in his critiques of state hegemony over definitions of the nation. After having gone underground, Majrooh resurfaced to protest against the arrest of Sajjad Zaheer in Pakistan under the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, and spent additional time in jail. Majrooh proclaimed his distaste for the repressive practices of the state, as well as Congress Party policies.

In the film world, Majrooh was pushing progressive poets to adopt the *ghazal*. In an era when the genre of the *ghazal* was condemned anew by leading leftist Urdu poets as a "decadent" cultural form associated with feudalism and debauchery, Majrooh was one of the few to value

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<sup>19</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, *Roshnai* (Delhi: Publishing House?, 1953), p.223

the *ghazal* as a viable form of political and aesthetic expression. As Majrooh composed *ghazals*, they were later adopted into film. Many of the *ghazals* imparted his personal sense of alienation as a poet struggling in Bombay, whose verses were being commercialized. At the same time, the nostalgic style of self-expression of the *ghazals* also allude to the sentiments felt by the North Indian *ashrāf*, a community divided between India and Pakistan during Partition, and the disillusionment following Independence. Urdu writers expressed feelings of loss and betrayal towards what independence had wrought through a vocabulary of separation and desire of Indo-Persian aesthetics. In one such *ghazal*, Majrooh composed the following:

In uncontrollable desperation, I kept on calling you as I departed  
I have passed my entire life in the wine goblet, as I departed

You saw me, and how I had become mad (with passion)  
When the wine's effect cooled, then I discovered this:  
All the sheltering friends of that life have departed.  
In uncontrollable desperation, I kept on calling you, as I departed.

Do not tell me that it was I alone who lost myself,  
For I did not drown in that drunkenness alone.

In this *ghazal*, the poet calls out to the beloved after whom he has spent his entire life pining in a state of drunkenness, followed by disillusionment, and nostalgia of all that came before (i.e., his sheltering friends). Given Majrooh's broader political context, as a poet involved in left politics, who was simultaneously protesting the hegemony of the Indian National Congress in post-colonial India, the *ghazal* can be interpreted as the poet's own sense of disillusionment following independence. Majrooh expresses his alienation from the Indian nation and it is metaphorically elicited in this *ghazal*. At the same time, Majrooh's poetry was used in films, for even as the poem grew out of his personal experience and very particular political context, the absent, unnamed beloved of the *ghazal* could potentially mean or be anyone. Apart from his *ghazals*, which were incorporated into cinema, Majrooh wrote songs which also evoked the loneliness of

urban life. The verses of Majrooh's *Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jan* (1956), remain extremely popular, and continue to be fitted to the present concerns of the city. Majrooh's lyrics are:

*ai dil hai mushakil jiina yahaa.N  
zaraa haT ke zaraa bach ke, ye hai bamba\_ii merii jaa.N  
kahii.n building, kahii.n Traame, kahii.n motor, kahii.n mill  
miltaa hai yahaa.N sab kuchh ik miltaa nahii.n dil  
insaa.N kaa nahii.n kahii.n naam\o\-nishaa.N  
kahii.n satta, kahii.n patta kahii.n chorii kahii.n res  
kahii.n Daaka, kahii.n phaa.Nka kahii.n Thokar kahii.n Thes  
bekaaro ke hai.n ka\_ii kaam yahaa.N  
beghar ko aavaaraa yahaa.N kahate ha.Ns ha.Ns  
khud kaaTe gale sabake kahe isako business*

It is difficult for the heart to live here  
Move a little this way, save yourself a bit that way  
This is Bombay, my darling!  
In one place, a building, in another, the trams, elsewhere there are cars, and also the mills  
One can find it all here, everything indeed but the heart  
There is no trace, nor name, of humanity  
Some play numbers, some go to the races, others thieve;  
Some starve, some suffer insults, others grieve the idle, here, have many names  
People mock as they call the homeless a wandering vagrant  
They themselves have cut everyone throats, but this, they call business

The song is structured as an intimate warning to the newcomer: to carefully move through the city space, to gauge every step, for one had to avoid the advancing traffic and overwhelming crowds. Traffic was a symbol of modern city life, alluding to the growing expanse of capitalism as well as its dislocating effects upon the population. Ashish Rajadhyaksha has argued that films demonstrating such dislocation appeared at a moment in history coinciding with the end of the Second World War, when the city's capitalist institutions go through a foundational upheaval and, it seems, the film industry plays a demonstrably significant role not only economically within that upheaval, but also, along with the city's urban brutalism and its slums, as the *primary representational form* of that upheaval. One of the most famous scenes of this early cinema is of the vagabond hero of *Shree 420 (Mr. 420)* (1955) a pointed reference to the Indian law that

penalizes fraudô is refused a ride in a businessman's car en route to Bombay. In light of this, it is interesting to note that actor-comedian who performs the song, *This is Bombay, My Darling* on screen, Badruddin Jamaluddin Kazi (1923-2003) or Johnny Walker, his film pseudonym, was himself the son of textile mill worker in Bombay, who had grown up working in the city as a conductor in Bombay Electric Supply and Transport (B.E.S.T.) buses. Majrooh's criticism of the capitalist excess that Bombay represented was conveyed through a simple panorama of urban alienation, for, "there were buildings, trams, motors, and mills" everything to be had, except a heartí "and, "there was not a trace of humanity to be found in this bustling city." Furthermore, it was difficult, to live (*jeena*), the song tuned on, the melody bearing a striking resemblance to "O my darling Clementine", for simply to survive was a serious accomplishment: "Some play numbers, some go to the races, others thieve; Some starve, some suffer insults, others grieve" the idle, here, have many names" implying that there were many ways to make ends meet. The city was a lonely domain, and such alienation could be offset only by the possibility of love.

Interestingly, Majrooh's verses contained many of the elements which characterized *shahr-ashob* poetry from the eighteenth century. As I discussed in chapter one, urban dwelling has long preoccupied the moral universe of Urdu. The *shahr-ashob* (lament for the city) genre of Urdu poetry composed in the context of political and economic turbulence in eighteenth century urban society, was one where the poet broke with the conventions of love poetry" and located his existential self through an attachment to a homeland, in a particular city, which had links to a Persianate world. By the mid-nineteenth century, the *shahr-ashob* narratives no longer contained a tone of satire, or mockery. Yet, in Majrooh's verses the satirical tone is very much present, recalling especially the playful compositions of Nazir Akbarabadi who celebrated the everyday life of the *ajlāf*.

Elements of what characterized eighteenth century *shahr-ashob* poetry had re-appeared in the twentieth century, and that too, in relation to the city of Bombay. The earliest of such poetry comes from the seminary trained scholar, Shibli Naumani (1857 - 1914), who composed many poems alluding to his affections for a cosmopolitan Muslim woman of Bombay, Atiya Fyzee. She belonged to the prominent Tayyibji family, and was one of the first upper-class *ashrāf* women in colonial India to come out of *purdah*. The poems generated controversy in the Urdu literary sphere about the practices and conventions of naming the beloved in poetry. In an analysis of Shibli's *dasta-ve gul (Bouquet of Roses)* written between 1906 and 1907, Sunil Sharma has noted that what is remarkable about the poems in the collection is how the city of Bombay is situated as a place where the beloved is expected to be present. Nearly a third of the poems mention Bombay explicitly, and a reading of the city equivocating the beloved recalls the *shahr āshob* genre. Fyzee was part of the newness that Shibli found in the bustling and multicultural city of Bombay, which stood in contrast to the culturally and religiously claustrophobic world that made up his life in North India.<sup>20</sup> By inscribing the name of the city in his poem, Shibli affirmed the existence of a particular object of affection there, and these poems became immensely popular at the time. Sharma argues that the simultaneous process of discovering Bombay and writing the history for the Persian literary past became an intertwined project for Shibli.<sup>21</sup> Shibli's was no lament for urban decline, so much as an experience of falling in love with the city of Bombay and its wonders, captured in part by the evocative universe of the much older Persian *shahr-ashob*. It is in this vein that I return to Majrooh Sultanpuri. The song *Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jan* reflects the staging of an urban modernism by a progressive

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<sup>20</sup> Sharma Sharma, 'Atiya Begum and the Mystery of the Beloved's Identity in Shibli Nomani's Persian Ghazals', in Andreas Pflitsch and Barbara Winckler (eds) *Poetry's Voice, Society's Norms. Forms of Interaction between Middle Eastern Writers and Their Societies*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 105-119. 2006

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Urdu poet who is alienated from the nation (through his progressive politics, and also as a Muslim minority in India): as poets mined their own cultural pasts, an Indo-Persian poetic milieu of Mughal North India was re-articulated through a love for the city of Bombay. Majrooh's song invokes both an implicit satire of the wealthy, while also the *shahr-ashob* poet's practice of naming and identifying the people of the city, here, its various migrants—though this naming, unlike the earlier *shahr-ashob* is not of various professions or occupations. Instead, it names modes of idleness, for the unemployed of the city, it is proclaimed, go by many names: gambling, thieving, hunger, insult, grief, and suffering. At the same time, the song is a love lyric. In this sense, it is a naming of the nation that differs from the dominant national narrative of post-colonial India. Unlike the homogenizing logic of the Indian nation, the poet Majrooh is inserting a narrative that is at once personal and marginalized, but nonetheless conveys his sense of belonging within the national universe to which the city he describes belongs.

The song *Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jan* is filmed against a panorama of the city: Victoria Terminus, Bombay Municipal Headquarters, Marine Drive, the Rajabai Clock Tower, and Best buses appear throughout the song, in which a pick-pocket explains to his girlfriend—a *pan-stall vendor*—that the city is a place full of possible dangers. It begins with Johnny Walker leaving the police station, and ends with him in the arms of his beloved. While the song is addressed to the subaltern entrant, it is simultaneously addressed to a beloved, both being *merī jān* (my darling), alluding to both the dangers *and* pleasures of the city. Jumping onto a *tonga* he exclaims, "here, they laugh at the homeless calling them vagrants; but it is *they* who cut throats, and they call this business!"

The girlfriend, staging a comeuppance, responds:

You are calling the world wicked, don't be so naïve,  
You reap what you sow, that is how the world turns.

You shouldn't wait for fate to greet you.  
O gentle heart, but it is *easy* to live here!  
Listen mister, listen friend [*bandhu*],  
This is Bombay, *merī jān*.

The song pointed to the struggle that many lower middle class Indians were experiencing in relation to the alienating modernity of the city of the 1950s, which was expanding at a phenomenal rate. The population of Bombay had already doubled to nearly 1.7 million people between 1900 and the early 1940s. During the early 1950s, the city expanded northward with the inclusion of the island of Salsette, and by 1957 several suburban municipal boroughs and villages were incorporated into Bombay. The city's expansion due in part to the influx of large numbers of migrants, was mapped not only in terms of the political economy, but was reflected within cultural representation. At the same time, it is possible that the film studios were built on land formerly occupied by a peasant tenantry. The song clearly was characterized by a joyous love lyric, alluding to the pleasures of street-life. Majrooh's song is at once tied to a re-imagined Indo-Persianate past, but is also a reflection of his current political and social context in post-colonial India. It is worth noting that Majrooh's use of the *shahrashub* elements was not confined to Bombay. In a *ghazal* he presented before a literary circle, he recited the following: *ōmerī nigāh meiñ hai arz-e-moscow majrūh / vo sar zamīñ ke sitāre jise salām kareīñ* (My gaze sets its sights upon the magic of Moscow, upon that land there, which greets [us] with its stars.) The play on the words of Moscow as a space of magic is invoked by Majrooh's own name (meaning magic), and then becomes an illusion to his home of Bombay. When a high-ranking poet pointed out to Majrooh that the word, Moscow, could not be used within the *ghazal* format, Majrooh retorted with a *ghazal* from the eighteenth century poet, Dagh Dehlavi: *-Koi cheinTa pade tuh Dagh Calcutta chale jaein / azeemabad mein vo muntazar saavan ke bai* *The hain* (If a rain-drop should fall, then Dagh will go to Calcutta / Sitting in Azeemabad one can see the



arrival of scene of spring) adding ōbesides this, there are countless examples of such verses in Persian which you will find, such as ōkinare-ab-erukun abad-o-gulgashṭö or references to Samarqand and Bukara.ö<sup>22</sup>

How do we read this re-appropriation of the *shahr-ashob* in the context of 1950s independent India? The *shahr-ashob* is a genre which lends itself to being invoked during periods of great political upheaval and cultural fracturing of imperial formations in South Asia. The *shahr-ashob* in Urdu first appeared, after all, in the context of eighteenth century transformations of the Persianate world, in particular the perceived as well as actual, enduring cosmopolitan links between South Asia and Central Asia. The *shahr-ashob* elements of film songs during the twentieth century, emerges in the context of yet another political and cultural fracturing. The end of British colonial rule, and the nationalist and communitarian political restructuring of the South Asian continent that overhauled the region, as the nation-states of India and Pakistan were borne through political and economic upheaval, as well as communitarian violence in the cities. Yet what is of key importance here is that Majrooh clearly himself identified first and foremost with the city of Bombay, in terms of filial and territorial attachment, and furthermore, this identification was not one that made the nation analogous to the space of the city. In migrating to Bombay, Majrooh left behind his more provincial UP upbringing of the *qasbah*, and embraced the city as his home, a metropolis which, despite the film industry's ambivalent status in the eyes of progressive poets, offered up a cosmopolitan studio culture, a land of its own, characterized by the name of Kardar's company, Filmistan. Furthermore, the *shahr-ashob* genre lent the poet a space from which to articulate the individual disappointments of the nascent Indian citizen in the face of the cultural and political fractures that accompanied Partition. Majrooh's poetry, as he transferred and correlated it into song, was

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<sup>22</sup> *Chiragh*, Majrooh Number, pg. 331.

popularly disseminated, and widely accepted as a vehicle of democratic socialism of the immediate post-independence period. At the same time, the poetic nuances which characterized his music were shot through with the exigencies of a Muslim minoritarian identity in flux and in exile. The paradox of Muslim ñnon-belongingøto the nation was re-formulated through a belonging to the city of Bombay, for the ñnationøis always being re-imagined, articulated, and renegotiated, for it is not, nor was it, a singular phenomenon.

Additionally, the historical relationship between Urduøurbanity and the love lyric come together here to articulate the space of Bombay as a city wherein certain freedoms (i.e., in love relationships) were made possible, even as the city is critiqued for its capitalist excesses. Most of the lyrics that Majrooh wrote for the musical compositions of SD Burman were love duets, in which conversation or debate occurred between two lovers. Recalling his work with SD Burman, Majrooh stated in an interview:

The situation of the duet arose, and I remember very well, that SD Burman Sahib said, ñget rid of this duetô it doesnøt work.øI said, ñDada, let me write them. I wonøt write based on the old way (*purana dhachar*); I will make it into a very ñwittyøand ñconversationaløtype of song, and there will be a new style to duet song writing that was not there before. Just let me give it a go.øSo, he [Burman] said, alright. You will note that most of the songs I worked on with Burman Sahib were duets.<sup>23</sup>

Many of these songs were played out on screen against the visual backdrop of public places in Bombay, such as Chowpatty, Marine Drive, or the archetypical Bombay street, spaces which then became part of the national imagination. In progressive Urdu writing and poetry, the city of Bombay became an axis around which notions of morality and community were being worked out a-new. The songs, while romanticizing the struggle of lovers who fought against familial,

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<sup>23</sup> *Chiragh, Majrooh Number*, p. 281.

filial, patriarchal, and state authorities, spoke also to new forms of intimacy (between classes, between genders) that urban living in Bombay demanded. Thus, while the city was at once a place of alienation, it was also a space in which new kinds of filial or romantic attachments could be forged.

Often, such duets would represent a set of romanticized subalterns in the city, who encouraged the couple's love, such as in the song, *õLeke pahla pahla pyar.õ* Here, two entertainers are given money to convince the hero's beloved not to refuse him. As they cavort around Marine Drive, they serenade in the refrain: *õLeke pahla pahla pyar, bharkae ankhon mein khumar, jadu nagar se aaya hai, koi jadugarõ* (A magician from the city of wonders, hasí provoked the intoxication of the eyes).õ The city is again linked to wonderous, and the beloved is persuaded to enjoy its many mysterious, captivating joys. In yet other duets along similar lines, a couple satirically proclaims its adoration before a powerful, wealthy patron.õ In the duet *õO dilwale, ab teri gali tak aa pahuncheõ* (Beloved, we have finally arrived at your alley), the hero and heroine of the film battle against the injustices of political corruption by disguising themselves as vagrant musicians to obtain evidence from a tyrannical businessman.

Amongst the several verses coded to an upbeat, fast-paced song:

As a vagrant, as a broken star  
Who has neither place to rest, nor song to sing,  
They, yes *they*, are crazy about you.

Wandering and falling from city to city,  
From evening to morning, a painful heart  
Those who wander from doorstep to doorstep  
They are crazy for you.

The satire in this song comes from the peculiarities of the figure of the wanderer or vagrant, the *avāra*, who embodies the alienation and loneliness of modern Indian city-life, by his

location in the street. The street or footpath in Bombay cinema, as Mazumdar has argued, unlike the Western street is, a space of detached observation, is part village community, part cosmopolitan city street a symbolic organizer of a set of contradictory impulses that generates intense performances.<sup>24</sup> In India, the city constantly acknowledges the rural other, and this has been explicit in the history of film representation. At the same time, the *avāra* (vagrant) is a moral figure through whom the space and pace of urban life is mapped, onto the cinema screen. The urban street is a liminal space evoking both home (the space inhabited by the unemployed/semi-employed forging collective familial arrangements there) and homelessness (the defunct outside to the normative middle-class interiors). Furthermore, such paradoxical living has given rise to a subculture of masculine performance, most notable in the contemporary figure of the *tapori* (idle street youth) in Hindi cinema:

The *tapori* has primarily been a cinematic invention. He stands at the intersection of morality and evil, between the legal and the illegal, between the world of work and those without work. His strength lies in his ability to organize the various tensions produced by the urban experience in India. Sometimes dabbling in petty crime, the *tapori's* personality is invested with an integrity from which he emerges as the protector of a certain moral code. Lacking a home, yet longing for a family, the *tapori* occupies the middle space between the crisis of urban life and the simultaneous yearning for stability.<sup>25</sup>

While the *tapori* is a more recent invention of cinema, within the history of Bombay cinema its previous avatar was the figure of the *avāra* (vagrant). Many of such Indian song and film narratives were written by lyricist-poets who perceived themselves as *avāra* in that they belonged to a language which was migratory and had no home, finding themselves barely employed, and thus ultimately locating in the city of Bombay a spatial, lived, as well as symbolic bond. The *avāra* was a figure entirely at odds with middle and upper class morality and

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<sup>24</sup> Ranjani Mazumdar, *Bombay Cinema: Archive of the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Ranjani Mazumdar, 'Figure of the 'Tapori': Language, Gesture and Cinematic City', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, No. 52 (Dec. 29, 2001 - Jan. 4, 2002), pp. 4872- 4880.

respectability, in occupying the space of the street as the quintessential home, and the earliest evocation appears in of the most acclaimed Urdu *nazms* of progressive poetry (titled *avāra*) composed by the poet, Majaz, in 1937 while at Aligarh. The *nazm*'s refrain reflected the indecision of solitude experienced in the city—where to go, to whom to turn, what to do. The *nazm* is situated entirely in the city—ó the scene, while that of an Indo-Persian *bazar* is a social tapestry which unfolds through the turbans of *mullahs*, the ledgers of *baniyas*, the visions of *sufis*, but is reworked as metaphors for the capitalist system. By the end of the *nazm*, the *avāra* is not content to simply continue wandering, but seeks the destruction of kings and rulers. The opening and final verses are:

Tonight is the night of the city.  
 Should I wander about useless and sad like a vagabond (*avāra*)?  
 Should I walk about bright, animated streets?  
 Strangers all about  
 How long am I to be kicked from door to door?  
 O heart's sorrow, what should I do, O solitude of my heart, what should I do?

Before my eyes, begging this scene,  
 Hundreds of tyrants,  
 Hundreds of Jenghiz Khans and Nadir Shahs;  
 I should grab a dagger from the hands of a Jenghiz and break it?  
 I should shatter the gems in his crown?  
 Whether it should be someone else or not?  
 I shall come forward and break it.

I should step forward and set afire the ornaments  
 Of rich people's gatherings,  
 Set fire to this one's garden, set fire to that one's boudoir.  
 What is a king's throne! I should set the king's whole palace ablaze.  
 O heart's sorrow, what should I do, O solitude of my heart, what should I do?<sup>26</sup>

In Majaz's poetry, the figure of the *avāra*, represents the city street as the space of exile, but also recognizes it as a space which makes the utterance of moral condemnation against the

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<sup>26</sup> Asrar-ul Haque Majaz, *Ahang*, Noneet Printers Lucknow, reprint 1995.

exploitation of ruling classes, possible. This very theme of moral condemnation by the *avara*, explicitly engages with the nation in Guru Dutt's film, *Pyasa* (Thirst) (1955), the year that Majaz died, in which a drunken poet wanders the street of a red-light district, pointing to the exploitation of prostitutes, singing, "Where are they? Those who proclaim their pride for India, where are they?" Sahir Ludhianvi's poem explicitly questions the moral credentials of the Nehruvian nation, in a detailed description of the city's urban slums, demanding that India's leaders enter into its alleyways:

These lanes, these pleasure houses of rich delights,  
Precious lives: undone, defiled.  
Where are they? Where are they? Those protectors of virtue?  
Where are they who proclaim their pride for India? Where indeed?

These sinuous streets, these ill-reputed market,  
These lost by-ways, these clinking of coins,  
This selling of virtue, and its requisite haggling,  
Where are they? Where are they? Those protectors of virtue?  
Where are they who proclaim their pride for India? Where indeed?

The intersection between the sense of alienation expressed by progressive poets, and their involvement with peasant and labor organizations in Bombay—about which I speak more about in the following section—is a significant part of how the city came to be represented. The *avāra* was a recurring theme and figure, famously captured within the 1951 Raj Kapoor film by the same name. According to Mazumdar, during the 1950s, cinema deployed various metaphors which condensed the nation and its images, in particular that of the urban street: the street, in this reading, was ultimately addressed to the "nation" whereas by the 1970s films of the *tapori*, the metaphor of the "street" as "nation" transformed into the street as Mumbai.<sup>27</sup> Yet the figure of the *avāra* of the 1950s, was not simply an idealized "citizen" who stood in for the nation as such: the figure of the *avāra* was a universal figure who questioned the "nation" and that form of address

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<sup>27</sup> Ranjani Mazumdar, *Bombay Cinema: Archive of the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

was not without its specificities— tied as it was to the homelessness of minoritarian experience evoked through Urdu inflected Hindustani language. The broader networks of PWA and IPTA Urdu writers who found in cinema a space to which they could belong, deeply informed the filmic space itself, a space which was not solely working at the discursive level (representing Muslim figures, etc.) but operating at the level of production.

One of Majrooh's most oft-cited couplets was, *mein akela hi chala tha jaanib-e-manzil magar / ghair saath aate gaye aur kaaravaan banta gaya*, (I was walking alone towards my destination / Strangers began to accompany me, and a caravan began to form.) The couplet was debated between progressive poets at the Bombay progressive writers' meeting where it was first recited. It brought up the question of what it meant to belong to a community of progressive intellectuals and whether exile alone could necessitate a new form of intellectual praxis. The writer Krishan Chander defended Majrooh's use of the term *ghair* because, "all intellectual work necessarily mean a journey of loneliness." Majrooh later changed the word *ghair* (stranger) to *log* (people). The incident captures the tension apparent in the production of popular culture by progressive writers: what, if not strangeness, was their relationship to the "people", whom they sought to represent in the context of anti-colonial struggle and independence? Could progressive writers ever really claim to "represent" them? It was attachment to the city— forged out of the alienation from modern urban life— which was re-cast as a moral and ethical space which, while grounded on the one hand by a Muslim "minoritarian" experience in relation to the "nation" was also very much a part of anti-colonial struggle.

### **The *Sharif* Citizens of Bombay Progressive Theater and Cinema**

Within the first fifteen minutes of the 1944 Bombay film, *Panna: Lahore Ki Ek Tawā'if* (*Panna: A Tawā'if of Lahore*), the heroine has managed to murder three people: her *dalāl* (pimp), who was demanding that she offer sexual services in addition to song and dance; the fascist warden of the Andaman Islands prison where she is sent to serve *kāla pāni* (life-sentence) and lastly, the prison guard who attempts to re-capture her as she makes a daring escape on a skiff from the most feared prison in the Southern hemisphere. Panna then stows herself onto a steamship headed for Calcutta, where she circumvents the law yet again by forcibly trading places with a woman who is an undercover spy for the fascists. The plot shifts from Panna as a *tawā'if* pretending to be a spy who is pretending to be a *tawā'if*, ultimately falling in love with the very detective in search of the spy. Throughout, Panna's ethical dilemma is not about the restitution of sexual virtue as she spends a night with the detective and there is no stitching over this moment of the narrative with ideological claims to sexual purity. Rather, the heroine is torn between whether or not to confess to her detective lover about her criminal past, while simultaneously ensuring that spies working in league with German and Japanese forces are derailed from their plans and pushed out of Hindustan. She struggles with an identity formed in part by ideals of *sharāfat* (respectability) about which I shall say further on as well as patriotism in the form of anti-fascist, and anti-colonial resistance.

