

Conflict, Transition, and Hesitant Resolution:

A Survey Of Urdu Literature, 1850-1975

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For much of North India, the world changed twice in 1857. It first changed in May, when columns of Company soldiers marched into Delhi and proclaimed the end of Company Bahadur's rule. The world changed again in September, by which time it was clear that the brief Indian summer of Indian rule was decisively over. If the first change was violent and disorderly, it was also fired by a desperate hope, and a burning anger. Anger had generated hope--hope that the supercilious and brutal foreigner, who understood so little of Indian values and Indian culture, could still be driven out, that he was not a supernatural force, or an irrevocable curse on the land of Hindustan. The events of 1857-1858 drove the anger underground, and destroyed the hope. The defeat, dispersal, and death of the rebels signalled the end of an age, and the ushering in of a new order. It was an order which was essentially established by force, but which sought to legitimate itself on the grounds of moral superiority. It claimed that its physical supremacy resulted from its superior intellectual apparatus and ethical code, rather than merely from an advantage in numbers or resources.

It was thus quite natural for the English to try to change Indian society from both the inside and outside. The new Government would be failing in its duty if it did not promote a new kind of education, a new kind of literature, a campaign to wean Indians away from their effete and decadent modes of thinking and writing. Perceptive Indians had observed the emergence of the new intellectual and political order well before 1857. In a Persian poem written in 1829-30, Ghalib (1797-1869) had described Calcutta as "the eighth realm," and had said that one couldn't hope to get justice there. Since ancient geography divided the world into seven realms, designating Calcutta as the eighth realm didn't just emphasise its great size; it also suggested that the English capital was run on lines different from the rest of the world. Around 1852, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) requested Ghalib to write a Preface to his recently completed work relating to the *A'in-e Akbari*, the great work of the sixteenth-century scholar and courtier Abul Fazl. Ghalib responded by exhorting Sayyid Ahmad to observe "the Sahibs of England" and their great achievements in establishing control, through modern technology, over land and sea. Sayyid Ahmad would be well advised, Ghalib suggested, to forget the past, and to come to terms with the new age and its new masters.

Once an alien culture establishes itself by force of arms, it tends gradually to take on a positive value in the eyes of the subjugated. Tensions arise where the cultural consciousness of the subjugated people is strong--where the people see themselves as active participants in History, not merely passive material on which others may inscribe their own stories. In such a case the people try both to imbibe the new culture, and at the same time to cling to their own traditional values. Sayyid Ahmad Khan's founding of the Scientific Society (1862), the magazine *Tahzib ul-Akhlaq* (1870), and finally, the College at Aligarh in 1877, were attempts to imbibe the new culture. So was the so-called Aligarh Movement in Urdu,

with which are associated almost all the great names of late-nineteenth-century Urdu prose. The prose of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and of the *Tahzib ul-Akhlaq*, embodies the stylistic principles of that movement: it reveals a forceful but functional style. The issues that the Aligarh writers discussed were social, or political, or moral. Fiction and romance were rigorously avoided, though allegory was permitted. Biography was preferred to admiring accounts of past kings and heroes. Translation from the English was encouraged. The pedagogic activities of Delhi College, which was re-established on new lines in 1864, had already laid the groundwork. At Delhi College, Master Ram Chandar (1821-1888), Pyare Lal Ashob (1834-1917), Maulavi Karimuddin, Maulavi Zakaullah (1832-1910), and a host of others wrote or translated books on history, mathematics, and the physical and the social sciences.

In contrast to these Westernising responses, the founding of the Dar ul-Ulum (Academy Of [Islamic] Learning) at Deoband (U.P.) in 1867 was a Muslim cultural response of the conservative kind, maintaining traditional values in the face of the change and upheaval wrought by the supremacy of the British Raj. The Academy refused to accept institutional or Government aid, kept itself and its alumni aloof from government jobs, and was devoted to the revival of Islamic learning. The Radhasoamy Satsang of Agra, established a few years later, proposed to perform the same service for the Hindus.

Urdu literature was largely secular in character; it was the product of the Indo-Muslim ethos, shared alike by all Urdu speakers regardless of their religion. It already had Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and even Europeans in its ranks. Thus the challenge presented by new literary values, and the new demands on literature, was felt by all Urdu-speaking communities. The activities of Dr. John Gilchrist (1759-1841) at the College of Fort William in Calcutta (founded 1800), and his promotion of a "simple" Urdu prose style, were not seen as much of a disruptive development. For his effort was directed towards educating Company Officials in the local languages. The real challenge came from the new poetics, promoted by British officials both through their educational activities, and through the official patronage freely given to "useful" and edifying literature.

It was around 1874 that two of the greatest Urdu writers and thinkers of the time, Altaf Husain Hali (1837-1914) and Muhammad Husain Azad (1830-1910), came in direct and intimate contact with Western educators like Dr. Leitner and Col. Holroyd in Lahore. Their encounters laid the foundation of modern literary theories and practices in Urdu literature. Hali advocated "natural" poetry--that is, a poetry not written according to the classical tenets, but with a strong social and ameliorative purpose. In 1880, Azad published *Ab-e hayat*, a history of Urdu poetry based on the concept of cultural and linguistic periods. (It must be noted that before Azad, literature was generally seen as a continuum, synchronous rather than diachronous, governed by a timeless poetic canon.) Azad made a passionate appeal for the avoidance of abstract themes, high flights of imagination, and complex traditional metaphors which he saw as outworn. The history of modern Urdu literature is thus shot through with tensions and self-doubts generated by the impact of Western ideas about the nature and uses of literature.