From beginning to end in this filmic narrative, Panna exists always on the peripheries of an emergent India, as she transforms from a subaltern to a revolutionary. Each time she sings, it is from the outside: she is first to be found on the margins of respectable urban life, singing *ghazals* in a *kothā* (brothel) above the busy streets of Lahore's red-light district; her soulful rendition behind bars in the Andaman islands is not only a yearning for a return from exile but it is a patriotic eulogy, punctuated with attempts to form filial bonds with an imprisoned



revolutionary poet; aboard the steamship to Calcutta, she performs a dance number that is a syncretic combination of traditional *kathak* and cabaret before an audience of ambassadors and diplomats; she sings the last song on the way to the detective's home, a shack on the outskirts of the jungle. The long-standing leitmotif of the itinerant *tawā'if* of Indo-Persian literature is here re-manufactured as 'the good spy'; she is a figure who articulates anti-colonial resistance while smarting at the fascists, cleverly maneuvering around local laws and international waters. *Panna* was so popular it had a record-breaking run in many cities across British India, playing for over six months in several theaters, and well over a year in others. It eventually came to the attention of the Maharaja of Indore, who personally attended the Silver Jubilee week and awarded a medal to actress Geeta Nizami for the role.<sup>28</sup>

The reception to *Panna* illustrates the extent to which popular expressions of anti-colonial resistance in the decades leading up to independence did not necessarily rely upon overtures of a culturally exclusivist Indian nationalism. This example by no means is meant to gloss over the very real communitarian conflicts which were rife in the decades of the 1930s and 1940s. Markus Daechsel has argued for instance, that despite its multi-religious make-up, the Urdu middle-class milieu was by no means a shared public sphere, and that Urdu constituted, perhaps more than religiously exclusive languages, a shared linguistic battleground<sup>29</sup> orientation towards fascist political agendas coming about as a result of, and coincident with, the rise of consumer society.<sup>29</sup> Yet, this does not explain why or how so many Urdu progressive intellectuals were keen to take on leading roles in organizing anti-fascist and anti-imperialist politics in conjunction with the production of popular culture in Bombay. Both the 'radical

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<sup>28</sup> Dawn, Friday February 22, 1946. The film ran for over 80 weeks in Allahabad, 34 weeks in Calcutta, 28 in Bombay, 25 in Indore, 18 in Peshawar, and 16 in Lahore. Dawn, NMML.

<sup>29</sup> Markus Daechsel, *The Politics of Self-Expression: The Urdu Middle-class Milieu in mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan*, Routledge, London, 2006.

reformist and populist interventions made by progressive Urdu intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s to challenge what they termed as the reactionary impulse of an existing middle-class *sharīf* culture, were profoundly shaped by an already existing language of revolution and radical politics and took on new meanings as they cultivated a shared socio-political space in the city.

Acknowledging that it was the sphere of the performing arts that progressive cultural work was gaining ground was one of the reasons that led to the formation of an all-Indian people's theater movement. Moreover, it was the perceived urgency of raising popular consciousness about the dangers of fascism that led to the formation of the IPTA (Indian People's Theater Association) in 1943. Its draft resolution claimed that "fascist hordes are on our borders planning and fighting to overrun our country and destroy our freedom for years to come [while] internally, an alien bureaucracy totally isolated from the people seeks to hold its sway and prevent the masses from organizing their national defense by resorting to grim repression."<sup>30</sup> The IPTA would become one of India's most enduring cultural movements. The main purpose of the IPTA, as its organizers identified it in the "All Indian People's Theatre Conference Draft Resolution," was to mobilize "a people's theatre movement throughout the whole of India as the means of revitalizing the stage and the traditional arts and making them at once the expression and organizer of our people's struggle for freedom, cultural progress and economic justice."<sup>31</sup> It aimed in "reinterpreting, adopting, and integrating [our rich cultural heritage] with the most significant facts of our people's lives and aspirations of the present epoch." The IPTA organizers stated that, "with the growth of Kisan and working class movements, writers and artists from among the submerged masses began to be stirred by the new hope and faith in their classes engendered by these movements. Village bards and factory workers began to compose and sing

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<sup>30</sup> Sudhi Pradhan, ed., *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, vol. I. Calcutta, National Book Agency, 1979. Pg. 148 Pradhan.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

their own songs of hope and defense of national unity and international alliance of progressive forces, but the organization of these developments into an all-India movement was yet to be achieved.<sup>32</sup>

What initially started in 1942 as an organization in Bombay and Calcutta had expanded by 1945 into a nation-wide movement organized along three departments: the song and dance division, the drama division, and the film division. While the IPTA partly drew inspiration from Western and Chinese play-acting practices, it was rooted in India's own cultural and social worlds, challenging existing hegemonic structures, both colonial and Indian. Additionally, by presenting the same plays in different languages, the IPTA organizers tried to overcome the lack of cohesion among a heterogeneous population. This was done with a view to establish connections amongst the people through the people's identification with day-to-day struggles. Many of the IPTA plays, like the *mushai'rahs* I discussed in chapter 3, were performed in outdoor theaters such as Kamgar Maidan in Bombay, which could accommodate up to twenty-thousand people. Organizers mobilized plays to propagate antifascist ideology and espouse the cause of world democracy and its members consisted of men and women from various backgrounds, including lawyers, professors, students, musicians, journalists, playwrights, farmers, trade-union leaders, and workers groups. The IPTA cut across regional and religious affiliation, its prominent members included Balraj Sahni, Shombhu Mitra, Bijaa Bhattacharya, Anna Bhau Sathe, and K.A. Abbas. By the 1940s, Bombay had become the epicenter of a wide-range of creative and artistic activities, the IPTA organization being a part of this general trend, coinciding with modernist art movements.<sup>33</sup> As with the IPTA, these other activities arose from

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> See Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism? Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, Manohar Publishes, Delhi, 2000.

explicit political engagement, in particular with the mobilization efforts of communist leadership.

There had already been a vibrant labor movement in Bombay, from as early as the 1920s and the Bombay working class movements of the 1920s and 1930s had become models for Communist organizers in other parts of India. The largest group of workers came from the mills, many from Girangaon, one of the oldest communities in Bombay.<sup>34</sup> From the late 1920s onwards, especially after the strike of 1928, the labor movement in Bombay came to be dominated by a communist leadership. In the 1920s and 1930s, there were over a thousand strikes that took place in individual mills and departments. Girangaon, then, came to be seen by the city's elites, especially in the late 1920s, as an insurrectionary center. By the late 1940s, support that the communists commanded among the workers had begun to dwindle by comparison with the heady days of the late 1920s, but nonetheless they continued to elicit substantial support in Girangaon up until the 1970s. The reason that communists began to lose support was because of how radical elements in the 1930s which tried to infuse nationalist politics were ultimately left fractured in by the end of the decade, given the different kinds of policies adopted by the CPI and the CSP (Congress Socialist Party). Furthermore, in the 1940s, the CPI shifted its official policy on World War II, and was no longer opposed to it, claiming to seek unity with the British imperialists in the fight against fascism.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Girangaon was part of the burst of cultural creative activities, which could not have taken shape in isolation from IPTA. Annubhau Sathe, a Marathi leader of several strikes, was formative to the street theater which was organized by communist party platforms. As Adarkar and Menon have pointed out, the range and vitality of

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<sup>34</sup> Ed. Meera and Neera Darkar Menon, *One Hundred Years, One Hundred Voices: The Millworkers of Girangaon*, Seagull Press 2005.

í cultural production could not have take shape in isolation from the similar vibrancy that was witnessed in Girangaon at the same time. They emerged from similar influences and from connections and contexts that were closely related and unavoidably in dialogue with each other.<sup>35</sup> They point out how artists differentiated the specialty of their art forms and located themselves within their particular histories, identifying the provenance and complexity of their performances. At the same time, such as in the following case of Marathi dance dramas and folk-songs, genres also cut across regional specificity in Bombay, in the more universal location of the performer of the artist as *sha'ir*, the Urdu-Hindustani word for poet:

Annahau Sateø ñMumbaichi Lavniø was a conscious tribute to Patthe Bapurao. The *loknatya* tradition explicitly drew upon and closely associated itself with the tradition of the Satyashodhak *jalsas* or dance dramas. Nivrutti Pawar recalled how his first visit to see Patthe Bapuraoø *tamasha* shaped his future as a *shahirí*. Subsequently he took his first steps towards becoming a singer when he began to accompany Shahir Haribhau Bhadari as he peddled *khaja* through the streets of Girangaon. As a result he began to acquire a reputation as a singer. ñI started getting invited to sing at functionsø and thus became a professional singer and poet. ñShahirø as he pointed out, ñis a title people give you. It is not a title conferred by any institution.ø In this sense, it was not very different from those who came to be known as *dadas*.<sup>36</sup>

As compared to the communist leadership of the previous decades, that of the 1940s and 1950s was no longer as sensitive to the particularities of local circumstance, since left movements were being constrained by new political debates and theoretical alignments having to do with the Second World War. In 1942, the year that the Quit India movement was launched, Indian Congress leaders saw immediate freedom from the British as a more pressing need than averting the threat of fascist forces, which, in their view, only peripherally affected India. The Communists found this policy of Congress limited. They saw the war as a conflict between

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<sup>35</sup> *One Hundred Years, One Hundred Voices: The Millworkers of Girangaon*, Seagull Press 2005. pg. 26-27.

<sup>36</sup> *One Hundred Years, One Hundred Voices: The Millworkers of Girangaon*, Seagull Press 2005. pg. 26-27.

imperialist and fascist powers for a re-division of the colonies and hence urged action against Fascist Japan and Germany before action against the British. Reflecting the split on the left between those who argued that fascism had to be eliminated, and those for whom British imperialism was to be extinguished first, a new discussion arose regarding a People's War. Given that the IPTA was formulated in this context, many of its early plays had to do with the threat of fascism as well as the socio-economic conditions of villages widely perceived as directly resulting from the colonial policies linked to an expansionist empire. Meanwhile, Bombay was witnessing increased levels of urbanization in the 1940s and 1950s, with the influx of refugees from famine stricken villages, war, and eventually, the migration of Partition refugees in the early 1950s. Alongside many others, Urdu writers and poets, were seminal to documenting, dramatizing, and show-casing these vast socio-economic changes by narrating the stories of downtrodden refugees and poor.

As Nandi Bhatia has shown, the intersection of the popular and the political, through socially realistic plays had important ramifications for women as well. The IPTA's interactions with the local population opened up the issue of the doubled adversity faced by women from the lower-classes, especially in factories where women made up a large portion of the work-force. The IPTA playwrights participated in show-casing the question of the exploitation of women, both by writing plays about women, and by catering to large female audiences. Thus, Ali Sardar Jaffri's *Yeh Kis Ka Khūn Hai (Whose Blood Is This)*, a play about peasants and workers' resistance to the first Japanese bombing in Chittagong, staged its last performance for an audience of *bīdī* workers, most of whom were women.<sup>37</sup> There were also several progressive activist women who wrote and produced plays, such as Anil de Silva, Razia Sajjad Zaheer, and

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<sup>37</sup> Nandi Bhatia, *Acts of authority, acts of resistance: theater and politics in colonial and postcolonial India*, University of Michigan Press, 2004, pg. 85-89.

Rashid Jehan Begum. Some of them were associated with the Communist Party of India, or left politics, through their husbands, who resided in the living quarters of the Communist Party affiliates. The communes played a significant role in forming filial bonds and attachments between communist party members, and working people in Bombay though perhaps more of the former than the latter. Such attachments have been narrated in Shaukat (Kaifi) Azmi's memoir, *Yāad ki Rahguzar* (Procession of Memories) in which she relates her experiences of living in Bombay with her husband the progressive poet Kaifi Azmi. The memoir, mostly an ode to her erstwhile husband's legacy of poetry and politics, provides significant glimpses into how a community of progressives, many associated with the IPTA, lived close to the mills and such places as Byculla Jail. Shaukat Azmi relates her story of leaving Hyderabad, where she had belonged to a well-to-do *sharīf/ ashraf* family, for Bombay to join her husband after marriage. In her reminiscences, her arrival to the city of Bombay marks a turning point, a shift from the trappings of the *sharāfat* (respectability) of an upper-class family, to the moral character of an individual committed to progressive causes. In the narration, for instance, her father advises her that as she is choosing her husband-to-be, she ought to know before moving to Bombay that living with a poet in such a big city, on a meager income, might not suit her, given the privileged life she was accustomed to living. Responding to her father that she wanted to marry him precisely because she was drawn to Kaifi Azmi's *sharif* character—his commitment to political change and social justice, over and above the pretenses of *ashraf* life—she shows the déclassé culture which Urdu progressive writers were a part, and to whom identification with the city of Bombay was central.

Urdu progressive writers of the period saw themselves as *auteurs* of socially realist literature that depicted the lives and minds of people who had up until then appeared at best

as peripheral, and at worst, held in contempt as the inverse of all that was *sharīf*. What came to be a defining feature of progressive writing was that, figures like the peasant, the laborer, the lower-class prostitute, the tonga-wallah, the asylum inmate, the household servant, the clerical peon, roadside vegetable vendor, and the middle-class housewife, were transformed into individuals with desires, dreams, and disappointments. In short, socially realist literature of this period constantly reiterated to the colonial state, to the middle-classes, and to nationalist leaders, that *these* were the “citizens” generally left out of discussions about franchise, debates over India’s involvement in World War II, and how and when their families were going to be counted and divided during the 1947 Independence and Partition of British India. Progressive writers argued that the law-makers, leaders, and local bodies of authority— typically those belonging to what was considered *sharīf* society— were not the only people in society who were deserving of citizenship— in fact, these people often figured in short stories as shady characters, never to be trusted fully.

What happened when the concerns and issues raised within progressive Urdu fiction and the stage were then worked into the medium of Bombay’s narrative theater and cinema? In significant ways, cultural practices, themselves linked to certain valuations regarding dissent and subversion, were coupled with emergent democratic sensibilities in a wider political context. Additionally, the attendant specificities of Muslim upper-class societal ethos were, in Bombay, deployed for a newly imagined political utopia that was not always tied to the territorial nation as such. Progressive Urdu political culture significantly contributed to the production of a new moral economy in cultural representations of the “nation” but this moral economy was forged through deep territorial attachment not to the nation but to the *city* as the quintessential homeland (*vatan*). Thus, Kaifi Azmi’s following couplet, cannot be read simply as an homage to the Indian



nation; rather it is a perspective deeply informed by the actual experiences of finding a home, in the filial attachments forged in communist collectives of Bombay city, struggling to survive in a new urban environment, under regimes of imprisonment (colonial and nationalist), while contending with the specificities of his *ashrāf* background.

*Kar chale ham fida, jan-o-tan sathiyon*  
*Ab tumhare havale watan sathiyon*

We have sacrificed our lives and our souls, comrades,  
Now the country is in your custody, comrades.

I have already argued above that the film song was one medium which popularized much older Indo-Persian themes of poetry related to attachment to the city, but the many screenplays written by Urdu progressive writers in Bombay also linked up themes related to notions of *sharāfat* from the IPTA plays and incorporated them into cinema. For the most part, writers such as Manto and Chughtai, in their roles as screenplay and dialogue writers, worked within the acceptable parameters of popular cultural production, reserving their more experimental and radical personas for their fiction. Both, however, were extremely critical of the commercial world of the film industry. Manto claimed that he had been reduced to nothing more than a *ōa mere munshiō* for the film studios<sup>6</sup> evoking an image of his status as a clerical peon by using the term used to denote the scribes employed for colonial officials. Meanwhile, Ismat Chughtai, wrote expository articles and a novella, about the unethical ties between corrupt business practices of film distribution (*ōblack moneyō*) and film production. Such criticisms also coincided with the transformation of the over-coded concept of *sharāfat* (respectability), so key to conceptions of Indo-Muslim society as well as political representation. The meanings associated with *sharāfat* had already been worked away from notions of rank-based propriety associated with upper-class

*ashrāf*. In Bombay cinema, however, those meanings began to also attach themselves to popular Indian idealizations of the citizen, and to a set of wider populist concerns.

In spite of the efforts of progressive writers and people's theater activists to incorporate the marginalized and subaltern groups into the mainstream narratives of the nation as well as of citizenship, they were ultimately unsuccessful in quelling South Asia's lunge into communitarian violence and strife. The reasons for this, is twofold. Firstly, the progressives were unable to resolve the Hindi-Urdu divide within their institutional contexts such as writers' conferences, meetings, and gatherings. They were unsuccessful in developing a new Hindustani language for educational purposes, such as the literary personalities of the Hindi movement had done. Meanwhile, the only place where Urdu-Hindustani flourished as a national language was the film industry, which, while containing progressive and democratic themes, in some ways also functioned to curb the more radical message of PWA and IPTA. This was clearly the case as Urdu progressives within the film world such as Majrooh, Ismat, Manto, Rahi Masoom Raza and others pointed to their dissatisfaction with the commercialization and commodification of art, the corruption in the industry, and the low-brow film-scripts they were forced to write. At the same time, even as the progressive project failed to shift the political trajectory of South Asia, it had a powerful impact on film. Urdu progressives left behind a rich legacy of song, poetry, and cultural narratives in Bombay cinema. In their personal attachments to the city, and critique of the dominant national narrative, they nonetheless managed to leave behind traces of their personal and political engagement with alternative nationalist politics. Related to this was how the progressive project was linked to discourses of decline of the Urdu language, and in their attempt to square a re-imagined Indo-Persian past with their political present, they staged an urban modernity against the homogenous national form.

The other reason that the PWA and IPTA were unsuccessful in changing the course of nationalist politics in the years approaching independence was because of how they were perceived as a cultural front for the Communist Party of India. The CPI was certainly a big part of the story of the PWA project, but progressive writers came from a variety of political backgrounds. That the PWA and IPTA were being perceived by Indians as a cultural front with the CPI, however, was a problem because of the position that the CPI took on World War II. As the Indian Congress Party under Gandhi's leadership refused to fight in Britain's war, the CPI thought that the greater threat to India was fascism. Even though there were many progressives such as K.A. Abbas, who were against the war, nonetheless the Indian National Congress never forgave CPI for taking this position, and meanwhile the Progressive Writers Project was being seen a front for the CPI, thus making it less popular amongst Indian nationalists who opposed the war.

## Chapter 5

### Anti-Imperialist Convergences: Radical Literati and the Emergence of Pakistan, 1919-1954

I cannot see the man of *jihād* anywhere,  
In whose veins runs force of character ó Iqbal

We Palestinian Arabs see you as a poet not only of international renown, but as a bold and courageous *mujāhid*, who gives the people confidence to move forward for emancipation, progress, and prosperity. We take pride in our friendship with you for your depth of thought, which has led you towards making the Palestinian struggle successful... Letter from Yasser Arafat to Faiz Ahmed Faiz, 1981, *Afkar*

We shall Witness  
It is certain that we too, shall witness  
The day that has been promised,  
About which it is written, upon the slate of eternity ó Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Come, let's raise our hands (for prayer) too,  
We, who do not remember any rituals of (formal Muslim) prayer.  
We, who except for the feeling of love,  
do not remember any deity or God. ó Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Prayer*<sup>1</sup>

Having thus far examined how long-standing Indo-Persian and Indo-Muslim conceptions of aesthetics and ethics were politicized in the mid-twentieth century literary milieu, I now turn to a more careful examination of the political forces which shaped the radical Urdu intelligentsia. Scholarship which has focused upon the emergence of the Indian and Pakistani nation-states, has viewed the intellectual production of colonized elites in terms of colonial and subsequent derivative nationalist discourses.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I sketch a history of politics whose imagined

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<sup>1</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, "Dua (Prayer) Aaiye haath uthaye hum bhi / Hum jinhe rasme dua yaad nahin Hum jinhe soze' mohabbat ke siva / Koi but, Koi khuda yaad nah, 1967

<sup>2</sup> In studies of nationalism about the era of decolonization, the processes of cultural and intellectual exchange have often been narrated by starting with the colonizer's culture as the principal point of reference for the colonized, or otherwise subjected peoples. Within these narratives, culture and ideas move in one direction: from a hegemonic center (Europe) to its receptive peripheries (non-Europe). In writing about Indian nationalism, Partha Chatterjee inscribes its moment of departure, by taking for granted Edward Said's argument regarding Orientalism as identical to the colonial project. In Chatterjee's framework, nationalist thought in India at its emergence does no violence to the thematic of Orientalism and the only sense that nationalist thought is opposed to colonialist (Orientalist) thought, for Chatterjee, is that, "cultural ideal in which the sciences of the West can be emulated while retaining the spiritual greatness of Eastern culture." See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). What happens to such "cultural ideals" at moments of departure, if we move beyond territorial boundaries of the nation? The early twentieth century saw greater levels of world communication and travel: there were networks of anti-colonial activity between

community is larger than the nation as such. I examine three inter-related, yet distinct phenomena: first, the relationship of North Indian Muslim leftist radical writers to the trans-nationalist politics of the Khilafat movement; second, the relationship of leftist radicals to the cross-currents of Bolshevism, anti-imperialist Indian politics, and the colonial state; and third, the fate of leftist radicalism within the post-colonial Pakistani state.

The anti-imperial and trans-nationalist politics of the Khilafat movement in the second decade of the twentieth century set the stage for Indian Muslims to enter into the politics of left internationalism and socialism from the 1930s onwards. The Khilafat movement, which called for the continuation of the Ottoman Caliphate following Turkey's defeat in World War I, as a reinstatement of centralized political power in the Muslim world, was formulated as a response against British imperialism. It focused upon securing the political interests of Muslim elites in colonial North India. In standard accounts of the Khilafat movement, the shaping of Muslim political identity has been viewed mostly in terms of its relationship to the Indian nationalist movement at home, leading to an over-emphasis upon the part played by 'religion' and 'religious symbols' in the political motivations of the North Indian Muslim elite.<sup>3</sup> (Furthermore, the religio-political character of the movement has often been uncritically and problematically viewed as the forerunner to Muslim nationalism and the emergence of Pakistan.) Yet, the reason why the left-leaning writers' guild with internationalist underpinnings of AIPWA garnered so much support in the Urdu public sphere was because an existing twentieth century literary milieu had already been looking beyond India in articulating anti-imperialist struggle. Such intellectual linkages to a wider world of protest against imperial rule were sustained in the organizational

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aspiring Indian revolutionaries, anti-imperial groups in North America, Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, and throughout Asia. The idea that the world is divided into East and West, an idea unwittingly reified by post-colonialist scholarly paradigms, disintegrates when we turn to the intellectual networks of a diverse array of anti-imperialist Muslims, such as those discussed in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Mushirul Hasan, *Communal and pan-Islamic trends in colonial India*, (New Delhi: Manohar Press, 1981).

and ideological impetus of the radical left literati. This chapter is an account of the Urdu radical intelligentsia and the politics of anti-imperialism: subsidiary to this are two themes. First, through travel and writings, these writers consistently embraced and at times dwelled in horizons that were broader than those of territorial nationalism, and second, they were regarded as especially threatening by the colonial state for this very reason.

The colonial state erroneously linked the activities of the radical Urdu intelligentsia of the 1930s, to those of a contemporaneous generation of Indian communists. Some of the earliest Indian communists were *muhājirs* (migrants), who had travelled to Afghanistan on the heels of the Khilafat movement (1919-1922).<sup>4</sup> Often overlooked within the anti-imperialist struggles of the period, *muhājirs* played an active role in radical anti-imperial projects, many being influenced by Bolshevik ideology abroad. Some renewed their anti-imperialist commitments in accordance with allegiances to the Communist Party of India (CPI). Despite the fact that the *muhājirs* who joined revolutionary groups in India were separate from progressive writers committed to social realist literary endeavors, the colonial state saw their overlapping vocabularies of social justice to be one and the same, especially given the centrality of the role of the CPI to both. The colonial state was panicking about securing the frontiers of the empire during the mid-1920s, in the face of increasing nationalist aspirations in India, and progressive intellectuals of the early 1930s came under suspicion. The state's sweeping categorization and suspicion of left-leaning nationalists persisted into the early post-colonial period.

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<sup>4</sup> Even prior to the expeditions of *muhajirs* from the Khilafat movement, however, were anti-colonial Islamic revolutionaries calling for a *jihad* against the British, including the followers of the Deobandī Maulana Mahmudul Hasan, such as Obeidullah Sindhi. The latter crossed the Punjab into Afghanistan, and attempted to throw in this lot with the Russian Bolsheviks as early as 1919 in a bid to establish contacts in the Afghanistan government for assistance to upend British rule in India. See Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) p. 204-210.

The final portion of this chapter begins to consider the cross-roads of these processes through the life and works of Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984), a globally celebrated Urdu poet, who shaped and was shaped by, his place and his time: a transitional period between late colonial India and post-colonial India and Pakistan. The Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case (1951) in which the nascent Pakistani state cracked down on progressive forces, heralded limitations for intellectuals and civil society for many years to come. Amongst the purported ðringleadersö was Faiz, for whom imprisonment, exile, and the politics of international solidarities were intertwined. Faiz's poetry as well as his writings on culture and society, much of which was written while he was in prison or in exile, reflects his outright rejection of territorial nationalism. While his critiques of nationalism evolved during the divisive climate of Partition, they had also developed alongside the wider context of socialist activism in the years before and after 1947, as well as the struggles against authoritarian rule of the post-colonial Pakistani state in later years. A thorough assessment of Faiz's writings in exile on culture and nationalism constitutes its very own separate study, but in this chapter I will touch upon the explicit connections between literary aesthetics and politics in his work, and how, despite the fact that widespread organized (and institutionalized) leftist radical politics were brought to a brutal end, Faiz's aesthetics continued to inform Pakistani sensibilities of protest.

### **Khilafat to AIPWA**

Between 1935 and 1936, three manifestoes of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association were published. The English version appeared first. It was authored by Indian students at Oxford and Cambridge, and was published in *New Left Review* in February of 1935:

Radical changes are taking place in Indian society. Fixed ideas and old beliefs, social and political institutions are being challenged. Out of the present turmoil and conflict a new society is arising. The spiritual reaction<sup>1</sup> though doomed to ultimate decay, is still operative and is making desperate attempts to prolong itself. While claiming to be the inheritors of the best traditions of Indian civilization, we shall criticize ruthlessly, in all its political, economic, and cultural aspects, the spirit of reaction in our country; and we shall foster through interpretive and creative works (both native and foreign resources) everything that will lead our country to the new life for which it is striving. We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today [sic]<sup>2</sup> the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness, and political subjection. All that drags us down to passivity, inaction, and un-reason we reject as reactionary.<sup>5</sup>

The Hindi translation of the progressive writers' English manifesto was published in the journal *Hans* eight months later. As the AIPWA (All-India Progressive Writers Association) reached out to Hindi writers to join, the radicalism of the original English version was muted by *Hans* editors when translated: 'radical' was replaced with 'great' and the term, 'progressive' was shorn of its transparent communist-inspired connotations. The terms 'religion' and 'class' were removed entirely, and the document was limited to expressing anti-imperialist sentiment while remaining vague on such controversial matters as the Hindi-Urdu language debate.<sup>6</sup> Given the more politically conservative aims of the Hindi movement in the UP associated with aspirations for a single Indian national language, and its steady project of eradicating a shared history away from Urdu, it comes as little surprise that the Hindi manifesto was not likely to support radical causes. At the same time, Urdu (Hindustani) continued to be the dominant spoken vernacular of the middle and upper classes within the UP. The third manifesto, was formulated as an *āilān-nāmah* (announcement) written in Urdu, and was the most widely circulated. Heralded as an

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<sup>5</sup>Carlo Coppola, *Urdu Poetry, 1935-1970: The Progressive Episode*, Thesis (Ph. D.), Univ. of Chicago, Committee on Comparative Studies in Literature, March 1975.

<sup>6</sup>Carlo Coppola, 'The All-India Progressive Writers' Association: The European Phase', in *Marxist Influences on South Asian Literature*, 1975. Coppola argues that the second version was streamlined so that the organization could garner support in India amongst Hindi writers.



authoritative document of *taraqqī-pasand adab* (progressive literature), it was presented at the first All-India Progressive Writers' Conference in Lucknow in April 1936, and was distributed under the aegis of Sajjad Zaheer (1905-1973) who was by this point a leading member of the Communist Party of India.

Sajjad Zaheer's prominent role in the formation of AIPWA, the publication *Angāre* (*Burning Embers*), as well as the Oxford Communist Group have already been featured at length in chapter 3. When he returned to India in 1935, he was elected secretary of the Allahabad branch of the Indian National Congress and worked closely with Jawaharlal Nehru, as a representative of the CSP (Congress Socialist Party). During this period, the broader canvas of Indian nationalist politics was being defined by an increasing number of right-wing Hindu associations joining the Congress Party's fold.<sup>7</sup> It was in this context that the CSP was attempting to radicalize Congress from the left. Zaheer was jailed twice during this period, both for his involvement in communist politics and for his anti-colonial writings and speeches. Upon his release in 1942, he continued his political work of mainly editing leftist Urdu journals such as *Qaumi Jung* and *Naya Zamana*, helping to found the All-Indian Kisan Sabha, before becoming a staunch proponent of Congress Party-Muslim League Unity.<sup>8</sup> After Partition, he went to Pakistan to establish the Communist Party there. Zaheer also had a leading role in drafting the AIPWA manifesto in both English and in Urdu. Amongst several prominent *ashrāf* intellectuals such as Maulana Hasrat Mohani (1875-1951) and Maulvi Abdul Haque (1870-1961), the '*ailān-nāmāh*' was signed by the leading litterateur of Hindustani prose, Munshi Premchand (1880-1936), who had been invited to preside over the proceedings of the first AIPWA meeting in Lucknow. If the

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<sup>7</sup> See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (London: Macmillan Press, Cambridge Commonwealth Series, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> See Sajjad Zaheer, 'The Case for Congress-League Unity' in *People's War*, 1943; reprinted in Mushirul Hasan, *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics, and the Partition of India*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Hindi version of the document had lost the radical potential of the original, the Urdu version proved otherwise:

At this moment, revolutionary (*inquilābī*) changes are taking place in Hindustani society (*samaj*). And [the force of] retrogression (*rajat-parastī*), whose death (*maut*) is essential and imminent, is wildly flailing (*devana-vār haath paon mar rahi hai*), so it may prolong its existence! Our literature (*adab*) has [long been] prey to! escapism (*gona farāriyat*)! seeking refuge (*panāh*) in an empty spirituality (*khokhli rūhāniyat*)! hence, its veins have stopped flowing with new blood! .It is the duty (*farz*) of Hindustani litterateurs (*adīb*) to give full expression (*bhar-pūr izhār karein*) to the changes which will be taking place! the purpose of our organization is to liberate *adab* from the talons of retrogressive forces, which want to push *adab* into the trenches (*gadhon*) of decline (*inhetāt*). We want to bring *adab* closer to the people! We understand ourselves as inheritors (*vāris*) of the best traditions (*behterin ravaij*) of Hindustani culture (*tehzīb*), and in claiming those traditions as ours, we shall strive (*jihd-o-jihād*) against the reactionary forces in our country. In this endeavor, we shall benefit from both our own civilization (*tehzīb-o-tamaddun*) and that of foreign countries (*ghair mulkon*). We want to make our most fundamental problems the subject of Hindustan's new literature (*nayā adab*): hunger, poverty, social backwardness, this slavery! we shall oppose all that which takes us in the direction of helplessness, inertia, and superstition.<sup>9</sup>

Of the departures made in the Urdu document, three are particularly striking. First, the use of the term *revolution* in which the death of an existing order is imminent for the liberation of *adab*, thus, enabling the birth of a new society. Second, as opposed to the English version, in the Urdu document, *spirituality* is not in and of itself a problem. Rather, spirituality *devoid* of meaning, fullness, and content offers no panacea to the injustices which prevail within colonized Indian society. Thirdly, the litterateur draws from the *civilization* which he has inherited, as well as the civilizations of other countries. Unlike the English manifesto, where the writer is expected to be much more utilitarian! drawing from *native and foreign sources* alike! the term *tehzīb-o-tamaddun* is linked to Indo-Muslim discourses about culture and society. *Tehzīb-o-tamaddun*, which was closely linked to *ashrāf* norms of self-conduct and civilizational identity, owes much

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<sup>9</sup> *Guftagu, Taraqqi Pasand Adab Number*, 1969. p 16 (NMML)

to the reformist agenda of the north Indian Muslim middle and upper classes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Prior to the nineteenth century, the term *tehzīb-o-tamaddun* was not commonly used, the term for culture and civilization being simply, *tehzīb*.<sup>10</sup> In this manifesto, *tehzīb-o-tamaddun* refers more universally to a shared Hindustani culture (*tehzīb*). The notion of *tehzīb-o-tamaddun* to refer at once to culture and to civilization undergoes significant change as it comes to be defined within Faiz Ahmed Faiz's writings on culture and identity in post-colonial Pakistan.<sup>11</sup>

What explains the radicalism of this *ḥailan-namah* (letter of announcement)? Why, as opposed to the manifesto in English, did it enunciate questions of social justice explicitly in terms of revolution? Certainly, not all writers agreed with these terms: Ahmad Ali, one of the earliest signatories of the English manifesto, claimed that the term 'progressive' should *not* be taken to be synonymous with 'revolutionary' and he soon found himself at odds with the core organizers of the group, eventually going his own way after falling out with Sajjad Zaheer over the role of art in the production of 'political propaganda.'<sup>12</sup> Even though AIPWA was closely tied to communist politics, it would be misleading to define it as Aijaz Ahmad does, as a cultural front for and of the Communist Party of India (CPI).<sup>13</sup> Such a view overlooks the diverse array of writers who were drawn to progressive writing and the contestations around the term 'progressive', and reifies the colonial and post-colonial state's view of the organization. While

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<sup>10</sup> Urdu scholar CM Naim has suggested that the terms acquired quite different meanings over time in his examination of Lucknow litterateur-historian Abul Halim Sharar's work, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*. Whereas the term *tehzīb* referred to culture, *tehzīb-o-tamaddun* referred to, 'civilization' 'etiquette' and 'refinement.' CM Naim argued that *tehzīb-o-tamaddun* relates to the concept of 'decline' as it plays out in the cultural history of the Muslims of colonial North India. Working Paper, *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition*, University of California Irvine, November, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, (Ed.) Sheema Majeed, Muhammad Reza Kazimi, *Culture and Identity: Selected English Writings of Faiz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

<sup>12</sup> Ahmad Ali, 'Progressive View of Art,' in Sudhi Pradhan, ed., *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, vol. I. Calcutta, National Book Agency, 1979. See also, Carlo Coppola, 'Ahmed Ali (1919-1994) Bridges and Links East and West,' in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Volume 9, 1994, pg. 50-51.

<sup>13</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. 117.

members of the CPI certainly played a pivotal role in establishing the literary organization, the AIPWA also included a range of anti-colonial writers, some who shunned communist and leftist politics altogether and others who would break with the group over diktats against writing purportedly 'obscene' literature. If anything, the AIPWA was a convenient term to refer to a broad scope of writers who sought to challenge accepted social and political norms as they individually defined it in their struggle against colonial rule. Since the progressive project was rooted in a conscious effort to mobilize culture in the interest of politics, it is worth examining the larger context out of which *adab* was, for the first time, being wedded to a revolutionary program, while also being connected to the world beyond India. What were the broader political and cultural forces that made the AIPWA's aims so readily acceptable to Urdu litterateurs, as opposed to those committed to the project of nationalizing Hindi?

Urdu litterateurs had already implemented modernist techniques within the writing of short stories and novels. That the AIPWA project employed literature for social and political purposes, was not unusual in South Asia and by the 1920s, as Ralph Russell has noted, 'themes of revolt against imperialism, of nationalism, and of radical social reform were already common in literature.'<sup>14</sup> The AIPWA clearly manifested an earlier trend—the continuation of a modernizing transformation in literature that could be traced to the Aligarh movement of the late nineteenth century, and which continued in the writings of Iqbal and Premchand. Thus, for instance, as I discussed in chapter two, Altaf Husain Hali's Urdu poetry in the late nineteenth century was characterized by its socio-cultural and political concerns, foregrounding the loss of Muslim political power and the demise of the Muslim community's cultural unity. The literary experiments of Iqbal and Premchand, in particular, were most immediately relevant to the AIPWA: their critiques of the prevalent socially and economically exploitative conditions of

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<sup>14</sup> Ralph Russell, *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992)

colonial India, as well as their equally strident condemnations of conservative segments of the religious elite, were amongst the central concerns of their writings.

The AIPWA project, however, was marked by its revolutionary component. It called for an immediate end to colonial rule in India, and for doing away with the social elite's conservative social mores, at times, in explicitly Marxist-inspired terms. It was this stridently anti-colonial vision that set the group apart from the strand of late nineteenth century reformers and writers associated with the Aligarh movement. It is all the more significant that the left-dominated politico-literary ventures of AIPWA emerged a little over a decade after the first united struggles against British colonialism, as well as the emergence of anti-colonial Indian Muslims who had begun to reconcile communist and socialist ideas with Islamic principles. Many Indian Muslims had been drawn to communism and socialism through their participation within the Khilafat movement; others had been involved with radical political organizations in the Punjab. These developments set the stage not only for the organizational impetus of AIPWA, but also for the all-too-brief life of the All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association.

The Khilafat movement (1919-21) was the first effective mass mobilization against the British Raj, and changed the tone of Muslim politics within the nationalist movement in colonial India. The politics of the period have typically been viewed as moving on two separate, parallel paths: first, the anti-colonial agitations headed by Gandhi's non-cooperation movement; and second, the protests of India's Muslim community which was coalescing around Muslim grievances over the Allied, in particular British, policies towards the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman Caliph in the wake of World War I. Between 1919 and 1921, there was a forging of Hindu-Muslim unity at the level of high politics, even as the animosities between the two

communities were sharpened.<sup>15</sup> As a crumbling Ottoman empire gave way to European power, Indian Muslims sought the continuation of a Turkish *khalifa* seeing the Ottoman sultan as the temporal and spiritual leader of a universal Islamic community (*ummāh*). By no means was the relationship forged in this period between Indian Muslims and the Ottomans an entirely novel phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> However, it was in the post-1857 context the loss of formal political sovereignty amongst upper class Muslims in colonial India that the *khilafat* had acquired new meaning for segments of Sunni Muslim *ashrāf* classes as well as the *ʿulema*. This cannot be simply understood as a religious call, but as Ayesha Jalal has noted, the preservation of the temporal power of Islam based in Constantinople was seen as a necessary safe-guard to the political future of Indian Muslims.<sup>17</sup> Made up of an alliance of western-educated North Indian Muslims, led by the brothers Shaukat and Muhammad ʿAli of Aligarh, as well as religious authorities (*ʿulema* and *pirs*), the coalition became closely allied to the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mohandas Gandhi. This was a movement in which, there were layered meanings and multiple subtexts in the efforts to accommodate Islamic universalism within Indian nationalism.<sup>18</sup>

The memory of the Khilafat movement as the first united anti-colonial political project was not lost upon Urdu progressive intellectuals. In fact, the first AIPWA conference in Lucknow 1936 took place in the auditorium of *Rifah-e-Aam (Welfare of the Public)* Hall, a building which had served as the venue for the Khilafat Conference in 1920. Zaheer writes that

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<sup>15</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self & Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001)

<sup>16</sup> Azmi Ozcan demonstrates that the early twentieth century was not the first time that Indian Muslims had turned to the Ottoman Empire for purposes of political legitimacy within the subcontinent, but that there were political relationships established between Mughals and Ottomans as early as the seventeenth century. See, Azmi Ozcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924* (New York: Brill Press, 1997)

<sup>17</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Self & Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge Press, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

large heaps of British-made cloth was burnt in the Rifah-e Aam compound. Then in connection with the Non-Cooperation Movement, members of the Congress and Khilafat parties rioted and occupied the hall during a conference of the Liberal party.<sup>19</sup> The main reasons for the failure of the Khilafat movement as well as Non-Cooperation, in Zaheer's view was that the rightist leaders of the Congress and the Khilafat Movement regarded the people's unity and struggle with irritation and fear. They directed the people to fight for independence and *swaraj* [self-rule], but refused to explain the meaning of *swaraj*. The leaders belonged to the middle-classes and were guided by landlord and capitalist interests. They wanted to channel the anger of the public into protests, processions, meetings, and boycott of British goods, thereby putting just enough pressure on the imperialists to force them to come to some agreement with them, and grant them economic and political privileges. They talked about revolution and freedom only to attract the masses.<sup>20</sup> This view echoed the criticisms of Indian communists against an earlier set of agitations: resistance against colonial rule had hitherto been defined by the narrow interests of the nationalist elite on solely its terms.

AIPWA in the first several years of its existence had few contenders from the Hindi literary and political world, but it found full support from those *ashraf* Urdu intellectuals sympathetic towards socialism. The distinction between the Urdu and Hindi literary sphere here was most certainly not a division between Muslim and Hindu, as there were many Hindu writers part of the Urdu literati. Some of the ashraf Urdu intellectuals who inclined towards socialism, who were once active in the Khilafat movement but had since retired from political life. The poet-politician Maulana Hasrat Mohani (1880 ó 1951), whose political career peaked during the Khilafat movement, was a staunch supporter of the aims of the progressive writers group. Hasrat Mohani

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<sup>19</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent: A Translation of Roshnai*, Amina Azfar (Trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 54-55.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid p. 43-44.

was the editor of *Urdu-e Mu'alla*, a political and literary journal published from Aligarh. He was jailed several times, and interned during World War I for his outspoken criticisms against British rule. Attributed with coining the chant, *‘inqilab zindabad* ‘Long Live Revolution’, first employed when he organized Kanpur workers in a protest march,<sup>21</sup> Hasrat Mohani was ‘the main attraction’ at the inaugural AIPWA conference.<sup>22</sup> In 1925, he had chaired the committee of the first communist conference held in Kanpur, and claimed that ‘communism is the final and best form of politics.’<sup>23</sup> He wrote poetry which was widely employed by Khilafatists, and although he was wary of developing any links with the Communist International, he believed that the Indian constitution should be modeled on the Soviet one, claiming that ‘the structure should resemble that of the Soviet Republic where all the principles of Communism are acted upon.’<sup>24</sup> Three allegiances – Makkah, Mathura, and Moscow – defined Hasrat Mohani’s politics, as he cautiously distinguished between Islam as a matter of personal faith, and Islam as a marker of social difference.

Drawing parallels between Bolshevism and Islam as part of a larger set of anti-imperial politics became increasingly common as radical activities on the ground coalesced around the Khilafat movement. Maulana Hasrat Mohani announced at a Khilafat meeting at Mathura that the cardinal principles of Bolshevism were anti-landlordism, anti-capitalism and equality, all of which were ‘in the main, similar to the principles of the Muslim religion.’<sup>25</sup> By the mid-1930s, years after he had withdrawn from mainstream politics, he lent support to AIPWA by defending

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<sup>21</sup> Nafees Ahmad Siddiqui, *Hasrat Mohani Aur Inquilab-e-Azadi* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1998) p. 250-251.

<sup>22</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent: A Translation of Roshnai*, Amina Azfar (Trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> Nafees Ahmad Siddiqui, *Hasrat Mohani Aur Inquilab-e-Azadi* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1998) p.250-251.

<sup>24</sup> Khalid Hasan Qadri, *Hasrat Mohani* (í full ref?) p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent: A Translation of Roshnai*, Amina Azfar (Trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 38.



its manifesto against the attacks of both government and its traditionalist critics. When addressing the *adīb* (litterateurs) of AIPWA, he argued that there was no contradiction at all between Islam and Communism, and furthermore, the objectives (lit. *nasb-ul'ain*, ideal goal) of Islam demanded that all Muslims, all over the world, should try to establish a system of social equality, and that the writers should popularize these views.<sup>26</sup> He added that the new literary movement should support laborers, farmers, and all oppressed humanity, and that it should express the people's sufferings, desires, and longings in a way that would enhance their revolutionary strength and help them to become united, in order to succeed in their struggle for revolution.<sup>27</sup> Arguing that mere Progressivism was not enough, Mohani clamored for a modern literature that upholds socialism and communism, a literature that was defined as revolutionary. Hasrat Mohani himself had written a good deal of political poetry during the early 1920s:

The custom of tyranny successful, let us see, how long it lasts.  
Love of country in a stupor, let us see, how long it lasts.

The chains of deception, the stymied anger of the people,  
Let us see how long it shall last.

What tyrannies in the name of laws are passed!  
This veiled force, let us see how long it lasts.

The riches of India in foreign hands are clasped.  
These numberless riches: let us see how long they shall last.<sup>28</sup>

The organizers of the AIPWA literary project not only found allies in poet-politicians who had once been linked with the anti-colonial thrust of the Khilafat movement in the UP, but they also contended with existing Urdu language and literary organizers who looked to the world beyond

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<sup>26</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent: A Translation of Roshnai*, Amina Azfar (Trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Gail Minault, "Urdu Political Poetry during the Khilafat Movement" in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1974), pp. 459-471.

India in formulating their goals. Much has already been made about how AIPWA had been first conceived by Indian writers in London, who drafted the English manifesto while dining in a Chinese restaurant, drawing heavily from the manifesto of the Popular Front in France.<sup>29</sup> During the early to mid 1930s, ‘popularizing culture’ through political organizing had become widespread, not only in the wake of the Popular Front in France, but also with the rise of pan-African popular cultural fronts leading up to the Second World War.<sup>30</sup> In 1935, India’s first internationally known English writer Mulk Raj Anand, along with Sajjad Zaheer, travelled to Paris to participate in the World Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, where they met with intellectuals of the French Communist Party, specifically, AREAR (Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers) formed in 1932. The AREAR manifesto against German fascism had been signed by a number of intellectuals whom Sajjad Zaheer consulted, such as André Gide, André Malraux, Romain Rolland and Louis Aragon, and served as the inspiration for the first progressive writers’ manifesto.<sup>31</sup> Zaheer was particularly impressed by Louis Aragon, whom he described as being not only ‘every popular among French workers’ but having a place ‘in the most sophisticated and the most exclusive literary circles of Paris.’<sup>32</sup> Such movement between exclusive literary circles and workers’ movements would equally describe Zaheer’s own role within British India during the 1930s and 1940s.

The activities of Indian writers within European internationalist circles in the 1930s were certainly significant to the initial thrust of the organizing principles of progressive literature in

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<sup>29</sup> See Raza and Ali Mir, *Anthems of Resistance* (Delhi: Roli Books, 2006). See also Priyamvada Gopa, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation, and the Transition to Independence* (London: Routledge Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> See also, Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Priyamvada Gopa, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation, and the Transition to Independence* (London: Routledge Press, 2005) p. 24. In Carlo Coppola’s PhD Dissertation (1974), he compares the English PW manifesto to the Hindi one that appeared under Premchand’s leadership in the literary magazine *Hans*.

<sup>32</sup> Sudhi Pradhan, (ed.), *Documents of the Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, vol. I. (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1979), p. 19. (NMML)

India, but these alone do not explain, nor account for, the wide receptivity to such literary pursuits within the Urdu public sphere. Existing Urdu literary organizations were looking beyond India before AIPWA was established. By far the most significant organization of the period was the *Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu* (Association for the Advancement of Urdu), which had been established in 1903 by Maulvi Abdul Haque (1870-1961). Indeed, there was no way that the *tehrīk-e taraqqi-pasand musanifīn* (The Movement of Progressive Writers) could have established itself without engaging with this leading association. The *anjuman* had initially emerged out of the Hindi-Urdu conflicts in North India. Maulvi Abdul Haque, who came to be known as *Baba-e Urdu* (Father of Urdu) was a steadfast proselytizer for the cause of Urdu. He wielded considerable influence in the public sphere, and by the mid-1930s, was notorious among proponents of Hindi, as an uncompromising figure who refused to accept Gandhi's proposal that Urdu be included within Hindi, but not as a national language. To place Maulvi Abdul Haque's *anjuman* squarely within the domain of Hindi-Urdu politics, however, would be to miss the wider dimensions of how he conceptualized Urdu in relation to anti-imperial resistance: namely, by comparing India's position of 'decline' to that of Japan, and by looking towards the Soviet Union, France, and Africa.<sup>33</sup> Maulvi Abdul Haque himself did not travel to these places, but encouraged others in his *anjuman* to do so, and sought to position Urdu not just within India, but in the world at large.

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<sup>33</sup> Recently, Kavita Datla has argued that Maulvi Abdul Haque's comparison of India's condition to that of Japan in the preface of Osmania University textbooks must be read in a political context following the Russo-Japanese war. Japan by this time had become part of the non-Western, Asian imagination, as a successful military and economic power capable of defeating Western powers. By the time that Abdul Haq was writing, Japan may have seemed even more impressive fresh from its military, economic, and political successes during World War I. There was also the not unrelated fact that Japan was the first Asian country to initiate successful programs in mass education—in its own, rather than a European, language. See Kavita Datla, 'A Worldly Vernacular: Urdu at Osmania University' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. For more, see also Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

The *anjuman* was inseparable from Haque's involvement with the formation of Osmania University in 1918 within the princely state of Hyderabad. Osmania was not only the first and only university in colonial India in which the entire curriculum was in Urdu, but it was the first university to use a modern Indian language instead of English as the medium of instruction. One of the chief contributions of the *Anjuman Tarqqi-e Urdu* was establishing a translation bureau (*dar-ul tarjummah*), financed by the Nizam of Hyderabad.<sup>34</sup> *Dar-ul tarjummah* was dedicated to acquiring works from various languages including English, Russian, French, German, Persian and Arabic which were then translated into Urdu. Even though the vast majority of the textbooks for Osmania were translated from English—given that the model of education there was inspired by English university system—what is of significance is that the English books themselves were translations. Thus, the books of interest included many from languages other than English. Maulvi Abdul Haque's interest in the world beyond India increased throughout the late 1920s. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, there was considerable interest in having works of Russian translated into Urdu. Again, these were not direct translations—they were Russian works made available through English. Many writers, even those who would part ways with the progressive writers group, began as journalists or translators. Sa'adat Hasan Manto began his writing career by translating the works of Russian authors such as Gorkhy, Turgenev, and Tolstoy under the patronage of the Punjabi revolutionary activist and journalist, Abdul Bari.<sup>35</sup>

By the early 1930s, Maulvi Abdul Haque was patronizing leading Marxist writers, most notably Akhtar Husain Raipuri and Sibte Hasan, both of whom would play very important roles in the organizational work of AIPWA, and later, APPWA (All-Pakistan Progressive Writers

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<sup>34</sup> Kavita Datla, "A Worldly Vernacular: Urdu at Osmania University" in *Modern Asian Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> In Manto's own account, "Whither Moscow, and whither Amritsar? Nonetheless, Hasan Abbas and myself were new revolutionaries— and we would often take out the world map and draw out schemes to take us overland from India to Russia— In those days, comrade Sajjad Zaheer was known only as Banne Bhai, but we had made Amritsar a little Moscow..." See Sa'adat Hasan Manto, "Bari Sahib" reprinted in *Manto-Numah* (Sang-e-Meel, 1999) p. 70-94.