Scholars have tended to claim that until almost the very end of the nineteenth century, Urdu literature was "medieval" in character. But the term "medieval" does not tell the whole story. The ideas that invaded Urdu literature from the West were not only modern and novel: they were culturally alien. And they introduced disruptive elements into our literary thought. For all their apparent philosophical soundness, these ideas inaugurated a long period of disequilibrium. There are no signs even today that the old equilibrium will soon be restored, or that a new equilibrium is about to be achieved.

To take just one example, Plato raised the question: can poetry be true? His answer was that it cannot. Aristotle tried to get around Plato's arguments. But all he could say was that poetry is truer than history, because history tells you only about things that happened, while poetry tells you about things that can happen. But this was cold comfort. For even if poetry can tell you about things that can happen, its claim to truth would still rest on things which were yet to be proven. Again, Plato declared poetry to be harmful to society. Because poets often couldn't explain the meaning of their own verses, they lacked rationality. And they often aroused emotions which were socially inconvenient, even dangerous. So poetry should have no place in the ideal state. Aristotle answered the first charge by saying that poets were inspired with a special kind of madness. To refute the second charge, he produced his famous theory of *katharsis*. These psycho-literary arguments of Aristotle's raised more problems than they solved. Even a casual study of an ancient or medieval Western treatise on literary theory will show how difficult life was for the Western theorist, as he struggled to explain how an untrue statement could have a morally salubrious effect.

Now the questions raised by Plato and Aristotle were unknown to, or unrecognized by, Arab-Iranian and Indian literary theory, the two traditional and formative influences on Urdu literature. The classical Indian theorists were interested in questions about how poetry worked, not in asking what social service it performed, or whether it was true or false. It was perhaps obvious to the Indian thinkers that the poet was a maker of things, not a discoverer of verifiable "truths." As V. Raghavan says, "The Upanishad said that what was well done was indeed the most delectable thing (*rasa*). Here can be seen the concept of *rasa* which later became the core of Indian aesthetics." Discussing the seminal ideas of the great Kashmiri theoretician Nayaka (10th century), Raghavan says, "Comparing poetic expression with law and scripture on one hand, and story and news on the other, Nayaka said that in the former the letter mattered; in poetry the way a thing was said or conveyed was all in all."

The Arabs viewed the question of the truth of poetry in two ways, one of them strikingly similar to the Indian vision. Qudamah ibn Jafar plainly declared that what matters in poetry is the words, not the content. Words make poems; content does not. Ibn Qutaibah asserted that poetry contains "wisdom resembling the wisdom of philosophers." Thus poetry produced its own kind of knowledge, it didn't depend on philosophy for its validity. According to Ibn Qutaibah, poetry is "the mine of knowledge of the Arabs, the book of their wisdom...the truthful witness on the day of dispute, the final proof at the time of argument."

The history of Western speculation about the nature of poetry is the history of discussions emanating from the conflicting claims made against and for poetry by Plato and Aristotle respectively. Much European critical literature of the medieval period, and certainly all of it after the Renaissance, can be properly understood only if this fact is kept in view. M. H. Abrams sees the whole of Western literary theory as nothing but a chart of the battle between Platonic and Aristotelian views of literature. A battle, it must be remembered, whose shock waves did not reach Arab or Indian shores. It seems unlikely that the Indians were even aware of Greek theories of literature; what these theories meant to the Arabs can be seen in Averroes' summary of Aristotle's *Poetics* and his commentary on it. Averroes, writing in the twelfth century in Spain, was one of the greatest analytical and assimilative philosophers who ever lived, and a firm follower of Aristotle. Yet his summary and commentary show that Aristotle's literary concerns meant very little to him. In a delightful (and in many ways, disturbing) story called "Averroes' Search," Jorge Luis Borges describes how Averroes, in spite of the deepest thought and study, fails to understand even such "simple" terms as "tragedy" and "comedy," although the solution to the conundrum was twice within his immediate grasp, if he had only been attuned to perceive it.

We must therefore remember that before the advent of Western ideas, Urdu literature was not medieval simply in a linear sense. It was also a true child of the Indo-Muslim ethos, unaffected (I'd almost say "untainted") by the feeling of embarrassment and guilt about poetry that had run like an undercurrent in the literary theories of the Western world for two thousand years. Never had Urdu literature been called upon to declare whether it was on the side of truth and reality, or of fiction and imagination. Never had it been required to defend itself against charges of social uselessness or harmfulness. Never had it pretended that it could corrupt or improve the morals even of young people, much less of whole nations. It had always believed that what was important was what Nayaka had long ago called *kavi vyapara*, that is, the poet's mode of doing things with words and themes. Now Urdu literature was suddenly in the dock, fighting for its life, charged with the crime of degeneracy and moral bankruptcy.