Association). Akhtar Husain Raipuri wrote the first Marxist literary history in Urdu, *Adab aur Inquilab (Literature and Revolution)* in 1935, which drew heavily from the ideas and works of Russian authors. The book heralded social realist literature to be the *farz* (duty) of the new Urdu literary vanguard, with extensive essays on Soviet theater, and short-story writing of Gorky. Quoting Tolstoy, amongst others, Raipuri put the ideas of Russian writers to work in the service of concepts such as *jihād* (struggle), arguing that the role of the writer was to be one who delivers a *paighām* (message) to the people, claiming that the *adīb* (literateur) has a *farz* (duty) to write literature that not only reflects, but also liberates, the lives of the oppressed.<sup>36</sup> Combining both Islamic and Marxist notions of decline and liberation, the *adīb* in Raipuri's view are assigned a moral duty: those who shun it by producing art for art's sake have gone astray, failing to achieve revolutionary goals. The telos of the narrative is all too familiar: rampant Mughal decadence not only leads to decline, but enervates Hindustan, making it susceptible to British conquest and subsequent industrialization, resulting in a capitalist present. Raipuri rehearsed a familiar Marxist refrain: the past was feudal, a time of Oriental Despotism, its ornamented poetry funded by the royal elite (*tabaqa-e amir*). The present is capitalist and literature created to satisfy a bourgeoisie; and the future is utopian egalitarian. This view of history, in which there is a transition from decline to redemption, only if *adab* (literature and literary ethics) is put in the service of revolution, fit neatly, as Geeta Patel has noted, with the language of modernization. The book became a standard account of literary history amongst the AIPWA. Akhtar Husain Raipuri's introduction to Russian literature, however, was through Maulvi Abdul Haque's translation bureau. Besides its Marxist underpinnings, the anti-colonial vocabulary within *Adab aur Inquilab* also fit with that of an existing discourse about ethical

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<sup>36</sup> Akhtar Husain Raipuri, *Adab Aur Inquilab* (Hyderabad: Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu, 1935) Jamia Milia Islamia University Special Collections Library. p. 3-7

struggle (*jihād*). That Raipuri could use the term freely in the context of revolution and liberation, without having to justify its use, demonstrates that the term *jihād* could loosely refer to anti-colonial nationalist struggle. Furthermore, Raipuri's writing underscored how anti-colonial Indian nationalist thought was shaped alongside Islamic universalist principles.<sup>37</sup>

In 1934, when Italy invaded Eritrea, Akhtar Husain Raipuri along with Sibte Hasan edited a volume of articles under the title, *Jang-e-Habshah Attalia* (War of the Africans and Italians) in protest of Italy's atrocities, which were published by the *anjuman*. Maulvi Abdul Haque had himself been impressed with the speech of Haile Selassie, Ethiopia's emperor, before the League of Nations. What particularly caught his attention were Selassie's words about fascism: "You might be under the illusion that the only thing at stake in the battlefield between the *habsha* (Africans) and fascism is our future. Indeed, it is *your* fate too being decided on those very fields of war."<sup>38</sup> Sibte Hasan claimed that he first came to know about Italy's invasion through Muslim student-activists in Hyderabad. Recalling that the "youth of Hyderabad were very much in touch with international politics," Sibte Hasan recounts that with Maulvi Abdul Haque's support, he was compelled to write about the liberation struggles of Africans from the Italians.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, Maulvi Abdul Haque called for Urdu to be defined as the language of the Muslims, a demand, Sajjad Zaheer claimed, that made him an "Urdu colonialist."<sup>40</sup> Coeval with these sentiments was Maulvi Abdul Haque's call to progressive litterateurs. He argued that their work was "revolutionary" in much the same vein as the work of "eighteenth century French encyclopedists," whom he compared to "the true *mujahids* [those who do *jihad*]" as they sought to provide "the substance for enlightenment" — the revolution of thought, and the annihilation of

<sup>37</sup> See Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008)

<sup>38</sup> Sibte Hasan, *Shehr-e-Nigaran* (Karachi: Maktaba-e-Danyal, 1984) p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> Sibte Hasan, *Shehr-e-Nigaran* (Karachi: Maktaba-e-Danyal, 1984) p. 91.

<sup>40</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent: A Translation of Roshnai*, Amina Azfar (Trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 43

prejudices and superstition.<sup>41</sup> Abdul Haque interpreted the project of European enlightenment as revolutionary in the context of the wider anti-colonial movement. Thus even as the AIPWA organizers were creating new goals for literature in internationalist contexts across Europe, the Urdu literati in Indian cities had already been engaging with literature, languages, and ideas beyond India. The AIPWA's goals, then, coalesced with those of the writers, poets, and anti-colonial activists of the wider Urdu literary world.

### ***Muhājirs, Writers, and the Communist Party of India***

One of the repercussions of the Khilafat movement was the mass emigration of lower-class strata of Indian Muslims to Afghanistan in 1920. Khilafat leaders had effectively announced a *hijrat* (migration) from British India, though they in the main abstained from making the journey northwards. A *fatwa* (religious decree) in favor of the migration was issued by Maulana Abul Bari and Abul Kalam Azad. The ʿAli brothers advocated the exodus, and the ʿAmir of Afghanistan, in a strategic attempt to win bargaining power with the British, promised by way of public announcement a welcome to all those who decided to migrate. The announcement provoked a wide-spread response across India, as many Muslims, totaling roughly thirty thousand, began their journey northwards. Upon reaching Afghanistan, the *muhājirin* (migrants) realized that their Afghan counterparts did not share their ideas about a universal brotherhood of Islam. Indian Muslims were now left to fend for themselves in a land where they had no protection from the Muslim sovereign, whom they had been led to believe would welcome them with open arms. This was a grim reminder, in Ayesha Jalal's words, of the limits of Islamic universalism. Some of the *muhājirs*, disillusioned with the *hijrat*, began to consider other

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

ideologies such as Bolshevism, as they came into contact with a number of political groups in Central Asia.<sup>42</sup> In the months of travel throughout Afghanistan and Central Asia, some of these anti-colonial radicals became the earliest members of the CPI.

The first loose establishment of the CPI occurred in Tashkent in 1921. There was no communist activity within colonial South Asia during this time and the party was organized first as an *émigré* CPI, made up mostly of *muhājirs* who had only recently abandoned the ideals of the Khilafat movement. The *muhājirs* who decided to throw in their anti-imperialist efforts with communists, had studied for some time in the Communist University, were influenced by Bolshevik ideology, and were dubbed, 'Toilers of the East.'<sup>43</sup> Shortly thereafter, in the words of one Rafiq Ahmad, who would go on to become a proletarian leader in Bhopal, 'we formed the party though we were away from home, we did so because we felt it was necessary.'<sup>44</sup> Rafiq Ahmad was adamant that the CPI was first formed by his group of *muhājirs*. The account finds some substance in the memoirs of M.N. Roy, the Bengali revolutionary closely tied to the Comintern who would go on to become the CPI's first General Secretary.<sup>45</sup> Roy initially expressed discomfort that the *muhājirs* aimed to represent themselves for India:

The minority, which proposed the formation of an Indian Communist Party, was reinforced by the Abdur Rab-Acharya group, and I sent a delegation to the Turk Bureau of the Communist International to plead their case. I tried to argue with them that there was no hurry. They should wait until they returned to India. There was no sense in a few emigrant individuals calling themselves the Communist Party. They were evidently disappointed, and I apprehended that the experience might dishearten them. I needed their help to manage the refractory majority of the emigrants. The idea of turning them out with the offer of employment was not practical. So I agreed with the proposal for the formation of a Communist Party, knowing full well that it would be a nominal

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<sup>42</sup> K.H. Ansari, 'Pan-Islam and the Making of the Early Muslim Socialists,' *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3. (1986), pp. 509-537

<sup>43</sup> See Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India, 1917-1947* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2007) p. 87

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p. 88 Chapter 3

<sup>45</sup> For a critical biography of M.N. Roy, see Kris Manjappa, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010).



thing, although it would function as the nucleus of a real Communist Party to be organized eventually.<sup>46</sup>

The *muhājirs* in most historical accounts occupy a subaltern status: they either disappear from narratives of the Khilafat movement, or they recede to the background in histories of communism in India. *Muhājirs* feature in British records of a number of conspiracy cases launched by the colonial state during the 1920s. The increasing number of such cases filed during that decade reflects the panicked efforts of the colonial state to suppress nationalist activities. The conditions in colonial India during and following World War I—the colonial government's aggressive increases in tax and customs duties, the rise of conscription to the army, and subsequent war loans—led to pressures on the Indian economy, and helped to fuel anti-imperialist resistance in the subsequent years.

Moreover, it was during this period that the imperial council placed on the statute book the Emergency Powers Bill—or the Rowlatt Act, named after Justice Sydney A.T. Rowlatt, the president of the Sedition Committee, who wrote the *Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate Revolutionary Conspiracies in India*. In fact, the Rowlatt Act was adopted by the British as a direct response to the Silk Letters Conspiracy which involved the Islamic revolutionary Obedullah Sindhi and a group of students from the Punjab University crossed the border into Afghanistan in 1915; Sindhi spent several years in Kabul planning an armed overthrow of the British government, but as early as 1916, letters (purportedly enclosed in silk handkerchiefs) which he sent on behalf of the provisional government to the government of Russian Turkistan urging them to declare war on Britain wound up in British hands.<sup>47</sup> The colonial state then used the silk letters conspiracy as justification for creating new emergency

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<sup>46</sup> See Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India, 1917-1947* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2007) p. 90 Chapter 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) p. 208.

laws.<sup>48</sup> The Sedition Committee presented an image of India as hostage to elaborate conspiracies and thus the ensuing Rowlatt Act of 1919 perpetuated wartime ordinances into peace-time legislations, which translated into the suspension of civil liberties. The Act allowed the British to hold Indians without trial, and was passed against the urging of nationalist leaders who saw it as evidence of government perfidy, specifically, as a complete turn-around against the promises made by the British during the war to expand Indian political participation. There was a considerable amount of outrage against the Act, as leaders from various aspects of the nationalist political spectrum denounced it. Mohammad Ali Jinnah argued that, "the fundamental principles of justice have been uprooted and the constitutional rights of the people have been violated at a time when there is no real danger to the state" in my opinion, a Government that passes or sanctions such a law in peace, forfeits its claim to be called a Civilized government.<sup>49</sup> Gandhi said that the Rowlatt Law was a "black act", passed by a "satanic" government, and capitalized on the moment to mobilize mass protests at the all-India level, relying on political networks such as the Home Rule Leagues, as well as various groups inspired by Islamic universalism.<sup>50</sup>

In this post World War I period, threatened with the purported Bolshevik specter upon the frontiers of their empire, the British rounded up and banned several groups under the emergency laws of sedition: all of the cases were tried under section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code. Between 1921 and 1924 there were four conspiracy trials conducted against communists: the First Peshawar Conspiracy Case, Second Peshawar Conspiracy Case, Moscow Conspiracy

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 209. Sindhi was actively involved to establish contacts in the Russo-Turkestan government, and thus he sent one Khushi Mohammad to Tashkent where the Bolsheviks had established the Eastern University for training people against imperialist powers.

<sup>49</sup> See Deep Chand Bandhu, *History of Indian National Congress 1885-2002* (Delhi: Gyan Books, 2003) p. 202. Original source citation?

<sup>50</sup> See (Ed.) Sugata Bose & Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: Routledge, 2004)

Case, and the Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy Case. In the first three cases, *muhājirs* made up the majority of those on trial. As *muhājirs* made their way back from the Soviet Union and Central Asia into India, they were charged with attempts of overthrowing the government. Over twenty *muhājirs* were identified in the Peshawar Conspiracy Case trials, many who had joined the Tashkent Military School and others who had studied at the Toilers of the East University. By 1929, many *muhājirs* as well as other communists had been arrested in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. The colonial state was increasingly alarmed by groups of returnee *muhājirs* who were involved in politically mobilizing workers in the cities of British India, ranging from dockworkers in Bombay to the trade unions of lascars in Madras, as well as factory workers in Kanpur.

In the second Peshawar Conspiracy Case (1927), the British government's main obsession was with one Fazl Elahi, a *muhājir* who had acquired a number of aliases, and was also an emissary of the Bengali revolutionary, M.N. Roy. After arresting him in Bombay in April 1927, and trying him for sedition, claiming that he had attempted overthrowing the colonial regime, Fazl Elahi was imprisoned for a period of three years. He was charged with travelling on illegitimate passports, and for lending his passport to other communists, such as one Mahabharat, who was travelling abroad, and attending the Indian Study Circle in London – an anti-imperialist communist group. An urgent telegram message was sent between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy in December 1926: 'Fazl Elahi alias Qurban left Marseilles for India S.S. D'Artagnan third December, was given instructions by Sepassi to form branches Indian Seamen's Union Bombay and Calcutta to facilitate smuggling literature and was travelling on false passport secured from Indian student in London.'<sup>51</sup> Especially troubling for the state were the routes through which Fazl Elahi travelled, for he denied that he had used a false passport, claiming that

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<sup>51</sup> File No: IOR/L/P&J/12/299: Document 3, 1926 (BL)

he walked into India via Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup> The judge of the case, claimed that unlike so many of the Mohajirans to whom sympathy must be extended for the subsequent wanderings which their initial false step compelled them, Fazal Ilahi voluntarily went to Moscow because he wanted to study there; he did not go for the sake of food when the Tashkent School was shut down. He stayed at Moscow for three and a half years and then returned to India unrepentant and under false pretence. As a person thoroughly dangerous to the peace of India he therefore deserves no compassion and mercy.<sup>53</sup> The politically conscious anti-colonial activist was seen by the British as a revolutionary threat, as opposed to the religiously misled. This perception had to do with which groups of *muhājirs* joined the Bolsheviks rather than with the *muhājirs* as a whole.

Fazl Elahi had been travelling to Marseilles, France, as well as to Germany. His movements connected to international networks of communists and anti-imperialist activists was the most threatening for the British. By the mid 1940s, Elahi had travelled to the United States where he was organizing the Indian Labor Movement with labor organizations in California. The Workers' Life magazine, claimed that the sentence showed British justice in India at its best, for sentencing Fazl Elahi Qurban, whose sole crime was that he had attended the Eastern Workers' University in Moscow criminalized any person who travelled to Moscow: "In order to get an excuse for putting Qurban into jail, it was necessary to prove that he had conspired against the Government of the King Emperor. But as he had done nothing since his return but earn his living as an engineer, the only remaining subterfuge was to prove that the Moscow University itself was a conspiracy within the Act."<sup>54</sup>

The parallel paths of the returnee *muhājirs* from Moscow University, and some returnee Indian communist students from London, intersected ideologically at times, in shared claims

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<sup>52</sup> File No: IOR/L/P&J/12/299: Fazl Elahi alias Kurban, 1926 (BL)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

about the illegitimacy of the colonial state, and a larger language of anti-imperial humanism. However, unlike the core organizers of the Progressive Writers Association— CPI affiliated social realist authors who had undergone Western education, and were from primarily *ashraf* backgrounds— the *muhājirs* linked up with Communist and internationalist politics through bypassing the colonial metropole. Consider, for instance, the following descriptions of Moscow by two Indian Muslim Communists:

í The train from Tashkent to Moscow was luxurious and comfortable. The compartments were bigger and better than those used in Indiaí There do not exist any classes in railways, the only difference being soft cars and hard cars í .The first glimpse of Moscow from the train is majestic. You cannot compare it with Calcutta or Bombay or Delhií It is a dream-land with its spires, colored domes, brilliant pinnaclesí Moscow is like no other city on earth. It is neither eastern nor westerní .<sup>55</sup>

The conclusion I arrived at after the first days in Moscow was that it was a great and beautiful city, different from any other that I had seení there was a complete absence of thatí listlessness so common in our country or of that nerve-wracking anxiety and tension that one is so immediately aware of in Western Europeí I found our compartment quite neat, clean and comfortable as our Indian first-class. The carriage was an old one, the fittingsí rather elaborateí <sup>56</sup>

Both of these descriptions, separated by roughly a quarter of a century, belong to travelogues documenting journeys from India to the Soviet Union. The first is from Shaukat Usmani's *Peshawar to Moscow: Leaves from an Indian Muhajirin's Diary*, published in 1927. The second is from Mahmud-u-Zafar's *Quest for Life*, written in the mid-1940s (published 1955). Both Shaukat Usmani (1901-1978) and Mahmud-u-Zafar (1908-1956) were Urdu-speaking Indian Muslims brought up in the UP; both were anti-colonial intellectuals who conceived of the Soviet Union as a political utopia; and both were committed members of the Communist Party of India.

<sup>55</sup> Shaukat Usmani, *From Peshawar to Moscow: Leaves from an Indian Muhajireen's Diary* (Benares: Swarajya Publishing House, 1927) p. 113 (NMML)

<sup>56</sup> Mahmuduzzafar, *Quest for Life* (London: People's Publishing House, 1954) p. 21-31 (NMML)

Their paths to Moscow and communism belonged to very different, yet inter-connected trajectories.

Shaukat Usmani was born into a family of artisans, Ustas of Bikaner, professional artists patronized within Rajasthani courts. He traveled to the Soviet Union, as an outcome of his journey to Afghanistan and Central Asia during the *hijrat* of 1920. During this time, Shaukat Usmani became one of the earliest members of the Communist Party of India. He is usually cited in reference to the Meerut and Peshawar Conspiracy Cases in the late 1920s. Mahmuduzzafar, on the other hand, was a member of the royal family of Rampur, and was educated in Dorset then at Oxford. He was a physician, writer, and one of the earliest members of the All-India progressive writers' movement, well-known in the controversy in 1932-33 over *Angāre*. Mahmuduzzafar was also married to the better known literary radical, Rashid Jehan, who was an active member of the Communist Party. Mahmuduzzafar had come to communism through membership in the Oxford Communist Group. The activities of Indian Muslim students in London were crucial in pushing already existing Muslim associational life of the *majlis* and the *anjuman* leftwards. In the mid 1940s, the couple travelled to the Soviet Union, in order to procure medical treatment for Rashid Jehan, who had been diagnosed with cancer. Rashid Jehan died in Moscow, and was buried there. Mahmuduzzafar's travels within the Soviet Union, which paints a rather rosy picture of Stalinist Russia, were written shortly upon his return to India several months later.

In briefly sketching the divergent trajectories and travels of these two men, my aim is *not* to present how the Indian Muslim intelligentsia came to socialist thought during the first four decades of the twentieth century. I do not argue that Usmani and Mahmuduzzafar belong to different phases or generations of anti-colonial Indian Muslims. Nor is my purpose here, to demonstrate how a diverse class of Muslims made up a leftist political spectrum in colonial

India. I am also not arguing that the marked presence of Indian Muslim socialist intellectuals in the decades leading up to Partition suggests simply, that Indian nationalism was a ‘composite’ political force, made up of Indian Muslim voices who opposed ‘separatism.’ Rather, what both Usmani and Mahmuduzzafar shared, were conceptions of non-territorial national identity in their articulations of political utopia. Their anti-imperialist efforts were shaped by turning to the Soviet Union as an idealized model for equitable and socially just government.

In Usmani’s narrative, the *muhājirs* divided themselves into separate groups while in Afghanistan, yet could not part ways due to how they were perceived by Turkomans. There were other accounts by men who were introduced to communist thought in Central Asia, who had had contact with *muhajir* organizers. One of the most vivid accounts is the travel memoir of one Dada Amir Haidar Khan, first written in the early 1940s. Dada Amir Haider Khan was originally from a village on the outskirts of Rawalpindi. At a young age he ran away to Bombay, finding employment first as a dock-worker, before travelling as a ship-hand to Basra. He then worked on ships that went to South East Asia, and eventually made his way back to India, before going on to London, and then the United States. While in the U.S., he became a Communist, as well as an American citizen, and befriended members of the Ghadar Party, which was a Punjabi anti-colonial revolutionary group established in 1913 made up predominantly of Sikhs living in the Western U.S. in cities such as San Francisco. Led by one Lala Hardayal, Ghadr Party activists had been involved in establishing contacts with a number of revolutionary groups within India. Dada Amir Haider Khan crossed the Atlantic for a second time, moving through Europe, and eventually made his way to Moscow, and then to Tashkent, where he joined the Toilers of the East University in 1926. While there, in addition to studying Russian, economics, anthropology, and political geography, by Russian teachers, he also met up with several *mujāhidīn*, some of

whom may very well have been Khilafat *muhajirs* and others who may have been part of the an earlier migration led by Obeidullah Sindhi some years prior. Some of them had been appointed to read out and explain the daily newspapers to the *toilers* so that *we* could become acquainted with the daily political events and various struggles – such as the great armed struggle of the Moroccan people under the leadership of Ghazi Abdul Kareem against French imperialism.<sup>57</sup> Dada Amir Haidar Khan described his autobiography as progressive literature. The first half of his memoirs was written in jail between 1939 and 1942 in Bombay recounting his life until the late 1920s and the second half of the manuscript was written while he was imprisoned in Pakistan during the mid 1950s. Dada wrote: “The role of the progressive writer is to expose everything bad in society, no matter how ugly it might be! Those who do not like it let them change it.”<sup>58</sup> Here was yet another interpretation of what constituted progressive literature.

By this point, the AIPWA had opened chapters and branches in several cities in colonial India. There are some striking similarities between the origins of the CPI, and those of the Progressive Writers Association in India. It wasn’t simply that both organizations attracted large numbers of anti-colonial Indian Muslims. Rather, as *émigrés*, interacting with people, ideas, and texts beyond India, they were instrumental to the genesis of these organizations themselves. The anti-colonial impetus of the Khilafat movement – in particular, its purported “deployment of religious symbols” has been read as the precursor to Muslim nationalism, as an uninterrupted path which led to the creation of Pakistan.<sup>59</sup> Yet, such a narrative overlooks how the Khilafat

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<sup>57</sup> Dada Amir Haider Khan, *Chains to Lose: Life and Struggles of a Revolutionary* (Karachi: Pakistani Study Centre, University of Karachi, 2007) p. 539.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Gail Minault, *The Khilafat movement: Religious Symbolism and Political mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). See also, Mushirul Hasan, *Communal and pan-Islamic trends in colonial India*, (New Delhi: Manohar Press, 1981).



movement was a phenomenon that participated within a larger global imaginary of anti-colonial movements, in particular, the over-lap between *muhājirs* with groups in India. The anti-colonial, pan-Muslim politics of the *muhājirs* at times meshed with the goals of socialists and communists, given shared universalist concerns of anti-imperialist struggle. The colonial state, in the midst of crisis, made the leap of identifying, and then suspecting, all progressive writers as constituting a front for the Communist Party of India. It was this assumption, coupled with the divisive climate of Partition, which guided the Pakistani state in repressing progressive forces in civil society as early as 1947 – a civil society made up of extremely diverse strands of intellectuals, dissidents, and communists who were trying to make sense of their new homeland.

### **CPI, AIPWA, and the Demand for Pakistan**

In the early 1940s, several oppositional nationalist forces came to the forefront in the agitations against the British Raj, which by the end of the war had been severely weakened and had lost all credibility amongst most Indians, was hovering on the brink of collapse. As anti-colonial sentiments swept the cities of North India, there was little agreement as to what kind of nation would follow as the British exited the scene. What kind of a nation would India be? Would it be Socialist? Hindu? A Republic? There were multiple, variegated, and competing narratives of the nation. Nor was it at all self-evident that Pakistan was going to be carved out as a separate territory. What ‘Pakistan’ meant was not clearly defined, and there were a multiplicity of meanings assigned to the term. The progressive poet Josh Malihabadi who moved between India and Pakistan during and after Partition, unable to decide where he would eventually settle, was forced as many others were, to choose which side of his border his loyalties lay. The ‘choice’

was amply explained to Josh by a friend: "Josh Saheb, you can't cross a river with your feet anchored in two boats. Mind you, your credibility would be undermined in both the countries."<sup>60</sup>

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was not opposed to the formation of an independent homeland for Muslims on the basis of the right to self-determination, a position that was completely at odds with the Congress Party. There was already a rift between Communists and the Socialists within the anti-colonial movement generated by the position the CPI took on the war: Communists saw the "imperialist war" as a "people's war," and ultimately sided with the British against the Axis powers, even if this meant pitting themselves against the nationalists under Gandhi's leadership. The Congress Party's perception of the Communists as having betrayed the anti-colonial nationalist movement during this critical moment of World War II was further exacerbated when the CPI supported the demand for Pakistan. The CPI conceived of India as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious polity, and Muslim demands for a separate homeland were understood in this view as a legitimate demand for a group of people organized around a religious *minority* community, rather than religious aspirations. The Muslim League's demand for Pakistan was premised on the notion that the unitary center of India was a British creation, and that India actually consisted of many nationalities which had to be brought together in a manner that recognized its diverse groupings. This was endorsed by leading voices of the Communist Party such as P.C. Joshi, who recalled:

We held a series of discussions within our party and came to the conclusion in 1941-1942 that [the Muslim League] had become an anti-imperialist organization expressing the freedom urge of the Muslim people that its demand for Pakistan was a demand for self determination and that for the freedom of India, an immediate joint front between the Congress and the League must be forged as the first step to break imperialist deadlock. A belief continues to be held that League is a communal organization and what Mr. Jinnah is Pro-British. But what is the reality? Mr. Jinnah is to the freedom loving League masses what Gandhiji is to

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<sup>60</sup> (Ed.) Mushirul Hasan, *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995) p. 121

the Congress masses. They revere their Qaid-e-Azam as much as the Congress do the Mahatma. They regard the League as their patriotic organization as we regard the Congress. This is so because Mr. Jinnah has done to the League what Gandhi did to the Congress in 1919-1920 i.e., made it a mass organization.<sup>61</sup>

These ideas came to have a formidable impact upon the AIPWA. In 1943, Shripat Amrit Dange, a key member in the Bombay communist party, spoke at the fourth All-Indian Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA) conference, where he argued that the basis of national unity for writers was not an imposed Akhand-Hindustan but that a voluntary united Hindustan of autonomous nationalities must be the true home and ideal of the people's artist.<sup>62</sup>

Zaheer's arguments were also largely based on those widely shared by the CPI, namely, that the demands of the Muslim League were not illegitimate and in line with aspirations for independence. He argued against the hardening Congress intelligentsia's line, that the Muslim demand of Pakistan was a stunt or worse still, as inspired by British imperialism in order to break the unity of the country and to perpetuate the political subjection of India by Imperialism.<sup>63</sup> Rather, he argued, the demand was the logical expression of political consciousness among the Muslim peoples of India and that it has grown together with the development of the national movement for freedom as a whole. He wrote:

í No freedom-loving Indian can deny the right of full sovereignty or that of forming a separate autonomous State to any compact group of people, that is, to any nationality. It is precisely such a right to sovereign existence which is demanded in the Pakistan resolution. As such it does not deny, but carries forward the principles of Independence of every people which the Congress accepted at Lahore in 1929 and which has been reiterated year after year since 1930 by hundreds of thousands of our countrymen. It is the very basis of our national demand, the very core of our democratic belief. It cannot be rejected without rejecting the right of self-determination for all...The right to form a separate State,

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<sup>61</sup> PC Joshi, *Congress and the Communists*, People's Publishing House Bombay, p 5.

<sup>62</sup> Sudhi Pradhan, (ed.), *Documents of the Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, vol. I. (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1979) p.82

<sup>63</sup> Sajjad Zaheer, "Congress-League Unity", 1944, *People's War Magazine* in Mushirul Hasan, ed. *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics, and the Partition of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 124

the right to secede, guaranteed under a common constitution or by treaties, is the one and only guarantee of unity on the basis of equality, unity of all nationalities for a common purpose—unity because there will be no fear of domination of one nationality by another, unity which will be based on mutual help and collaboration among free and equal peoples. This is precisely the lesson we learn from the USSR. There the establishment of Socialism having eliminated the very basis of exploitation of many by man, and of oppression of one nation by another it has been found that the tie which keeps the nationalities of the USSR together is the right to secede from the Union vested in each of the fifteen constituent republics. Even though each republic has now got the right to keep its own national army and control its own foreign relations, it does not mean disintegration, but a further strengthening of the bonds of unity between the free nations of the Soviet Union.<sup>64</sup>

There was a great deal of activity by communists, as well as broader progressive forces that supported the demand for Pakistan. According to the accounts of some members of the APPWA (All-Pakistan Progressive Writers' Association), the Communists did more than the Muslim League to give popular shape to the notion of Pakistan, given their involvement in workers organizations and *kisan-sabahs*.<sup>65</sup> Their involvement in the Punjab Muslim League, and especially in the movements for Pakistan in Bengal was quite substantial.<sup>66</sup> Rahi Masoom Raza, in his novel *Adha Gaon*, seems to suggest that Muslim League party workers were not nearly as successful as mobilizing villagers in the Punjab, as is commonly thought. In the novel, Aligarh Muslim League activists are rebuked by a group of villagers who, when approached, respond: "We people belong to the Weavers' Association. We cannot vote for any Muslim League. I am an illiterate peasant."<sup>67</sup> A hint of attempts at popular mobilization appears also in the poetry of the progressive poet, Asrar-ul Haque Majaz which was recited in New Delhi as he participated in anti-colonial marches during the direct action movement in late 1946. Majaz

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> See interview with Hasan Abidi in Talat Ahmed, "Writers and generals: Intellectuals and the first Pakistan coup," *Indian Economic Social History Review* 2008; 45; 115. p. 132.

<sup>66</sup> See Bose, Neilesh. *Anti-Colonialism, Regionalism, and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics, 1840s-1952*. Diss. Tufts University, 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Rahi Masoom Raza, *Adha Gaon*, in *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, ed. Mushirul Hasan, Vol. I, (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2005) p. 59.

himself would never have condoned the violence which occurred in Calcutta in the aftermath of direct action day. The poem, *Pakistan ka milli tarana* (Pakistan's National Anthem), combines the spirit of leftist agitation with Islamic concepts:

On the horizon of the Khyber shines the bright crescent,  
Lo and behold the freedom-lovers are calling us.  
Our soldiers march upholding the green flag;  
Lo and behold the torrential stream descends from the mountains.  
Lo and behold Capitalism is ablazed with a red spark.  
Say one, Say all  
This Pakistan is ours  
This Pakistan is ours  
This Pakistan is ours  
Our Qur'an is superior to hundred Bibles,  
No foe has ever stopped our forward march,  
Yes, Turks are ours, Afghans are ours,  
All mankind is ours.  
We are the warriors of Pakistan, Pakistan is ours.  
Say one, say all  
This Pakistan is ours  
This Pakistan is ours.<sup>68</sup>

Non-territorial expression of nationalism constituted a central feature of the international socialism which influenced many Urdu Progressive writers in India. The first AIPWA conference in 1936 occurred just two years after the creation of the Union of Soviet Writers. Sajjad Zaheer also represented the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union). Under his aegis, Marxist intellectuals were impacted by the politics of the United Front—a Leninist-inspired strategy of alliance between Communists and other revolutionary groups based on the assumption that the colonial Indian bourgeoisie was antagonistic enough towards economic imperialism to support the common cause of the Communist Party, but simultaneously fragile

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<sup>68</sup> Sahba Lucknavi (ed.) *Majaz ki Ek Ahang* (Karachi: 1956), Cited in Hafeez Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4. (Aug. 1967), p. 685

enough to resist communist ascendancy.<sup>69</sup> By no means was the United Front an uncontested policy, even as Soviet diplomacy encouraged communist parties to enter into antifascist alliances. Rather, internationalist politics cultivated an intellectual culture which enabled writers to voice a program of profound radical change premised upon the liberation of all peoples, within colonial India and elsewhere.

Turning to the Soviet Union's socialist experiment held out the promise of broadening the political scope of literature. The term social realism, which described the project of the progressive literati, itself comes from Russian-inspired ideas about the function of literature in a revolutionary socialist society. In Hafiz Malik's words, "the international production of social realist fiction is characterized by a belief in the power of the word and in the writer's ability to portray in a satisfying documentary fashion the structure of social reality. Social realism is inspired in various ways by the Russian revolution, Soviet communism, international Marxism, and the need to respond critically and in a denunciatory fashion to the various mechanisms of repression and the frustration of personal and collective aspirations."<sup>70</sup> In this sense, Soviet Russia left a lasting impact upon many progressive Urdu intellectuals— Rashid Jahan, Mahmuduzafar, Akhtar Husain Raipuri, Ali Sardar Jaffri, Majrooh Sultanpuri— who turned in their prose, poetry, and non-fiction writings, to conceiving it as a political utopia.

The earliest origins of the CPI in the first two decades of the twentieth century can be traced to the assemblage of various anti-colonial "revolutionary" groups, including the *muhājirs* who were linking up with Bolshevik political organizations in Central Asia. By the early 1930s, however, a different relationship between communist politics in India and the Soviet Union had

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<sup>69</sup> This was a highly contested policy, most elaborately outlined by the writings of M.N. Roy. See *Leftist Hegemony over the Nationalist Movement*, Volume 1-3.

<sup>70</sup> Hafeez Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4. (Aug., 1967), pp. 649-664.

developed. Whereas Indian Muslim *muhājirs* had gone into exile through Central Asia, experimenting with leftist politics in the 1920s, those associated with AIPWA contended with Soviet politics and society through an entirely different trajectory. Indian writers who had been educated abroad played a pivotal role in taking associations at Oxford, leftwards. Even as the Soviet Union was conceived of within utopian terms, Urdu progressive writers critiqued unequivocal identification with Russian culture. In the coming-of-age novel of Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, *Inqilab (Revolution)*, the plot which narrates the period from the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in 1919 to Partition in 1947, revolves around one Anwar, who remarks that some young students of his cohort were dubbed as ‘Russians’ because they were always talking ecstatically of the wonderful things being done in the Soviet Union. Abbas writes, ‘Provoked by their exclusivism, the other students had distorted the name of each to give it a Russian sound. Thus Subhan was called Subhanovsky, Moosa became Moosacov, and Zaheer was turned into Zaheeroff.’<sup>71</sup> Abbas himself was to later lead a cultural delegation of film actors and artists to the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s.

Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, war-related events in the international arena—the rise of Fascism in Germany, the civil war in Spain, Japanese military forces in China, the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, waves of renewed disturbances in Palestine—formed the wider political context out of which progressive-left intellectuals articulated anti-colonial resistance. A new demand surged to the forefront of news weeklies circulated by progressive Urdu intellectuals during the Second World War. British imperialism and fascism were seen as two sides of the same coin thus it became increasingly significant to express solidarity with oppressed *peoples* in moments of global crisis:

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<sup>71</sup> K.A. Abbas, *Inqilab* (New Delhi: India Paperbacks, 1951) p. 178 (NMML)

í simply holding meetings, (*jalse*) and passing resolutions (*tajvīz*) will not solve the problem, for these do not put pressure (*dabāo*) on British imperialism (*sarmayadāri*). The main reason that the Khilafatí [and other] movements eventually became so weak (*dhīlī pargayīñ*), is because the people (*avām*) were never involved in them. When the people's enthusiasm wavers, so too do movements (*tehrīk*); whether the matter is Palestine or China, the frontiers (of Hindustan) or Spain, they are all inter-relatedí as long as imperialist governments continue to exist the world over, so too will there continue to be oppressed peoples (*muzālim*).<sup>72</sup>

If the struggle against both imperialism and fascism was to succeed, progressive intellectuals demanded that it be articulated as a People's War in which, at stake, was the survival of *civilization*. India's first international writer in English, Mulk Raj Anand, who had travelled to Spain during a period when German and Italian forces were assisting General Franco, reported upon the Spanish resistance movement before returning to India to assist progressive intellectuals organize an anti-fascist campaign. Writing in 1939, he urged, "it is of the utmost importance that we must uniteí irrespective of class, creed and statusí to save our civilization. If we let our civilization be destroyed we will not have left even the vestige of freedom through which we can discuss, criticize and re-mould our varying ideals, and develop our national culture."<sup>73</sup> Inspired by the International Brigade of Writers and Poets who were fighting against fascism in Spain, Indian progressives participated in intellectual circles that reached well beyond British India. The Chilean communist poet, Pablo Neruda saw India as leading the "awakening of an Asian spirit" and met with Ali Sardar Jafri, a leading progressive Urdu poet who was seminal in organizing communist party offices in Bombay. Recalling his meeting with Neruda, Jafri would later comment that, "when I showed him the book of his poems with the signatures of my jailors on its

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<sup>72</sup> *Hindustan*, August 15, 1937. NMML.

<sup>73</sup> Sudhi Pradhan, (ed.), *Documents of the Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, vol. I. (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1979), p. 16. (NMML)



first page, he autographed it for me with the words: –Sardar this book was with you in prison. I want you to take it to freedom with you.ö<sup>74</sup>

Overthrowing the yoke of British imperialism was akin to dismantling fascist authoritarian regimes: not infrequently, the British themselves were depicted as *the* prototypical fascist regime. In a political cartoon referring to Japan's military forces in China, a Japanese soldier with a sinister expression confides with a British officer; both of them are crushing their victims underfoot, and an Urdu couplet on the margins reads:

Today we can say, our chests bursting with pride / We are not inferior to the  
British  
Britain brings cruelty upon Hind / We have given China color with their blood.<sup>75</sup>

Japan here is seen as taking its cue from British forms of colonial subjugation. Additionally, the idea that anti-imperialist resistance movements had made mistakes in the past, increasingly gained currency. Reporting on the political turmoil in Palestine, newsweeklies claimed that "we in Hindustan have made a grave error in thinking that the problem in Palestine is the conflict between the Arabs and the Jews. In actuality the conflict is between the Arabs and the British imperialists."ö<sup>76</sup> The author went on to argue that the "Hindustani Muslims can learn a lot from the Palestinian problem". Arab leaders, instead of placing the real blame on the British, are wasting their time by blaming the Jews. The problem with the Arab High Committee is that its policy against the British needs to be made stronger. ö<sup>77</sup>

The progressive Urdu intelligentsia, then, articulated the role of the *avām* (people) and the *mazlūm* (oppressed) not through the *qaum* as such, but through the *bain-ul-qaum*, literally

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<sup>74</sup>Anil Sehgal, *Ali Sardar Jafari, The Youthful Boatman of Joy* (New Delhi: Bhartiya Jnanpith Press, 2001) p. 176

<sup>75</sup> *Hindustan*, June 19, 1938. NMML. *Hind par tode sitam angrez ne, hum ne rang di hai cheen ko khoon se.*

<sup>76</sup> *Hindustan*, June 19, 1938. NMML.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

between nations and unequivocally stated that the establishment of any international order would be impossible without the liberation of all colonized peoples. The term *tehzīb* (culture) in this context acquired a new, universal significance. Rather than referring to a set of practices associated with refining one's status within *ashrāf* society, *tehzib o tamaddun* was here not only inflected with a humanist agenda, but was politicized so that it was articulated as solidarity with those who faced the onslaught of a foreign power. The director of the Chinese-Indian Cultural Society, one professor San-Yun-Shan, thanked his Hindustani friends for holding a China Day, in response to massacres led by Japanese forces. Commenting upon the Japanese occupation, the *Hindustan* reported that, "China has always given Japan civilization (*tehzīb -o-tamaddun*), and even now, amidst the war, the Chinese are prepared to give the imperialists (*samaraj*) their demands, but it seems that Japan wants nothing less than the destruction of China! We Hindustanis are also oppressed (*mazlūm*)! both of us are friends, for our enemy is the same! we are prey to the imperialists."<sup>78</sup>

It was this broader political context that allowed AIPWA to emerge as a literary federation of Hindustan: it was formed against the twin forces of British imperialism and fascism. Josh Malihabadi (1898-1982), who was attributed with the title, *Shayar-e-Inquilab* (Poet of the Revolution) issued a statement against the war before the Progressive Writers Association conference in Delhi, 1942. It aptly demonstrated the extent to which anti-colonial politics included the struggle against fascism:

In our lives, we are concerned about the art of poetry and the science of literature; but, despite [those] struggles (*jihd-o-jihad*), we do have a political principle that for us poets and writers, is dearer to us than our lives: the liberation of Hindustan and the establishment of socialist government is our ideal (*mantahāyī khayāl*). On the one hand is the urgency of our conscience, and on the other, international conditions are taking such an alarming turn that no conscious and aware (*hasās*) human being can remain silent. We feel that *that* foundation of human civilization

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<sup>78</sup> *Hindustan*, October 10, 1937 p. 2 (NMML)

(*tehzeeb-o-tamaddun*) is in danger, upon which freedom and the human race are built. The most dignified aspects of life are being deemed worthless: freedom, democracy (*jamhuriat*), the end of oppression of one human being over another, happiness and comfort for all human beings and a classless social system (the closest to which exists in Soviet Russia, whose citizens have sacrificed their lives in the war against Germany making them the light of history). There is a grave danger that all those banners for human society, peace and freedom, may be eliminated if fascism is successful.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, any struggle against fascism needed to include the struggle against imperialism. In the banned pamphlet, "Let India Fight for Freedom," K.A. Abbas wrote: "We wish we could fight shoulder to shoulder with you for the defense of democracy and socialism. But far from being a socialist state, we have not even achieved national freedom. To voice the demand for freedom is still a crime in this country. Not once but many times over and over again, our leaders have expressed our hostility to Nazism and Fascism and our determination to participate in the fight for freedom if first we can secure our own freedom! But British imperialism, despite its many professions of sympathy for democratic ideals is not prepared to admit us to ranks of free nations on a basis of equality. Need you be surprised that, in spite of our whole-hearted sympathy for you, we cannot fight alongside you?"<sup>80</sup>

The All-India Progressive Writers Conferences between 1936 and 1942 partially took their cue from the suppression resulting from the Government of India Act (1935) which though widening the franchise, curbed political agitation, and enabled a new constitutional structure around which a contestation between Left and Right within the national movement was made possible.<sup>81</sup> The 1930s was marked as a period of rising labor strikes, and the Urdu socialist weekly *Chingari* walked a fine line between tacit support for Congress ideals while leveling

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<sup>79</sup> In Khalil-ur-Rahman Azmi's *Urdu Mein Taraqqi Pasand Adabi Tehreek*, pg. 65; Josh's statement was published in newspapers, and later reproduced in the 1943 edition of the literary magazine, *Naya Adab*.

<sup>80</sup> K.A. Abbas, "Let India Fight for Freedom," 1943, p. 56-58 (NMML).

<sup>81</sup> See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (London: Macmillan Press, Cambridge Commonwealth Series, 1988).

criticisms against its hegemony over the nationalist movement. Prominent leftists, such as Sajjad Zaheer, Rasheed Jehan, Hari Singh and P.C. Joshi chastised Congress Party workers for directing violence against peasants and workers.<sup>82</sup>

The difference between *aitedāl* (moderates) and *taraqqi-pasandon* (progressives) claimed the editorial in the 1938 issue, was that the moderates continued to allow Gandhi to define progress only in terms of constitutional reform. It argued that the *farz* (duty) of progressives (*taraqqi-pasandon*) was to struggle (*jidd-o-jihad*) to ensure that the Congress Party was successful in adopting a socialist program. Once again, the language of *jidd-o-jihad* to mean an ethical struggle against exploitative imperialist efforts demonstrates the extent to which Urdu remained a living language, in spite of its dismissal from a burgeoning Hindi politics, and the fact that it was not limited to Muslims alone. P.C. Joshi, the first General Secretary of the CPI, who had by the late 1930s returned from years of imprisonment in the Andaman Islands for his underground political activities, published in *Chingari* an article calling for leftist unity under the title: *õEk Jamaat, Ek Dushman, Ek Jidd-o-Jihad* (One Organization, One Enemy, One Struggle).<sup>83</sup> In it he argued that British imperialist forces were attempting to concentrate the political movements in one corner of the country, so that õit would not have to deal with the struggle (*jidd-o-jihad*) that was spreading all over Hindustan.õ<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Rasheed Jehan Begum's article in *Chingari* called *õHamari Azaadiõ* (Our Freedom) reflects on workers' strikes which became subject to Congress Party violence. Also, Sajjad Zaheer would once again attempt to forge alliances in 1942 after the CPI was legalized, this time between the Congress Party and the Muslim League. Chiding the Congress leaders for their unsympathetic attitude towards the League, Zaheer observed that Congressmen not only failed to see the anti-imperialist and liberationist role of the Muslim League but also failed to see that the demand for Muslim self-determination for Pakistan was a -just, progressive and national demand.õ The demand of the Muslims for Pakistan, he pointed out, was a positive expression of the very freedom and democracy for which Congressmen had striven and undergone so much suffering.õ In *Congress-League Unity*, pamphlet, 1942, NMML. At the insistence of P.C. Joshi, Ali Ashraf produced the first definitive translation of the Communist Manifesto in Urdu. See, *Ali Ashraf*: Prabhat Patnaik; Social Scientist, Vol. 31, No. 7/8 (Jul. - Aug., 2003), pp. 90-91; Ali Ashraf also translated several Marxist classics into Urdu.

<sup>83</sup> *ek hi jamaat, ek hi dushman, ek hi jidd-o-jihad* in *Chingari*, March, 1939. Jamia Millia Islamia Rare Books and Journals Collection.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

Shortly after the first AIPWA conference in Lucknow (1936), a semi-government British newspaper tried to prove that the organization was in actuality the outcome of a communist conspiracy hatched in London. Throughout the 1920s, the fears of the British colonial state intensified, as the frontiers of empire seemed to be unraveling with the burgeoning of internationalist movements. In a state of panic, the British banned all communist activity.<sup>85</sup> By the early 1930s, these fears had so intensified in India, that a report put together by the Central Bureau for Intelligence and later published in *The Statesman* claimed that the AIPWA had been instigated by the Communist International, attempting to spread its network among the Indian intelligentsia through communist Indian students. The goals of AIPWA—bring forth a new literature that deals with problems such as hunger, poverty and social backwardness may sound innocuous enough, even praiseworthy—wrote *The Statesman*. But the newspaper went on to warn that, it lacked candor, for AIPWA was linked to recognized political dissemination of progressive literature that has nothing to do with the realities of India's traditional civilization.<sup>86</sup>

The purpose of the organization claimed *The Statesman*, was to foment a violent revolution in the country, overthrow the government, spread despondence among the people, and destroy morals, faith, and religion.<sup>87</sup> The newspaper warned that every person who loved his

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<sup>85</sup> There have been no dearth of historical studies of communism in British India: GD Overstreet, M Windmiller, *Communism in India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); R. Mallick, *Indian Communism: Opposition, Collaboration and Institutionalization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Bibekbrata Sarkar, *Nationalism and Marxism in India: Quest for People and Power, 1920-1940* (Delhi: Kalinga Publications, 1990); Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri, *Leftist movements in India, 1917-1947* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); Harkishan Singh Surjeet, *March of the Communist Movement in India : An Introduction to the Documents of the History of the Communist movement in India* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1998). Most of these works, however, take little stock of the intersections between communism and Islamic universalism in their definitions of international.

<sup>86</sup> *Statesman*, July 1936. *Communist Propaganda: Moscow Changes Tactics: Effect in India: Soviet Combine Against Fascism* Claiming that communists in London had been trying hard to attract just this type of Indian student (affluent middle-class), and that Indian students in Germany had attended Berlin lectures which had co-opted the students into communist ideology. NMML

<sup>87</sup> *Statesman*, July 1936. *Communist Propaganda: Moscow Changes Tactics: Effect in India: Soviet Combine Against Fascism* (NMML)

religion, peace, and personal safety, and did not wish to get in trouble by defying the government, ought to stay away from the movement. What is more, the spirituality and religiosity of the East demanded that such a movement should not be allowed to flourish in a nation that believed in spiritual values, and rejected materialism.<sup>88</sup> Even the more benign circular issued that same year by the Home Secretary, which argued that the Indian Progressive Writers' Association was not necessarily a subversive or revolutionary organization, claimed that its development should be watched and approached with caution by individuals who do not wish to be involved in extremist left wing politics.<sup>89</sup>

The colonial state sought to demonstrate that the activities of communists and progressive authors were identical. While progressive writers shared a vocabulary of social justice with socialists and communists in articulating anti-colonial resistance, not all communist activists translated themselves as progressive writers, nor were all progressive authors communists. Communist and Progressive in the state's definition came to be associated with dissident cultural and intellectual activity that was threatening to the state's hegemony because of the intellectuals' role in attempts to create a new kind of civil society. The fears of the colonial state against any activity seen as revolutionary had already materialized in the campaigns of the earlier decade against conspiracies. These earlier campaigns, coupled with new political

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. The *Statesman* article had come on the heels of the newspaper's intensifying concern that Nehru's socialist message, mixed with his increasing popularity, around the time of the Congress session in Lucknow, was a cover for communist propaganda. As the colonial state intensified its anti-communist campaign, in the few years following the official establishment of the CPI (driving it underground), Jawaharlal Nehru was accused by both British officials as well as the merchant community of using his position as President of the INC to command and propound certain views which that organization has not given him authority to propagate, namely, communistic opinions. (*Statesman*, July 1936) Particularly alarming for *The Statesman* was that, shortly following the Congress session in Lucknow, Nehru had established a foreign department of the Congress, issuing letters to anti-Imperialist organizations outside India. It was this foreign-ness of the PWA, which was the source of alarm for the colonial state and officials.

<sup>89</sup> See circular by M.G. Hallet in Sudhi Pradhan, (ed.), *Documents of the Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, vol. II. (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1979), p.108

forces, had a direct bearing upon the nascent Pakistani state, which began its crackdown on radical literary activity immediately.

### **A Poet and a Plot: Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case (1949-52)**

Early one March morning in 1951, armed police appeared at Faiz Ahmed Faiz's home in Lahore, announcing that orders for his arrest had been issued by the Governor-General. It was only after four months spent in solitary confinement that the progressive poet would come to know with what precisely he had been charged.<sup>90</sup> His arrest occurred one day before the first elections to the Provincial Assembly in the Punjab. That evening, Pakistani Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan made the following radio announcement:

A conspiracy hatched by the enemies of Pakistan has just been unearthed. The aim of the conspiracy was to create commotion in the country by violent means and, in furtherance of that purpose, to subvert the loyalty of Pakistan's defense forces. Action has been taken to arrest the ringleaders. These are Major General Akbar Khan, Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier M.A. Latif, Brigade Commander at Quetta, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Editor of the Pakistan Times, and Mrs. Akbar Khan, wife of the Major General Akbar Khan. The existence of this conspiracy which, fortunately for all of us, was uncovered before it could take root, will I feel sure, shock the people of Pakistan as much as it has shocked me. The people will, no doubt, fully appreciate that for reasons of national security it is impossible for me to disclose publicly the details of the plans of those who were implicated in the conspiracy. All I need say is that these plans, had they succeeded, would have struck at the very foundations of our national existence and disrupted the stability of Pakistan.<sup>91</sup>

The Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case is a defining moment in the early history of Pakistan, a period of energetic leftist activity made up of various groups such as trade union and peasant organizers, journalists, and students. Amongst them was the All-Pakistan Progressive Writers Association, whose leading member was the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Most popular and scholarly histories have

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<sup>90</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, (Ed.) Sheema Majeed, Muhammad Reza Kazimi, *Culture and Identity: Selected English Writings of Faiz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 13

<sup>91</sup> Munibur Rahman, "The Pakistan Trial: A Call for An Open and Fair Trial in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case", published by South-east Asia Committee, 1 Hampstead Hill Gardens, London, N.W.3. South East Asia Committee Pamphlet: Number 1, 1951. Widener Library, Harvard University.

tended to focus upon the collectives of progressive writers and intellectuals as largely an Indian trend; what is often overlooked is the part played by the radical intelligentsia in Pakistan during its first decade after independence, when progressive intellectuals who had hoped to have a role in shaping the new state found themselves enmeshed in the country's earliest attempted coup in 1951. Arguably, the memory of the role of progressive intellectuals within the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case<sup>92</sup> and the activities of the Pakistani left in general has been erased from official political histories.<sup>92</sup> However, the echoes of this history are to be found within Pakistani national consciousness, for the memory has been sustained through the circulation, recitation, and invocation of Faiz's poetry and accounts of his life history found in literary magazines and popular media—a subject I take up in last section of this chapter.

To this day, Faiz Ahmed Faiz remains a somewhat controversial figure in Pakistan, in spite of his stature as the country's uncrowned poet laureate. He was awarded the *Nishan-e-Imtiaz* award, Pakistan's highest civilian honor, posthumously under the late Benazir Bhutto's prime-minister-ship in 1990. Labeled as one of the "ringleaders" of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, and given his leftist activism, he is often referred to as a communist poet though he never officially was a CPI or CPP member. As Urdu's most distinguished post-colonial poet, Faiz's *ghazals* and *nazms* are recited in Pakistan and India, and have been translated in over a dozen languages.

In rendering a critical biographical portrait of Faiz, while contextualizing his poetic practice against the larger canvas of his many terms of imprisonment, detention, and exile imposed by the Pakistani state, two key questions arise: first, how did Faiz define the "nation"? Second, how did he conceive of the role of the poet or writer in relation to the nation? Given

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<sup>92</sup> For more on memory, archives, and official history about the case, see Talat Ahmed, "Writers and Generals: Intellectuals and the First Pakistan Coup" in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 1 (2008)



that Faiz was both a literary and political personality, his literary pursuits are almost impossible to disentangle from the wider political trajectory out of which he emerged and impacted. It was in fact Faiz's confrontation with the Pakistani state from the 1950s through the late 1970s which led him to write extensively on the role of 'culture' in relation to national identity. Many of the essays were written in exile, the first period being between 1962-1964 under the regime of Ayub Khan, when Faiz travelled to the Moscow, New York, and Cuba; and the second exile was between 1978 to 1982 under General Zia's regime, when Faiz travelled to Cairo and Beirut. Above all, it was his poetry composed during incarceration and exile that elucidated his revulsion for the narrow confines of territorial nationalism and the authoritarian bent of the post-colonial state.

Born in 1911, Faiz was raised in a Persian and Urdu speaking home in Sialkot, Punjab, and was educated in both the *maktab* ('religious school) and by missionaries, acquiring Indian-Muslim and British schooling respectively. This type of education had become increasingly common for young men of his generation: at the *maktab*, Faiz was exposed to the basics of Qur'anic instruction, Persian as well as Arabic, taught to him by the *maulvi*, whereas the mission school, a common institution of learning in colonial India, prepared Faiz to pursue higher education in Arabic and English literature. Throughout his adult life, Faiz was deeply committed to the formation of anti-colonial and post-colonial literatures, being one of the foremost writers of the AIPWA as well as the leading voice of the Pakistani Progressive Writers Association. At the same time, Faiz participated in the world of colonial and national politics: he served in the British Indian army during World War II as a Lieutenant Colonel; was actively involved with Pakistani trade union organizing as well as the establishment of cultural organizations throughout the 1950s and 1960s; and served as Cultural Advisor to the Education Ministry in Pakistan's

government under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He was intimately connected to the networks of anti-colonial and post-colonial international struggle: he married Alys, an English woman who was a member of the Communist Party of Britain, and along the way, would befriend many international writers and activists, such as Pablo Neruda, Jean-Paul Sartre, and later in life, no less an iconic figure than the leader of Palestinian resistance, Yasser Arafat. He travelled extensively: during the early 1950s, delivering speeches to writers' guilds in Moscow, and by the 1970s, Faiz was editing the Afro-Asian literary and political journal, *Lotus*, in Beirut. In these decades, amongst the many places he travelled to, were England, Iran, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, a few Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union, and China. In his own country, Faiz was a prominent journalist and as the pre-eminent voice of the cultural left, he spent many years attempting to solidify progressive political coalitions in Pakistan.

Faiz came of age during a period of decolonization in South Asia, when radical intellectuals were involved in political movements for national liberation, moving to Lahore in his twenties. There had already been a marked presence of progressive writers during the 1930s in cities which would later become part of Pakistan, as AIPWA established chapters in Karachi, Multan, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Peshawar. Lahore in particular had long been a hub of radical intellectual activity, as a result of the various movements of anti-colonial activity that swept the Punjab in the previous decade.<sup>93</sup> The progressive writers not only added to Lahore's vibrant intellectual culture, but were also perceived as determining the city's identity, as in this description from the late historian K.K. Aziz's account:

í from [Lahore] appeared the largest number of Urdu literary journals, newspapers, and books and two of the best English language dailiesí Lahore provided a wide range of restaurants where people gathered for intellectual gossipí the Arab Hotel, Nagina Bakery, Muhkam Din's teashop, India Tea

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<sup>93</sup> See Neeti Nair, 'Bhagat Singh as 'satyagrahi' the limits to non-violence in late colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 43, 3, May 2009, pp. 649-681.

House and India Coffee House. Tagore spoke at the SPSK Hall. Political debates were held at Bradlaugh Hall. Amrita Sher Gill painted and B.C. Sanyal sculpted. The *baithaks* (salons) in the walled city trained young musicians and invited the connoisseurs to listen to classical music. At the West End of Lahore was a cluster of humble eating places where the modest and poor intellectuals got together...the best of them was the India Coffee House. Next to it was the Cheney's Lunch Home, and a hundred yards away the India Tea House. The oriental places drew a mixed crowd of journalists, poets, and men of letters. In the Coffee House there was a distinct group of the Communist Party and Progressive Writers Association. Dada Ameer Hyder of Rawalpindi and Sajjad Zaheer were frequent visitors. The India Coffee House of Lahore, where I sat with my friends for four to five hours every day for thirteen years entertained more Leftists than I found at the Communist Party office on McLeod Road.<sup>94</sup>

The coffee houses drew several writers formative to the establishment of the APPWA, such as Abdallah Malik and Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi. As a center of Urdu literary culture, Lahore was sought out early on by Sajjad Zaheer who travelled there in 1936 to meet Faiz and expand the literary organization. After Partition, Zaheer, along with some other progressive writers from Muslim backgrounds, such as Hamid Akhtar, Sibte Hasan, and Dr. Muhammad Din Taseer moved to Pakistan, from Bombay, the UP, and Delhi respectively. All were members of the CPI, and had considerable experience in India organizing the writers' association there. Dr. Muhammad Din Taseer, had not only been organizing with writers in India, but was also involved in the Cambridge communist and writers' study circles.<sup>95</sup> The coffee-houses were instrumental to the growth and lively culture of the progressive writers, and their official meetings were open to the public. Additionally, Lahore's progressive intellectuals of Urdu included writers from Hindu and Sikh backgrounds as well, such as Fikr Taunsvi. These

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<sup>94</sup> K.K. Aziz, *The Coffee House of Lahore: A memoir 1942-57* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2008) p. 8-10. Aziz writes that, "the Arab hotel which brought together several intellectuals who would move away from the West End of Lahore to its less posh district, later became Pak Tea House a few years after Partition." See also the moving portrait of Pak Tea House by Intizar Hussain, "Pak Tea House: Chai ki Mez se Footpath Tak (Pak Tea House: From the Tea-Table to the Footpath)" in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 16, 2001.

<sup>95</sup> Taseer established the *Niazmandan-i Lahore* as early as 1928, a literary organization which sought to establish the credibility of Urdu writers in the Punjab since Punjabi Urdu speakers were often perceived with contempt by Urdu writers of Delhi and the UP.

culturally shared intellectual and political forums and networks from the 1930s and 1940s onwards had become well known to Faiz as began organizing with the Progressive Writers Association in pre-independence India.

In post-colonial Pakistan however, the APPWA had a very short-lived history of eight years before it was shut down by the state in the aftermath of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. Its very first meeting was held in Lahore in 1947 immediately after Partition. Writers laid out the main objectives of the association, where it was decided that it was irrelevant whether a progressive writer identified with a specific political ideology a lesson that progressives seemed to have learnt from the tensions that ensued in pre-Partition India when some writers were marginalized by the organization due to ideological rigidity.<sup>96</sup> The Progressive Writers Association of Pakistan stipulated that the organization must be accommodating enough to encompass a broad group of intellectuals and artists. In his address at that meeting on the problems of progressive literature in the post-Partition era, Abdul Majeed Salih noted the role of progressive writers in the Bengal Famine as well as the violence in the Punjab during partition, citing several works of fiction on these subjects.<sup>97</sup>

Progressive writers have produced some of the most comprehensive documentation of Partition violence and the most compelling narratives of this human suffering in their fiction, which itself forms the subject of a separate study. Salih pointed to the writers support and relief work for the victims of these tragedies, in sheer contrast to the perfidy of the British, and the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh upper classes that formed an un-holy alliance which resulted in the enormous tragedy of East and West Punjab. This is no longer an imperial or communal battle the battle ahead is a class one against our elites who will stop at nothing to use religion to divide

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<sup>96</sup> Talat Ahmed, "Writers and Generals: Intellectuals and the First Pakistan Coup" in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 1 (2008) p. 129

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

us.<sup>98</sup> Salih's point speaks to how progressive writers responded to the Partition: they attributed the blame for the violence upon colonial authorities and the elites of all religious communities. In fact, progressive intellectuals were amongst the first to voice how the people had been swindled in the national independence that resulted, given the enormous cost at which freedom came. Fikr Taunsvi refused to leave Lahore for Delhi for many months afterwards. Upon witnessing a washer-man's infant fall ill from starvation because local shops and hospitals were inaccessible in the riots and ensuing curfew, he noted that politicians should ask great brains like Jawaharlal Nehru to place themselves in this washerman's shoes and imagine the reality of Partition; once this was understood, Taunsvi wrote, they could request the British to give you freedom and demand Pakistan and Hindustan.<sup>99</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz who captured this mood in his poem,

*Subah-e-Azadi* (Freedom's Dawn) in August 1947:

These tarnished rays, this night-smudged light  
This is not that Dawn for which, ravished with freedom,  
we had set out in sheer longing,  
so sure that somewhere in its desert the sky harbored  
a final haven for the stars, and we would find it.  
We had no doubt that night's vagrant wave would stray  
towards the shore,  
that the heart rocked with sorrow would at last reach its port.  
Friends, our blood shaped its own mysterious roads.  
When hands tugged at our sleeves, enticing us to stay,  
and from wondrous chambers Sirens cried out  
with their beguiling arms, with their bare bodies,  
our eyes remained fixed on that beckoning Dawn,  
forever vivid in her muslins of transparent light.  
Our blood was young what could hold us back?  
Now listen to the terrible rampant lie:  
Light has forever been severed from the Dark;  
our feet, it is heard, are now one with their goal.  
See our leaders polish their manner clean of our suffering:  
Indeed, we must confess only to bliss;  
we must surrender any utterance for the Beloved all yearning

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) p. 112-113.

is outlawed.

But the heart, the eye, the yet deeper heartô  
Still ablaze for the Beloved, their turmoil shines.  
In the lantern by the road the flame is stalled for news:  
Did the morning breeze ever come? Where has it gone?  
Night weighs us down, it still weighs us down.  
Friends, come away from this false light. Come, we must  
search for that promised Dawn.<sup>100</sup>

Faiz's poem expressed the anguish and betrayal felt by the subcontinent's people with the arrival of independence. Progressives who had supported the CPI's demand for Pakistan, like everyone else, had never anticipated the violence which was subsequently unleashed. Faiz, for his part, consistently refused to abide by narrowly constructed interpretation of the nation as set forth by the state, and from very early on he championed progressive ideals, recognizing the shared culture and histories of India and Pakistan. When Gandhi was assassinated in 1948, the poet risked angering the Pakistani government by travelling to India to attend his funeral.<sup>101</sup>

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, hostility towards communism was becoming a central feature of the Pakistani state. It is often assumed that the crackdown upon leftist intellectuals and communists in 1951 with the onset of the official trial of which Faiz was a part, but in actuality

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<sup>100</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Translated by Agha Shahid Ali,

Ye daagh daagh ujaalaa, ye shab-gaziida sahar / Vo intizaar thaa jis-kaa, ye vo sahar to nahiiN,  
Ye vo sahar to nahiiN jis-kii aarzu lekar / Chale the yaar ke mil-ja`egi kahiiN na kahiN  
Falak ke dasht meN taroN kii aakhiri manzil, / KahiN to hogaa shab-e sust mauj kaa sahil,  
KahiN to jaake rukegaa safiina-e-gham-e-dil  
JawaaN lahu kii pur-asraar shaahrahoN se / Chale jo yaar to daaman pe kitne hath paRe;  
Diyaar-e-husn kii be-sabr khwaabgaahoN se / Pukaarti-rahiiN baahen, badan bulaate-rahe;  
Bahut 'aziiz thii lekin rukh-e-sahar ki lagan, / Bahut qariin thaa hasiinaN-e-nuur kaa daaman, ,  
Subuk subuk thii tamannaa, dabii dabii thii thakan.  
Sunaa hai ho bhii chukaa hai firaag-e-zulmat-o-nuur, / Sunaa hai ho bhii chukaa hai visaal-e-manzil-o-gaam;  
Badal-chukaa hai bahut ahl-e-dard kaa dastuur./Nishaat-e-vasl halaal o 'azab-e-hijr haraam.  
Jigar kii aag, nazar kii umang, dil kii jalan, / kisii pe chaara-e-hijraaN kaa kuchh asar hii nahiiN.  
KahaaN se aa'ii nigaar-e-sabaa, kidhar ko ga'ii?/Abhii charaagh-e-sar-e-rah ko kuchh khabar hii nahiiN;  
Abhii giraanii-e-shab meN kamii nahiiN aa'ii,/ Najaat-e-diidaa-o-dil ki ghaRii nahiiN aa'ii;  
Chale-chalo ke vo manjil abhii nahiiN aa'ii

<sup>101</sup> Ted Genoways, "Let Them Snuff Out the Moon: Faiz Ahmed Faiz's Prison Lyrics in *Dast-e-Saba* in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 19, 2004, p. 95.

the PWA continued to be monitored into the early years of independence.<sup>102</sup> Echoing the sentiments of the colonial state a mere decade prior, the report released in the wake of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, *The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action* recorded that 'the association has built for itself some reputation. Several well-known writers called themselves progressive. The public does not realize even to this day that the PWA is not quite so innocuous and that it is in reality a front for the Communist Party.'<sup>103</sup> Despite the fact that the Communist Party of Pakistan was not established until 1948, the report listed over two hundred writers as undercover communists. The surveillance of the APPWA had begun in 1947 itself, with the presence of government officials at meetings, and conferences.<sup>104</sup>

The Pakistani state's hostility towards leftist activity only increased in subsequent years, in light of the fact that the Communist Party had been doing well through its regular cadres. Communists and left intellectuals were playing a strong role in their support to the movements for autonomy in the regions of Baluchistan, East Bengal, North West Frontier, and Sindh throughout the 1950s and by 1954, a united front made up of a number of parties opposed to West Pakistani hegemony won an overwhelming majority of the total number of seats reserved for Muslims in the eastern wing.<sup>105</sup> The ruling, but fractured, Muslim League government responded by alleging that the United Front and the CPP were involved in a conspiracy to destroy the unity of the country in its support of sub-nationalist groups, and a ban was imposed on the Communist Party in 1954, four years before Ayub Khan's ascension to power and declaration of Martial Law. This had a great deal to do with the wider context of Cold War

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<sup>102</sup> Talat Ahmed has shown this through an extensive examination of documents from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Punjab, which had begun recording activities and confiscating material of the PWA from 1947 onwards. See Talat Ahmed, 'Writers and Generals: Intellectuals and the First Pakistan Coup' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 1 (2008)

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 131

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p. 131

<sup>105</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

politics. This was followed by a crackdown on leftists and party-cadres across the country as the harassment and intimidation of leftists intensified. While these events find rare mention within official histories, they resonate within literature and novels of the period. Writer Shaukat Siddiqui ends his magnum opus, *Khuda Ki Basti (In God's Own Land)* a narrative of one family's saga during the early post-independence period in the slums of Karachi and Lahore with a description of the brutal storming of communist study and educational circles. The novel, revolving around the plight of poor refugees, women, and jobless students and how opportunistic businessmen take advantage of them, was published in 1955, and written during the years of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case and the immense state repression against leftist students that followed. The police and military officials in the novel, on the urging of a local businessman who is keen on developing the slums into a private commercial center, succeed in destroying leftist organizations in the area:

As a result of their investigations all the Skylarks had been arrested, and the society's documents and papers had been confiscated. When polling day arrived the Skylarks had no representation at the ballot box. When they were finally released from jail, many of the former members, fearing the consequences of the impending trial, washed their hands of the whole enterprise, and, little by little all their activities stopped. The Industrial Home was seized; the schools made into private residences; the Literacy Institute was given to a tonga driver to stable his horse in; and the other places they had possessed became gambling dens. The funds of the society were officially confiscated. Those who remained loyal were up against insurmountable difficulties.<sup>106</sup>

State intimidation of left sympathizers and progressive collectives had begun much earlier, and by 1951, Faiz, along with several army officers, was arrested by Liaquat Ali Khan's government. There was no evidence with which to charge Faiz Ahmed Faiz in the attempted coup, yet the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case was seen by the state as imbricated with communist plots. In the

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<sup>106</sup> Shaukat Siddiqui, *Khuda Ki Basti (God's Own Land)*, Trans. David Mathews (London: Routledge Press, 1995) p. 268-9. Additionally, the novel was serialized on Pakistan National television during the 1970s and early 1980s under Zia ul Haque's regime.



few short years prior to his arrest, Faiz had become a prominent journalist, taking an active role in society, committed to building Pakistan on principles of social justice. He began work as editor of *The Pakistan Times* in Lahore, a newspaper in which he championed progressive causes, and it was, in fact, the opportunity to edit the progressive newspaper that led Faiz to Lahore in 1947. Faiz also served as vice-president of the Trade Union Congress and secretary of the Pakistan Peace Committee. By the end of the trial, leftist activity in Pakistan was further suppressed, and the All-Pakistan Progressive Writers Association, banned.

Historians agree that the fall-out from the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case had a devastating effect not only upon the Communist Party of Pakistan, but on radical and progressive intellectual culture in the country, especially since the involvement of the high-ranking Indian communist Sajjad Zaheer in the debacle, furnished the state with the opportunity to increase its suppression of communist sympathizers. However, even in the most comprehensive study of the case, the main concern has been to elicit the events of the conspiracy through examination of the official records from only the early years of Pakistani statehood, with no eye to the much longer history of leftist suppression during the colonial period, especially in the 1920s.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, the official account has also ignored the political context whereby the famed individuals of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case considered taking up cudgels against the government: namely, disaffection amongst people over government failures, and the unresolved issue of Kashmir.

It is worth revisiting not only how the state curbed AIPPWA, but how intellectuals responded to the suppression, given the fact that it impoverished Pakistani civil society of intellectuals who collectively challenged the status quo. It was, as one historian has noted, a

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<sup>107</sup> Zaheer Hasan, *The Times and Trial of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy 1951: The First Coup Attempt in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998). In Hasan's assessment, "the myth has been constantly propagated by leftist intellectuals that there was actually no conspiracy, but that one was fabricated and the arrests of the army officers and the trial were engineered by the intelligence agencies of the Anglo-American bloc" – p. x. Hasan claims that the conspiracy to overthrow Liaqat Ali Khan's government began in 1949!

tragic watershed in Pakistan's history because it provided the ostensible justification for insulating the army from the nascent nationalism combing some parts of the land and marked a break in critical thinking from which the people of Pakistan one generation later have still not recovered.<sup>108</sup> Besides Faiz, the people arrested included the prominent progressive writer and communist Sajjad Zaheer, and several army officers: Air Commodore A.K.Janjua, Lieutenant-Colonel Niaz Muhammad Arbab, Captain Zafrullah Poshni, Lieutenant-Colonel Ziauddin, Major Hasan Khan, Major Ishaq Muhammad, Captain Khizr Hayat, and Brigadier Siddiq Khan. A special tribunal was set up to try the case, for which a new law was passed: the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Act of 1951. The law stated that, "any person in possession of documents or information by virtue of his participation in the proceedings of the said case, shall not disclose them to a person not officially connected with its preparation or conduct and a breach of these provisions is punishable under the Official Secrets Act."<sup>109</sup> The other stipulations were: that the trial would be held outside Pakistan's normal legal system; that there would be no jury; that the convictions would be determined by a government appointed tribunal, and that the tribunal would have the power to convict the accused of crimes beyond which they had been initially charged.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, a legal advocate for the defense of those being tried had to obtain special permission from the Tribunal, but then was made subject to the operation of the Official Secrets Act of 1923. The Official Secrets Act was an anti-espionage act held over from the colonial period, and it was under this act that several *muhājirs* of the early 1920s had been tried in conspiracy cases launched by the colonial state. As Faiz pointed out:

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<sup>108</sup> Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

<sup>109</sup> Munibur Rahman, "The Pakistan Trial: A Call for An Open and Fair Trial in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case", published by South-east Asia Committee, 1 Hampstead Hill Gardens, London, N.W.3. South East Asia Committee Pamphlet: Number 1, 1951 (NMML)

<sup>110</sup> Talat Ahmed, "Writers and Generals: Intellectuals and the First Pakistan Coup" in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 1 (2008)

if the conspiracy law from the British days was bad enough, you did not have to do anything, if it was proved that two people had agreed to break the law, it became a conspiracy, and if a third person deposed that he had witnessed these two people agreeing, that was enough. No power to act was necessary; this was all that was necessary under the British law. The [Pakistani] government thought that this was not good enough, so they made special Act abolishing whatever safeguards were open to the Defense, and in this Act, there was really no escape from conviction.<sup>111</sup>

Hasan Zaheer has suggested that the provisions of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case Act were at variance with the prevailing liberal laws inherited from colonial times and that the democratic government of the formative period of independent Republic established traditions of bad governance and disregard for fundamental human rights.<sup>112</sup> While the Act may have introduced greater repressive measures than its colonial counterpart, it was well in keeping with processes of legal decision making that had evolved during the colonial period, especially how the rule of law was applied in the colonies under the liberal British regime. As one scholar has shown, it would be a mistake to consider the state of emergency as was effectively announced by Liaquat Ali Khan shortly after arresting prominent intellectuals and army officials as categorically outside the rule of law. Pakistan inherited a rule of law from a long history of colonial jurisprudence, which entailed a nexus between the interpretation of texts and power relations in moments of crisis. Colonialism had not only made explicit the connections between racial and cultural conditions and forms of rule in general, but also made explicit the relationship between a rule of law and emergency.<sup>113</sup> The Rawalpindi Conspiracy Act came as a response to contemporary condition of the nascent Pakistani state, but bestowed upon the state powers of

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<sup>111</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, (Ed.) Sheema Majeed, Muhammad Reza Kazimi, *Culture and Identity: Selected English Writings of Faiz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 13

<sup>112</sup> Zaheer Hasan, *The Times and Trial of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy 1951: The First Coup Attempt in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 18. The rights of the accused embodied in normal law were abrogated by the Act, not only explicitly, but also by relaxing the standards of prosecution evidence and by laying down stringent trial procedures in the keenness to finalize the case expeditiously.

<sup>113</sup> Nasser Husain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003) p. 31-32.

emergency implemented by the colonial regime. As I showed in the earlier portion, it was precisely the emergency laws that had come about in the period between 1919 and 1929 which came to have a strong bearing upon the early 1950s.

Why did the Pakistani state create new stipulations regarding the laws of 'conspiracy'? While on the one hand, the amendments made to the Official Secrets Act through the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case was a direct outcome of the attempted coup in 1951, in practice, it set a long-lasting precedent in curbing progressive and radical literary and intellectual activities. The Official Secrets Act would again be applied to Faiz when he went to jail under Ayub's martial law regime in the 1960s. Recalling that separate prison term under Ayub, Faiz noted that, 'the Martial Law government rounded up everyone whose name appeared on the police files from 1920 onwards' so in the prison we found people ninety years old.'<sup>114</sup> By that time, the Pakistani state allowed colonial laws on the books to be imposed so as to make it possible to torture several leading leftists and dissidents in Pakistan, among them the Secretary General of the CPP Nasir Husain, whose death remains mired in controversy.

In the spring of 1951, Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Sajjad Zaheer, alongside a number of army personnel who had fought in the Kashmir war, were brought to trial at the Hyderabad Jail. One of the central figures of the conspiracy was Major General Akbar Khan, who was frustrated by Pakistan's acceptance of the ceasefire after the war with India over Kashmir (1947-48). This frustration emerged against a backdrop in which British army officers still exercised control of the Indian and Pakistani armies as they had dominion status initially after 1947' a fact that created much resentment amongst the armed services.'<sup>115</sup> Together with a number of disaffected

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<sup>114</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, (Ed.) Sheema Majeed, Muhammad Reza Kazimi, *Culture and Identity: Selected English Writings of Faiz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.14; Lecture to Asia Study Group in 1980.

<sup>115</sup> Talat Ahmed, 'Writers and Generals: Intellectuals and the First Pakistan Coup' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 1 (2008)

army officers, Major General Akbar Khan arranged a meeting towards the end of 1950 to discuss plans to overthrow the government, and invited some civilians as well, including Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sajjad Zaheer, and Begum Nasim. Akbar Khan wanted to form a new government, with new elections, and would allow the communist party to participate in the political process.

In actuality, the writers had never intended to actually upend the existing government, for there was never any agreement at that meeting to stage a coup d'état at all. According to Faiz, he had been approached by old army friends at the end of 1950, and was convinced to attend a meeting in the role of a consultant:

The plan was to occupy the Presidential House, occupy the radio station and make the President announce that the government was overthrown and a non-party government had been formed, and a new constitution would be promulgated in six months and new elections would be held and then there were to be social reforms. This was discussed for about five or six hours and eventually, they decided that it was not on, for the simple reason that there was no issue before the country on which you could mobilize the people and secondly, it was too risky so it was decided that nothing should be done.<sup>116</sup>

Despite the fact that no plan was in the offing, one of Akbar Khan's confidants, a police officer present at the meeting, reported the discussions which were held at the meeting to the Police, who, through the Governor of NWFP, brought it to the attention of the Prime Minister. After several months in trial, Liaqat Ali Khan's government delivered its judgement. Prison sentences were assigned according to rank: General Akbar Khan's sentence was fourteen years, the Colonels six years, and Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Sajjad Zaheer, being civilians, were given the lowest sentences of two and a half years each following the judgement. Over the next few years as Faiz faced trial before a tribunal that held the power to put him to death by a firing squad, he composed the poetry which made up the collection, *Dast-e-Sabah (Wind of the Palm)*. It was the

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<sup>116</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, (Ed.) Sheema Majeed, Muhammad Reza Kazimi, *Culture and Identity: Selected English Writings of Faiz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.12; Lecture to Asia Study Group in 1980.

political repression during this era, as well as subsequent terms of imprisonment, that set the stage of Faiz's most productive period of poetry.

### **Faiz as Ethical Interlocuter: Poetry Within and Beyond the Nation**

While official histories carry little or no mention of the progressive role in the attempted coup, and the state's repression against leftist movements in the early years of Pakistan, a narrative of that repression continues to be collectively remembered through Faiz's poetry. The prison poems that Faiz composed during the 1950s were clearly those of defiance and protest against state repression. They were published in 1953 in the collection *Dast-e-Sabah (Wind of the Palm)*, followed shortly afterwards by another similar collection, *Zindan Namah (1954)*. Yet, the prison poems of *Dast-e-Sabah* reveal to the audience not only Faiz's personal experience of incarceration and imprisonment, but a distinction the poet made between Pakistan as a promised country of freedom and social justice, and Pakistan as a brutal and oppressive state. So, even as Faiz articulated his role as an individual poet protesting against his jailers, the poetry was voiced on behalf of a collectively subjugated people against the ruling elite. The distinctions Faiz made within this poetry were subsequently outlined in his essays about developing national programs for arts and culture, which he developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s while forging links with broader Afro-Asian organizations.

The compelling quality of Faiz's poetry lay in his ability to hitch leftist notions of liberation, to Indo-Persian poetic tradition of the *ghazal* which itself was embedded within involved histories of social protest. Especially pertinent within this poetry was Faiz's use of the stock metaphors of separation, union, wine, and gardens so prominent within *ghazal* poetry drawn from Sufi mystical concepts. These poems themselves cannot be said to be either secular or religious, and Faiz's individual confrontation against the state, ultimately

expressed the broader conditions of his political present and his people. These were then appropriated into songs, which continue to circulate in popular poetry recitals (*mushair'ahs*), radio and television as can be seen in the music of Begum Akhtar, Iqbal Bano, Farida Khanum, and Noor Jehan and more recently, singers such as Tina Sahni and Nayyara Noor.

During the early months of imprisonment during the Rawalpindi Case, Faiz was kept in solitary confinement, where he was prohibited from reading and writing. In this period, Faiz composed *qit'asô* a four-line rhymed form that he could memorize and recite.<sup>117</sup> These poems he composed as he recited the Urdu couplets of Ghalib and Iqbal with the other prison inmates. *Dast-e-Sabah* opens with the following couplet:

Why should I be saddened if my tablet and pen have been taken away?  
 When I have drowned my fingers into my heart's blood?  
 My tongue has been silenced, but what of it,  
 I have hidden a tongue in every round-mouthed link of my chain.<sup>118</sup>

In the introduction to the collection, Faiz considers the role of the poet, which is, ñnot to merely bear witness (*mushahida*), but he also has a duty (*farz*) to be a *mujahida*.<sup>119</sup> The use of the term *mujahid* here means to ethically strive for what is just. For Faiz, it was not enough to stand as witness to the state's atrocities, but the poet must take an active role in eradicating social injustice. Poetry was not to be limited to an act of testifying. In stating so, Faiz drew from the shared Islamic concepts of *jihad* (lit. to strive), and *shahid* (one who witnesses) to articulate the ethical position of the intellectual. When Faiz committed his poems to paper, the writings were sent beyond the prison confines, where they were subjected to the scrutiny of the censors. He

<sup>117</sup> It is said that Faiz wrote some of the poems on the prison walls with charcoal as his fellow prison inmates regaled him with tales. At other periods in his ; See Ted Genoways,

<sup>118</sup> *Mata-e-Loh o Qalam Cheen Ga'ii to Kya Gham Hai / Ke Khoon-e-dil mein Dabooli hain Unglooyion Mein Zuban pe Mehr lagi hai to kya, ke rakh di hai / Har ek halqa zanjeer mein, zuban mein ne.* in Faiz Ahmed Faiz. *Dast-e-Sabah* (Amritsar: Azad Book Depot, 1957) (NMML) p. 13.

<sup>119</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz. *Dast-e-Sabah* (Amritsar: Azad Book Depot, 1957) (NMML) p. 8.

was thus forced to create, as Ted Genoways has noted, a secret system of images and metaphors drawn from Persian and Urdu poetry that would seem innocuous for the censors' eyes. In a 1984 lecture before the Asian Study Group at the British Council in Lahore reported in the newspaper, *Dawn*, Faiz noted that

an entire range of symbols evoked in the Urdu *ghazal* have transcended successive historical periods, each time acquiring new meanings to reflect changing political, economic and social realities. Faiz then demonstrated why traditional symbols like *chaman* (garden), *sanam* (idol), *sayyaad* (captor) and *qafas* (prison) are valid today and how they can be used as a means of escaping censorship. He said that when a poet speaks of *ehd-i-junoon* (period of obsession) or *chaman ki udasi* (sorrow of the garden) he or she is actually referring to oppression and injustice.<sup>120</sup>

By the end of the collection, in the *ghazal*, *Nisar Mein Teri Gulliyon Pe Ay Watan (Bury Me in Your Streets, O Beloved Country)* Faiz articulates the ethical position of the poet in relation to the wider collective of which he is a part. For Faiz, the nation did not have to be defined according to the narrow authoritarian ambitions of the state—indeed, it must not be. Furthermore, identifying with the nation for Faiz did not at all translate as having an uncritical understanding of nationalism. The nation, for Faiz, was to be defined by the aspirations of the people towards social justice, equity, and liberation; furthermore, this nation was one that was not yet a nation that is on the horizon and has yet to become. Thus, yearning for *this* nation, involves an act of striving towards building a society free of social and political inequity, and this is how the poet can be a *mujāhid*. Pakistan as a homeland is rendered through metaphors of union and separation from the beloved, and the poet's declaration in its opening verse literally means sacrificing himself to the larger goals of freedom.

Bury me under your streets, O my beloved homeland,

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<sup>120</sup> Ted Genoways, "Let Them Snuff Out the Moon: Faiz Ahmed Faiz's Prison Lyrics in *Dast-e-Saba* in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 19, 2004, p. 98.



Where today custom dictates that men dare not pass with heads held high,  
Or where your lovers who wish to offer you pilgrimage,  
Walk with eyes lowered, must fear for their lives and come around on the sly.

For those good hearts suffer this new law and order of ðfreedomø  
Where stones are locked up and dogs run free.  
Many are the pretenses of tyrannyø's hand,  
For those few, who in madness, take your name.

As the power-crazed men are judge, jury, and execution,  
Who will defend us to make our case? From where can we seek justice?  
But somehow the days go on, for those whose days must go on  
In separation from you, turning dusk to dawn.

As the prison grating darkens, my heart understands  
That somewhere, the parting of your hair is filled with stars.  
As the links of my chain begin to glimmer, I think  
That somewhere day perhaps is breaking over your sleeping face.  
I live, in short, in the imagined space between nightfall and dawn;  
[We] live in the shadow of walls, in the gateø's closed palm.

It has always been the same war between tyrants and the people  
Their tactics and customs are not new, and neither are ours.  
Such has always been: we have grown flowers amid fire  
Their loss is nothing new, and neither are our victories.

That is why I do not complain to the skies about my fate,  
Nor do I let my heart turn against you in our separation.

If today I am away from you, tomorrow we shall be together;  
It matters little, this separation of one night between us  
If today our enemies ride high, playing God, so what?ø  
Their reign of four days is nothing to us.

Only those who maintain their vow of fidelity to you  
Only they possess the cure for the circulation of night and day.<sup>121</sup>

Faiz moves between metaphors and arguments, expressing himself as a stranded prisoner, but then shifts the register of the poem so it speaks of the *collective* experience of imprisonment.

Faiz translates his own incarceration as one shared by the people under a tyrannical government.

The opening verse of the poem literally translates as, ðLet me be a sacrifice to your streetsø,

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<sup>121</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz. *Dast-e-Sabah* (Amritsar: Azad Book Depot, 1957) (NMML) p. 80.

which is often invoked in Urdu poetry to signify pious devotion. The metaphors of alleyways and streets in poetry have served to illustrate how far the mystic will go in his devotion for the divine, much like the lover who sacrifices himself to public humiliation, before an earthly beloved. In Faiz's poem, this spiritual and earthly beloved is the homeland, Pakistan. Indeed, Pakistan is still not yet, it is a beloved separated from its people, as the poet is held hostage by the state. The lovers of the homeland are its people, like Faiz, who are prohibited from frequenting the beloved: the metaphor is powerful because of the term *tawāf*, signifying the rites of circumambulation around the *ka'aba* during pilgrimage in Mecca.

In the second stanza, Faiz continues to address the country of Pakistan, distinguishing between the masses of people who are its true lovers and compatriots forced to suffer, and the powerful elite who believe in Pakistan in name only. Faiz keeps insisting on a definition of Pakistan as a homeland beyond the narrow confines of the state's definition. In the third portion of the *ghazal*, Faiz's self-alignment with a people held hostage to the state's repression, is made more explicit: "Who will defend us? Where can we seek justice?" thus amplifying the definition of the nation to include the oppressed masses. In his prison cell in the fourth stanza, Faiz turns his address once more to the beautiful beloved, the homeland which escapes him in separation, imagining a country that will rise and awaken from slumber. Faiz's hopefulness increases in the fifth stanza, where separation from the beloved homeland is but a temporary one and there is a confidence here transmitted to the audience as Faiz says that "the separation is only for a night, and thus matters little." This emphasizes that union with the beloved is right around the corner. Lastly, Faiz's statement of the "reign of four days" perhaps speaking directly to his four-year sentence means that imprisonment is temporary, for an authoritarian government cannot forever play god; indeed, the people have always been the victors and the tyrants have always

been vanquished as he illustrates earlier. Thus, Faiz explicitly claims that a people's struggle for justice within their homeland always wins out, in spite of the claims of the nation-state. Faiz's poetry is important in this regard, for even as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case was removed from the official political and historical narratives of Pakistan, Faiz's *ghazals* of protest and yearning for a better, peaceful, and progressive Pakistan remain a part of Pakistani public discourse and popular culture. As Sajjad Zaheer put it, several years later in the introduction to Faiz's second book of prison poems:

..long after the people forget all about the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, the Pakistani historian, when he comes across the important events of 1952 will consider the publication of this small book of poems as the most important historical event.<sup>122</sup>

Faiz was eventually released from prison in April 1955, and continued his work as Chief Editor of *The Pakistan Times* as well as the newspaper, *Imroze*. However, after a few years in 1958, Faiz was again imprisoned under the Safety Act, this time under the regime of General Ayub Khan. The Communist Party of Pakistan had already been officially banned in 1954, but under Ayub Khan's government which declared martial law, harsher policies ensued: this included the removal and destruction of all socialist literature from public libraries, as well as the expropriation of Progressive Papers Limited, so that the government would have control over the media.<sup>123</sup> As Ayub Khan came into power, the constitution was declared null and void, and all political parties were banned. Faiz's second prison sentence was shorter, as he served one year. Along with Faiz, the military regime also arrested Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi and Sibte-e-Hasan, the

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<sup>122</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Zindan Nama* (Lahore: Maktaba Karawan, n.d.) (NMML) p. 6

<sup>123</sup> Talat Ahmed, 'Writers and Generals: Intellectuals and the First Pakistan Coup' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 1 (2008) p. 146

editors of *Lail-o-Nihar* and *Imroze*, respectively, journals which belonged to the Progressive Papers Ltd, whose major shareholder was Mian Iftikharuddin, a leftist leader.

In the midst of these arrests, Faiz again produced poems, and once more, the *ghazals* were odes to collective suffering, which could be overcome. The terms Pakistan or homeland are not stated as such; in fact, the beloved in this poem appears as the oppressor ó for in Urdu poetry, there are many faces of the beloved. I would argue that the yearning for a more equitable Pakistan is implicit given the context in which they were composed; the poems had to be more ambiguous and subtle. At the same time, these *ghazals* were rendered into song. For instance, *Aye Kuch Abr, Kuch Sharab Aye (A Cloud Came, And Then Some Wine)*, was performed in the sonorous voice of the singer Begum Akhtar (1914-1974).

First arrived a cloud, and then some wine  
After which there followed, great punishment and difficulty

From heaven's terrace the moonlight shone  
And in the hands of the cup-bearer, some rays of sunlight too.

In every artery and vein, again shall flow lightning  
And before us she appears unveiled.

I was today keeping count of the many mundane sufferings  
And today, the memory of you was immeasurable/limitless

Your tyranny of sorrow has not left me  
Every day my heart rises in revolution

And in this way my silence roared  
It is as if from every direction answers would come

Victorious was the path adjacent to its destination  
Wherever I have arrived, success has followed.

Begum Akhtar (originally Akhtari Bai Faizabadi) was a *ghazal* singer from Faizabad, UP, whose songs were widely listened to on All-India Radio as well as within private and public gatherings. She belonged to of a class of female vocalists who were socially reproached and

stigmatized for singing in public given their association with courtesan culture. Many who had not read Faiz were perhaps first acquainted with the poet through Begum Akhtar's music which transcended the India and Pakistan divide. In this particular poem, *Aye Kuch Abr, Kuch Sharab Aye (A Cloud Came, And Then Some Wine)*, the nation is not named as such as the destination to which Faiz proclaims his victory. Yet, given Faiz's confrontation with the Ayub regime, the beloved here appears as a *zālim* (oppressor), who has revealed herself to the poet, and is the primary reason for his sorrow.

A second poem that Faiz composed in response to his imprisonment under the Ayub regime was published in the fourth collection of poetry *Dast-e-Tah-e-Sang* (Hand Under a Stone) in the early 1960s. Entitled *Aaj Bazaar Main Pa Ba Jaulan Chalo (Let Us Walk With Fetters In the Street)*, Faiz composed it shortly after he was taken to Lahore jail, passing through the streets of the city in a *tonga* (horse-driven cart) with feet bound in chains.

Let us walk in the bazaar in shackles  
Moist eyes and restless soul is not enough  
Being charged for nurturing concealed love is not enough  
Let us walk in bazaar in shackles

Let us go with bare hand, in trance and dancing  
Let us go with dust upon our heads and blood on garb  
Each and every one takes his path to the city of my beloved  
The city's ruler, so too the crowd of commoners

The arrow of false charge, as well as the stone of accusation  
The morning of sorrow, as well as the day of failure  
Who is their friend but me  
Who is left untainted in the city of beloved  
Who is left to be killed at the hand of the executioner  
Prepare your heart for the journey, go forward oh wounded heart

Then, let us go to be executed.

This *ghazal* has since been sung by the Pakistani vocalist Nayyara Noor, and has achieved much popularity. In the poem, Faiz is proud to wear shackles upon his feet, conveying that there should be no shame in being arrested and sent to jail, especially in face of a beloved. In his poetry Faiz always stressed the cohesive bonds between people that arose from the experience of oppression and suffering, again through creative deployment of the *ghazal* topos of gardens. In the following *ghazal*, composed in the late 1950s during martial law, Faiz again emphasized the act of walking (*chalna*) together, and approaching the destination of the beloved, stressing hope over sorrow.

Let flowers be filled with colors with the arrival of the fresh spring breeze  
Let us continue to walk, so that the garden may resume its glory

The cage is sad, O friend, say something to the cool breeze  
The ocean of god is everywhere, today let us hear of our friends

At some point, free the dawn from your sweet lips  
At some point, let us walk out of the dark tresses of night that encompasses us.

Great is the link between pain and this poor heart indeed  
But your loyal followers will walk with you if you let out a call.

That which we had to pass through, has passed; the night of separation is over  
Our tears will correct your path to the future

The destination of -Faizø(victory) has not been felt on our path,  
If we have left the lane of the beloved, let us walk to the home of the beloved.<sup>124</sup>

The poem was not only recited by Faiz himself at *mushai'rahs* during the early 1960s in Karachi and Lahore, it was also rendered into song by the Pakistani *ghazal* singer Mehdi Hasan, whose music is listened to across both India and Pakistan.

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<sup>124</sup> While I have not found an explicit reference suggesting that Faiz composed the poem in response to the arrest and subsequent torture in the Lahore Fort of General Secretary of the CPP Hassan Nasir, it is possible that the *ghazal* may be an ode to him. He died in 1960.

In the poems which make up Faiz's third and fourth books of poetry, *Zinda-Namah* (*Prison Letters*), in 1956 and *Dast-e-Tahe-Sang* (*The Hand Beneath the Rock*) in 1965, there are a greater number of poems which explicitly emphasize international solidarity. Some of these poems were also composed while Faiz was in prison. When Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in the United States on charges of conspiracy to commit espionage, Faiz composed the poem, *Hum Jo Tareekh Rahon Mein Maare Gaye* (*We Who Were Killed in Obscure Pathways*) while in Montgomery Jail.<sup>125</sup> Additionally, Faiz also composed an ode for Iranian students who died protesting the August 1953 Iranian coup d'état. The coup angered many Iranians, as the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh was overthrown and replaced by Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, through the involvement of England and the U.S. Many students took to the streets in protest, in support of Mossadegh. Faiz's poem, "For the Iranian Students"

(*Irani Taliba Ke Naam*):

Who are these cup-bearers  
Whose blood falls upon the earth  
Making the sound of gold coins  
Which drown into the broken pitcher  
Filling up the beggar's bowl

Who are these youth, in the land of Ajam (Persians/foreigners)  
These large-hearted  
The jewel of whose bodies  
Is scattered approvingly in the dust and in pieces  
Thrown about in the alleyways

O Land of Ajam!  
Why have you torn and thrown them, mockingly!  
Whose eyes are sapphires

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<sup>125</sup> For the love of the flowers of your fresh lips / The dry tree of agony we were made to array.  
Still longing for the lights of your shining hands / We were killed in obscure pathways.  
Far from our desire, as we hung upon the cross / The redness of your lips went on throbbing,  
Headiness from your tresses went on streaming / The silver of your hands went on gleaming.  
When your ways opened into oppression's night / We walked on as far as our feet carried us,  
A poem on our lips, our hearts with pain alight, / Pain was to your beauty witness  
Know that were steadfast in our testimony. Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Ed. and Trans. Sarvat Rahman, *100 Poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publishers, 2009) p. 68.

Whose lips are coral  
Whose hands are silver  
Where have they gone, Who has touched them?

Oh fellow patriots who ask!  
These tender youth  
Are the pearls of that light  
Are the flower buds of that fire  
They blossomed only during  
The sweet light and bitter fire  
Of the stormy night of oppression

The rebellion of the morning flower  
And dawn came in their hearts and bodies  
Bodies of silver and gold  
These faces of sapphire and coral

Oh fellow patriots who want to see!  
Come close and have your fill  
Of the necklace of the living queen  
The bracelet of the goddess of peace!<sup>126</sup>

Even as Faiz was actively composing *ghazals* stressing the goals of the people's liberation from state authoritarianism in the early 1950s, his definition of homeland also extended to people and places beyond Pakistan. As can be seen in the above poem, his definition of homeland also includes Iran where he invites his fellow patriots and people of his country (*pardesi*) as witnesses to the suffering of Iranian youth under state repression. The poem addresses the people and governments of Iran, as well as his fellow countrymen. The term, *ajam*, which has been used to refer to Persian, is also a term that means foreigner, which here can signal the state's complicity with foreign (American and English) interests. In the second stanza, Faiz writes that the bodies of those youth are scattered, *reza reza*, which literally means approval, a double entendre on the Reza Shah Pahlavi regime. After being released from prison by Ayub Khan in 1959, Faiz left the

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<sup>126</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz. *Dast-e-Sabah* (Amritsar: Azad Book Depot, 1957) (NMML) p. 72.



country for Iran, where he led a delegation of progressive writers from Pakistan.<sup>127</sup> He had already become a founding member of the Afro-Asian Literary Organization in 1958.

During the early to mid-1960s, Faiz was travelling, but at the same time attempting to fortify national arts organizations in Pakistan. In his essay *“Pakistan Kahan Hai?” (Where is Pakistan?)*, Faiz relates the following anecdote of his travels, specifically, how he is met with confusion by a Cuban in the mid-1960s:

Where are you from?  
From Pakistan.  
Pakistan! Oh, where is that? Is that in India or Afghanistan?  
No, brother. It is neither in India nor in Pakistan. It is its very own country.  
Oh, so what is the population there?  
About Nine million.  
What? Nine thousand or nine million?  
Nine million.  
Oh, such a large country! It is surprising that we know nothing about it!<sup>128</sup>

Faiz then tells the reader that it is alright that the Cuban has not heard of Pakistan, for there is no Pakistani embassy in Havana, before going on to note that it was a common question he was met with on his travels around the world. *“Have you ever noticed,”* he asks rhetorically of his readership, *“that Pakistan has no trademark, nothing by which anyone can recognize it?”* before discussing at length the problem of introducing Pakistan’s culture and civilizational history. While Faiz had for many years served as a member of the Executive Member of the World Peace Council, he was appointed in 1959 as the Secretary to Pakistan Arts Council. In this capacity, Faiz argued that the development of culture, defined as *“broadly a whole way of life of a given human community”* and in more restricted sense a stylized expression of this way of life in various forms of creative and artistic expression *“had been stunted in many parts of the Asian*

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<sup>127</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Ed. and Trans. Sarvat Rahman, *100 Poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publishers, 2009) p. 17.

<sup>128</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Pakistan Kahan Hai* (Where is Pakistan?) in *Mutala-e-Faiz: Europe Mein* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1994) pg. 229.

world, due to long years of foreign domination.<sup>129</sup> Faiz argued that the social and cultural development of them all was frozen at the point of their political subjugation and remained so until the advent of political independence.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, it was of utmost importance to Faiz that the only way for the fledgling nation of Pakistan to escape the remaining shards of colonial subjugation, was to promote culture.

Fostering culture as a means of political emancipation was understood by Faiz not only in terms of national solidarity with diverse peoples of Pakistan, but as a means to international solidarity. He attended the first Conference of Asian Writers in Delhi, in 1956, as well as the Asian and African Writers Conference in Tashkent, in 1958.<sup>131</sup> The latter rings true in the fact that it is in the Russian language where Faiz has received the most scholarly appraisal outside his native tongue, due to the poet's extended travels in the Soviet Union while in exile. He was widely read there, and as early as 1949, he organized a meeting of Progressive writers in Pakistan to invite a delegation from the Soviet Union. The Russian revolution had had a significant impact upon anti-colonial Indian intellectual life during the 1920s as I have already discussed earlier in this chapter. In 1919, news about the revolution, the Bolsheviks, and Lenin had become readily available in India, as newspapers carried stories about the Tsar being overthrown by peasants and workers. It is through Faiz's post-colonial reminiscences that we hear about that period of his life. In the introduction to his 1962 travelogue to the Soviet Union, Faiz wrote:

í in the stores in front of our house, in the staff rooms of schools, in the neighborhood mosques, everywhere, there was talk of [Russian revolution]...how

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Problems of Cultural Planning in Asia: With Special Reference of Pakistan in Culture and Identity*, Selected English Writings of Faiz, Ed. Shema Majeed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 37-8.

<sup>131</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Ed. and Trans. Sarvat Rahman, *100 Poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publishers, 2009) p.7.

did this Russian revolution happen? Why did it happen? Will the revolutionary army reach Hindustan and liberate us? What does a government of workers and farmers look like? When father would go to the *kacheri* (court), the people of alleys and the neighborhood (*gulli muhalle ke log*), who had stores and business in front of our house<sup>1</sup> would gather in the *beruni chabootra<sup>1</sup>* and would talk for hours about domestic and foreign politics: “Have you heard, Mahatma Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Shaukat Ali have together announced that we will be free within a year<sup>1</sup>” and “Have you heard that Ghazi Kamal Pasha’s forces have defeated the British forces in Afghanistan and are approaching<sup>o</sup>,” “Yes yes, Russian forces have joined them<sup>1</sup>” And the Russian Tzar’s throne has been overturned<sup>1</sup> and there is a leader born there named Lenin who has made an army of workers and after chasing out the *sultan* (king), have distributed money amongst the people<sup>o</sup> That was the first time that Russia, Lenin, and Revolution fell upon my ears<sup>1</sup> <sup>132</sup>

Faiz Ahmed Faiz was no stranger to the wider world that reached beyond British India towards Central Asia and the Soviet Union. His father, Sultan Muhammad Khan, left the Punjab in the late nineteenth century for Afghanistan, where he was employed in the service of the Amir of Afghanistan for several years. Sultan Muhammad Khan was fluent in English, Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and Punjabi. He was also the court biographer of the Amir<sup>o</sup> compiling in two volumes virtually the only account that exists of the Amir’s life for British archival records: he transcribed it in Persian, and then translated it into English. Victor Kiernan, one of the Faiz’s earliest biographers, writes that Sultan Muhammad Khan had “fallen afoul of his royal employer<sup>o</sup> and shortly thereafter turned up in England where he then trained as a lawyer.”<sup>133</sup> Faiz himself briefly explicated upon the reasons for his father’s return to India. Sultan Muhammad Khan, after being in the employ of the Afghan king for fifteen years, first as an interpreter and then as his chief secretary and minister, eventually became fed up with court politics. He was denounced as a British spy in these circles, and by the turn of the century, returned to Sialkot. He brought to

<sup>132</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Soviet Union Ka Pehla Tassawr* (First Impressions of the Soviet Union) in *Mutala-e-Faiz: Europe Mein* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1994) p. 316. See also Faiz’s travelogue: *Visal-e-Ashnaini*, p. 8.

<sup>133</sup> Victor Kiernan, *Poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 13.

the Punjab several wives from Afghanistan who spoke Dari, a dialect of Persian. Thus, from early childhood, Faiz was exposed to Persian not only through formal education, but was acquainted with the Persian-speaking world beyond India.

Both Faiz's early exposure to the fragments of this Persianate world as well as his education at the Scotch Mission School, explain his extensive use of Persian within his poetry. In his early formal education, he was taught Persian and Arabic there by Maulana Mir Hasan, who was an active supporter of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's Aligarh movement, and teacher also to Muhammad Iqbal. Upon completing his education at Scotch Mission, Faiz continued on as a pupil of Maulana Mir Hasan. The young poet emerged out of an Indo-Persian intellectual tradition closely mirroring that of Muhammad Iqbal's own life; in fact, Faiz's father knew Muhammad Iqbal personally, and it was upon a recommendation from Iqbal that the young Faiz was admitted to Government College in Lahore. Faiz's earliest recitations of poetry was at a gathering in honor of Iqbal, as the young poet became increasingly involved in intellectual and literary circles.

Faiz remains an iconic and multi-dimensional figure of the post-colonial Pakistani cultural landscape. The most sustained influences upon his poetry— that of Ghalib and Iqbal— he creatively brought together in his own verses, during the era of decolonization. Like Muhammad Iqbal, "the poet of the East", Faiz was deeply skeptical of territorial nationalism, seeing it as a space which fostered the worst kinds of fanaticism; he drew extensively from the Persianate poetic tradition in articulating his political views; critiqued western materialism as the source of exploitative capitalism; and contested the narrow interpretations of Islam that were cultivated by sections of the *ulema*. Also like Iqbal, for whom aesthetics were not formed in opposition to the politics of colonized Muslim self-hood, Faiz conceived of poetry as a means to enliven anti-

colonial resistance. His attachments to his homeland were cultivated through moments of confrontation with the state, and in tandem with strengthening ties of international solidarity elsewhere. Faiz's poetry was marked by fresh departures from that of Iqbal's: it was not only anti-clerical, but influenced heavily by precepts of leftist socialism. At the same time, Faiz's poetry, his migration to Pakistan, as well as his involvement within the wider international political arena, disturbs the problematic distinction between a secular Indian nationalism as opposed to a religious Muslim communalism, which is often said to have determined the emergence of the two nation-states.

Late in his life, Faiz was once again arrested in the early 1980s shortly before his death, this time under General Zia ul-Haq's regime. An audience of fifty-thousand people packed the stadium in Lahore to hear Iqbal Bano sing Faiz's ghazal, *Hum Dekhenge* (*We shall Witness*). Iqbal Bano immortalized the song, and as her voice reached its crescendo, declaring, "Certainly we too, shall witness that day, When these high mountains, of tyranny and oppression turn to cotton and blow away/And we oppressed/Beneath our feet will this earth shiver, shake, and beat/and heads of rulers will be struck/With crackling lightening and thunder roars/When crowns will be flung in the air and thrones will be overturned" , people joined in with slogans of "Inquilab Zindabad" (Long Live Revolution!) The radicalism of this particular poem not only drew from concepts of Sufi poetry, but is also a lyrical interpretation of a chapter from the Qur'an, verses from Surah Rahman, the theme of which is, Day of Reckoning. The poem continues to be recited and sung in today's protests in Pakistan, as it was during the lawyers' movement against General Pervez Musharraf in 2008.

We shall Witness

It is certain that we too, shall witness  
the day that has been promised  
of which has been written on the slate of eternity

When the enormous mountains of tyranny  
blow away like cotton.  
Under our feet- the feet of the oppressed-  
when the earth will pulsate deafeningly  
and on the heads of our rulers  
when lightning will strike.

From the abode of God  
When icons of falsehood will be taken out,  
When we- the faithful- who have been barred out of sacred places  
will be seated on high cushions  
When the crowns will be tossed,  
When the thrones will be brought down.

Only The name of Allah will remain  
Who is absent, but is also present  
Who is the spectacle and the beholder, both  
I am the Truth- the cry will rise,  
Which is I, as well as you  
And then God's creation (khalq ó khuda) will rule  
Which is I, as well as you

## *Conclusion*

I have approached this project from multiple perspectives. This dissertation has attended to the early modern, colonial, and post-colonial contexts in which the Urdu language operated, as well as the performative contexts of its literary forms, the cultural and intellectual history of its production, and the major themes which have preoccupied its narratives. I have shown how the Urdu literary and cultural milieu linked two worlds: the first being an Indo-Persian cultural universe, which allowed for a conceptualization of selfhood in which religious identity could be accommodated alongside cultural difference; the second was a set of anti-colonial, left-leaning, communist, anti-imperialist, politics that in their diversity suggests how nationalism, far from being a totalizing phenomenon, was a variegated one. In so doing, I have argued that the invocation of ethics by Urdu intellectuals in political life (whether in social justice projects for the lower-classes or in their questioning of conservative sexual politics) illustrates the existence of alternative secular nationalisms during the decolonization era. I have also suggested that progressive Urdu intellectuals of late colonial North India were not simply heirs to a left-socialism, but were also part of a much longer story of secularization within Muslim South Asia.

My analyses of sources, ranging from literary texts, poetry, and film, has demonstrated that notions of the ðethical,øencapsulated in such concepts as *adab* (at once ethical comportment and literature), *akhlāq* (ethical and moral conduct), and *shārafat* (respectability, both in its elite-based and socialist inspired variations), was a shared, ðsecularø space with particular, but by no means exclusive, relation to North Indian Muslim society. While the late colonial period is often conceived of as a period of intensifying conservative cultural politics, as Charu Gupta has noted, there was no triumphal nationalist discourse, for the ðthe rich variety of literary practices and complexities of cultural imagination were at the same time placing limits upon projections of

respectability and homogeneity<sup>134</sup> central to middle-class definitions of themselves in relation to the nation. In historicizing these concepts by showing how poets and intellectuals of the Urdu milieu articulated anti-colonialism in multiple voices, I have shown how the moral and political contexts of nationalism were not static.

This project, however, leaves much to be desired in the way of understanding post-colonial history in the South Asian subcontinent as it related to the individual writers who migrated to Pakistan. I have only barely touched upon the post-colonial context of Pakistan in the last chapter, where I attempt to narrate a genealogy of anti-imperialist thought and radical politics. The story of leftist movements from 1949 to 1971 and the influence of the Cold War on cultural politics in Pakistan, as well as the story of the co-option of leftism into liberal Pakistani nationalism, will form the basis of a second project. It is important to note that up until the late 1960s, Indian and Pakistani progressive intellectuals shared a cross-border collective. Secondly, this project could be made all the more richer by engaging with the forces against which progressive intellectuals positioned themselves, both in late colonial India, and in post-colonial Pakistan. While I have attempted in chapters two, four, and five to address the role of Urdu intellectuals in understanding their relationship to the emergence of Pakistan, a more thorough project must conceive of a much wider array of political actors, both Hindu and Muslim, in order to more fully appreciate the variegated articulations of nationalism.

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<sup>134</sup> Charu Gupta, "Possible Love and Sexual Pleasure in Late-Colonial North India," *Modern Asian Studies*, 36,1 (2002): p.195.



**Appendix**  
**1. List of Urdu Intellectuals**  
**(listed in alphabetical order)**

**Ghulam Abbas** - (1909-1982) was a short-story writer and also edited the popular children's magazine *Phool* before joining All India Radio in the 1940s. He moved to Karachi, Pakistan in 1947 and edited the Radio Pakistan journal *Ahang* until his retirement in the late 1960s. He published three collections of short stories

**Khwaja Ahmad Abbas** (1914-1987), popularly known as K.A. Abbas, was a film director, novelist, screenwriter, playwright, and journalist in Urdu, Hindi, and English. He was at the forefront of the IPTA (Indian People's Theater Association), and directed several films for Bombay cinema, amongst them the best of Raj Kapoor films, *Awaara*, *Shri 420*, and *Mera Naam Joker*. He is considered one of the pioneers of Indian neo-realist cinema. His column 'Last Page' which started to appear in the newspaper, *Bombay Chronicle* in 1935, holds the distinction of being the longest-running column in the history of Indian journalism.

**Nazir Ahmed** (1830-1912) came from a distinguished family of religious scholars of Bijonr and Delhi. He was a socio-religious reformer and a pioneer of the Urdu novel. Amongst them were *Mirat-ul-Urus (The Bride's Mirror)*, and *Taubat-un-Nasuh (The Repentance of Nasuh)* which he published while in British colonial service as Deputy Inspector of Schools in the Department of Public Instruction. These novels have become classics of Urdu literature and continue to be taught in schools. He is also known for having translated the Indian Penal Code into Urdu.

**Akbar Allahabadi** (1846-1921) was an Urdu poet and satirist from Allahabad. Initially educated in madrasas, he later studied law and became a session judge in the Allahabad High Court. His poetry often satirized Western educated Indian Muslim elites, and wrote three collections of poetry.

**Nazir Akbarabadi** (d. 1830) was an Urdu poet of the eighteenth century who composed *ghazals* and *nazms*, in a period of when many of his contemporaries were complaining of the decline of elites under the Mughal empire. He left behind hundreds of *ghazals*, though he is famous for his *nazms*, which reflected several aspects of daily social life of his era. Amongst his most famous poetry is the *Banjaranama (The Chronicle of the Gypsy)*, which continues to be circulated in school text books.

**Ahmed Ali** (1910-1994) was an Urdu writer and was among the founding members of the Progressive Writers' Association (1936) in India. He is famous for writing the English novel *Twilight in Delhi*. He moved to Karachi, Pakistan after Partition. Ali was also the BBC's Representative and Director in India during 1942-1944. During partition, he was the British Council Visiting Professor to the University of China in Nanking as appointed by the British government of India. Later, he was appointed Director of Foreign Publicity, Government of Pakistan. At the behest of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, he joined the Pakistan Foreign Service in 1950. Besides Urdu literature, he also translated the Qur'an into English,

**Farhatullah Baig** (1883-1947) was a prominent Urdu writer and satirist. He wrote essays, taught at a high school, and worked as a translator. In 1933 he was posted as a Sessions Judge and around this time he began writing poetry. He later became the Registrar of the Hyderabad High Court.

**Rajinder Singh Bedi** (1915-1984) was born near Sialkot, Punjab (now Pakistan), and spent his early years in Lahore. He was a progressive Urdu writer, playwright, and a film director and screen-writer for Bombay cinema. He wrote the screenplays for several Hrishikesh Mukherjee's films such as *Abhiman*, *Anupama*, and *Satyakam*. He directed the film *Dastak* (1970). He was a prolific writer of Urdu fiction, and many of his short-stories were about peasant life. He is known for authoring the novel, *Ek Chadar Maili Si* for which he won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1965.

**Krishan Chander** (1914-1977) was a progressive Urdu short story writer from Lahore. He was a prolific writer, author of over a dozen novels and several collections of short stories and several radio plays in Urdu as well as Hindi. His most famous novel was *Ek Gadhe Ki Sarguzasht* (Autobiography of a Donkey) a satire about life of ordinary people in the newly independent India, has been translated in over a dozen Indian languages. His short story *Annadata (The Giver of Grain)*, about peasant life, was made into the film *Dharti Ke Lal* in 1946.

**Ismat Chughtai** (1915-1991) was a progressive and feminist Urdu short-story writer from Badayun, Uttar Pradesh, and grew up in Jodhpur. While working on her B.A. in 1936, she attended the first meeting of the AIPWA in Lucknow. She thereafter worked towards a Bachelors in Education, becoming the first Indian Muslim woman to earn both degrees. She was charged with obscenity for writing the short story, *Lihaf* (The Quilt).

**Dagh Dehlavi (Nawab Mirza Khan)** (1831-1905) was a poet from Delhi, who composed many ghazals, under his nom de plume Daghlavi which literally means, "taint of Delhi." He was related to the family of last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, his stepfather being the heir apparent, Mirza Muhammad Fakhru. Several years after revolt of 1857, Daghlavi moved to Hyderabad, which had become a center for the patronage of many Urdu poets.

**Faiz Ahmed Faiz** (1911-1984) was a leftist Urdu poet from Sialkot, Punjab. He started the Lahore branch of the Progressive Writers' Association in 1936, during which time he was also a lecturer in English at the M.A.O. College in Amritsar. He served briefly in the British Indian Army through the war, up until 1944. He moved to Lahore, Pakistan after Partition, where he became the chief editor of the newspaper, *Pakistan Times*, and in 1959 was appointed Secretary to the Pakistan Arts Council. He served several years in prison, the first time during the infamous Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case in 1951.

**Altaf Husain Hali** (1837-1914) was born in Panipat, and was an Urdu poet, writer, critic, and social reformer. He was well-versed in Persian as well as Arabic, and lived in Delhi, where he studied Islamic theology as well as Urdu poetics. He transformed the poetic genre of the *ghazal*, and his most famous poetic work is the *Musaddas*, which examined the state of social and moral degradation of Muslim society in colonial India.

**Muhammad Iqbal** ó (1877 ó 1938) was a poet and philosopher, from Sialkot, Punjab, later moving to Lahore, who wrote in Persian and Urdu, and is widely considered the intellectual architect of the idea of Pakistan. He studied in Cambridge, Munich, and Heidelberg, and wrote prolifically on politics, history, philosophy, and religion. His most well-known works are *Asrar-e-Khudi*, *Rumuz-e-Bekhudi*, and *Bang-e-Dara*, and he composed a famous and enduring patriotic song, Tarana-e Hind. He was involved with the All-India Muslim League, and has been widely heralded as a strong proponent of political revival of Muslim identity in colonial India.

**Ali Sardar Jaffri** ó (1913 ó 2000) was an Urdu poet, critic, and film lyricist originally from Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh. He joined Aligarh Muslim University in 1933, and became a Communist. He wrote several anti-war poems, and was active in the socialist faction of the All India Congress led political activities. He was heavily involved in the Progressive Writers Movement, and edited the Urdu literary journal, *Naya Adab* (New Literature) as well as *Guftagu*, and in addition to several books of poetry and Urdu criticism, he was amongst the most prolific documentarians of the progressive writers movement. During his literary career Jaffri, edited anthologies of Kabir, Mir, Ghalib and Meera Bai, and wrote two plays for the Indian People's Theatre Association. He also produced a television serial, called *Kahkashan*, based on lives and works of noted Urdu poets.

**Sahir Ludhianvi** ó (1921 ó 1980) was born in Ludhiana, Punjab and was a popular Urdu poet and film lyricist and songwriter who was a member of the Progressive Writers Association. In 1943, after being expelled from college, Sahir settled in Lahore, where he completed his first collection of poems, *Talkhiyan* (*Bitterness*). After his work was published, he began editing four Urdu magazines, *Adab-e-Lateef*, *Shahkaar*, *Prithlari*, and *Savera*. For his pro-Communist leanings in *Savera* he was issued an arrest warrant by the Government of Pakistan, and left Lahore for Delhi in 1949. Thereafter, he moved to Bombay, where he worked for the film industry.

**Asrar ul Haque Majaz** ó (1909 ó 1955) was a progressive Urdu poet originally from Bara Banki, Uttar Pradesh, and received his education in Lucknow, Agra, and then went on to Aligarh Muslim University, where he became quite well-known for his revolutionary *nazms*. He was also well-known for composing the Aligarh anthem, and wrote two major collections of poetry, *Ahang* and *Saaz-e-Nau*.

**Josh Malihabadi (Shabbir Hasan Khan)** ó (1894 ó 1982) was an Urdu poet from Malihabad, Uttar Pradesh, and educated in Agra, after which he studied Arabic and Persian, and spent several months with Rabindranath Tagore's university, Shantiniketan. By the mid 1920s, Josh moved to Hyderabad, where he began to assist with translation work at Osmania University; he was esiled for writing a poem against the Nizam of Hyderabad. He then founded the literary magazine, *Kaleem*, and came to be called, *shayar-e inquilab* (Poet of the Revolution) for his writings against the British Raj. He had a senior post with All-India Radio until migrated to Pakistan in the late 1950s, much to the chagrin of then Prime Minister Nehru. His musings about life in Pakistan, amongst other life experiences, are in his memoir, *Yaadon Ki Baraat* (Procession of Memories).

**Sa'adat Hasan Manto** (1912 ó 1955) was a prolific Urdu short story writer, of Kashmiri background, who spent his early life growing up in the Punjab. In his life, he published twenty two collections of short stories, a novel, five anthologies of radio plays, three anthologies of essays, and two collections of biographical sketches. Manto was tried for obscenity several times, thrice before 1947 by the colonial Indian government and thrice after 1947 in Pakistan. Manto was extremely controversial, and his writings about the violence that accompanied Partition constitute an oeuvre in and of itself, and remains arguably the best writing about the collective trauma of that period. He was briefly involved with the Progressive Writers Association, but became disillusioned with the group, when literary contemporaries accused him of writing obscenity in his short stories. He migrated to Pakistan from Bombay in 1948.

**Makhdum Mohiuddin** (1908 ó 1969) was an Urdu poet and Communist political activist born in Andole village in Medak district in the then princely state of Hyderabad, India. After attending Osmania University, he founded the Hyderabad branch of the Progressive Writers Association in 1936, and became involved with the Comrades Association and the CPI. He was at the forefront of the 1946-1947 Telengana Movement against the Nizam of the erstwhile Hyderabad state. His collections of poetry include *Bisat-e-Raqs* and *Surkh Savera* (The Red Dawn) and *Gul-e-Tar* (The Dew-Drenched Rose).

**Munshi Premchand** (1880 ó 1936) was an extremely prolific writer of modern Hindi-Urdu literature, and widely heralded in India to be the doyen of Hindi-Urdu literature of the twentieth century. He wrote nearly three hundred short stories and several novels— his last was *Godaan* (The Gift of a Cow), which is considered one of the best novels in Hindi. He was one of the first Hindi-Urdu writers to experiment with social realism in literature, and many of his stories focused on peasant life in villages. He was involved with the Progressive Writers Association when it first came about, shortly before his death.

**Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi** (1916 ó 2006) was an Urdu short story writer, journalist, literary critic and poet who was formative to the Progressive Writers Association in Pakistan, serving as the secretary general of the Progressive Writers Association both of the Punjab, and of Pakistan. He published prolifically, many of his short stories about rural life in the Punjab. In his long career as a writer and editor, Qasmi edited several prominent literary journals, including *Phool*, *Tehzeeb-i-Niswaan*, *Adab-i-Lateef*, *Savera*, *Naqoosh*, and, *Funoon* which were forums that encouraged young and new writers to begin their literary careers. He also served as the editor of the prestigious Urdu daily *Imroze*. For several years Qasimi contributed weekly columns to national newspapers in Pakistan.

**Rashid Jahan** (1905 ó 1952) was an Urdu writer born in Aligarh, India who is best remembered for her path-breaking stories in the controversial publication, *Angare*, a collection of short-stories that was banned by the government in 1932. Her father was Sheikh Abdullah, who was a pioneer of women's education in India, establishing the Women's College at the Aligarh Muslim University. Rashid Jahan was a gynecologist who was educated at the Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi. She was an active member of the Communist Party of India and played a leading role in the Progressive Writers Association. She died in Moscow, where she travelled to receive treatment for cancer.

**Balraj Sahni** (1913 ó 1973) was a Hindi-Urdu actor originally from Rawalpindi in the Punjab, who began his acting career with the plays produced by the Indian People's Theater Association (IPTA) of which he was a founding member. He then began acting in films in Bombay, beginning with *Dharti Ke Lal* (1946), and earning widespread fame with Bimal Roy's classic 1953 film, *Do Bigha Zameen*, about a peasant family who shifts to the city, which won an international award at the Cannes Film Festival. He acted in several social realist and progressive films in the 1960s, amongst them *Garam Hawa* (*Warm Winds*) about the division of a Muslim family due to Partition. Sahni was also a very gifted writer, both in English and Punjabi.

**Majrooh Sultanpuri** (1919 ó 2000) was an Urdu poet and lyricist, whose career as a song-writer in Indian cinema spanned almost five decades. He was active in the Progressive Writers Association, and won the highest award in Indian cinema, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for Lifetime achievement in 1993.

**Sajjad Zaheer** (1905 ó 1973) was an Urdu writer and political activist born in Lucknow, India and he went on to study law, before becoming an active member of the Communist Party of India. He was a formidable organizational force of the Progressive Writers Association, and began his writing career with a collection of short stories in the controversial *Angare*. Later, he moved to Pakistan where he was jailed with Faiz Ahmed Faiz in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. While in prison in Pakistan, Zaheer wrote a history of the progressive writers movement in India, *Roshnai* (The Light) published in 1955.

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