The man who put Urdu literature in that dock was the great Altaf Husain Hali, the first serious analytical critic and literary theorist in Urdu. Prosecutor, judge, and witness for the prosecution, all rolled into one, Hali wrote his famous and even now powerful *Muqaddamah-e shir o sha'iri* [Preface to Poems and Poetry] in 1893. Already in 1879 in his long poem *Madd o jazr-e Islam* [The Ebb and Flow of Islam], popularly known as the *Musaddas* (after the stanzaic form in which it was written), he had condemned "the dirty heap of poems and *qasidahs* [eulogies], stinking worse than latrines." But the *Muqaddamah*, which became much more famous than the book of poems to which it is attached, and which soon came to be regarded as an independent work, was a sustained and reasoned, if somewhat selective, condemnation of Urdu poetry. Drawing upon what he thought were reliable sources for Western literary theory, and also making abundant reference to Arabic and Persian where it suited his argument, Hali created a literary theory which was an odd combination of Platonic idealism and Benthamite utilitarianism. He found much in Urdu literature that was morally unsatisfactory, artistically weak, and almost utterly useless as an instrument of social change. Hali said these things in admirably clear prose, unadorned but forceful. His supreme sincerity, as well as his love of literature, was apparent to even a casual reader.

But the reason for the tremendous influence of Hali's thought was not so much the power of his logic as the emotional and mental state of his audience. Indians in general, and Muslims in particular, were then passing through a crisis of identity and existence unparalleled in the long history of this country. The holocaust of 1857 and its aftermath had left the Indian mind reeling. The accumulated power and wealth of centuries had been largely lost even before 1857. But that terrible summer had shown Indians up to themselves as lost and utterly bankrupt forever, incapable even of making a worthwhile assertion of their national identity. And they identified, or were persuaded to identify, their fall and loss with their "mental" backwardness. The British were triumphant because their minds were better. That their minds were better was proved by the fact that they had better science, better mathematics, better engineering, a ruthless military machine, and a political-economic philosophy which decreed that each man's worth was determined by exactly how "useful" he was to society. So when a learned Indian gentleman like Maulana Hali came out against Urdu poetry, giving theoretical reasons evidently based on English scholarship, why, it was clear that he was right. Some of the most perceptive passages in Hali's book are devoted to linguistics, the theory of imagination, analyses of different verses, and specific comments on poets like Ghalib. But it was his diatribe against Urdu poetry, and his theoretical justifications for the diatribe, that from the very first were carefully studied and widely accepted. The reason is obvious: whenever Hali seemed to rely on the authority of English theorists, he acquired immense credibility. When he merely spoke in his own voice, people weren't all that interested.

Working by himself at Hyderabad, Shibli Numani wrote *Mavazinah-e Anis o Dabir* (1907), an exhaustive comparative study of Mir Babr 'Ali Anis (1802-1874) and Mirza Salamat 'Ali Dabir (1803-1875), two famous poets of Lucknow. He followed it with his five-volume *Shi'r ul- 'Ajam* (1906-1908), an historical examination of Persian poetry. Apart from the fact that the two books were written in the light of a distinct critical theory, Shibli also devoted separate sections in the books to poetics and rhetoric. Although his position was more "aesthetic" than Hali's, and his thought shows traces of Sanskrit poetics, he is at pains to reject, under the guise of aesthetic considerations, much that was typical of Indo-Muslim poetry and poetics. For example, he completely ignores Mirza 'Abdul Qadir Bedil (1644-1720), perhaps the greatest Persian poet of the "Indian style."

A similar conflict of values can be seen in the novels of Nazir Ahmad (1831-1912). In order to educate his daughters, Nazir Ahmad wrote didactic tales whose plots were based on the works of Daniel Defoe and other English writers. The first such tale was discovered accidentally by his British superior, who had it published (1869). Called *Mirat ul- 'urus* [A Mirror For Brides], it was an instant success, and was followed by other similar works. Cast in a somewhat primitive novel form, the tales were plain and obvious in their advocacy of what has been called the Protestant ethic, which placed great value on productive work, socially responsible behaviour, frugality, and a code of conduct which had very little place for pleasure, and none for levity. Yet in his *Ibn ul-vaqt* [Time-server] (1888), Nazir Ahmad made savage fun of Indians who imitated English ways. The central character in the story adopts European ways, after saving the life of a British officer during the uprising of 1857. But he is looked down upon by the English, who treat him with undisguised contempt. The narrator also sees him as a blue jackal, and makes it plain to us what he thinks of him. What is more important, however, is the fact that Ibn-ul Vaqt--whose name after all means "time-server"--ultimately reverts to his "native" ways. In spite of--or perhaps because of--its powerful anti-British message, *Ibn-ul vaqt* was not Nazir Ahmad's most influential work. That honour was reserved for his more didactic novels--since a code of conduct based on what was seen as the English way of thought struck a more responsive chord in the psyche of a defeated people.

The work of Shibli encountered the same barrier of audience bias. In spite of his tremendous authority as historian, Islamic scholar, and political thinker, Shibli's literary thought had very little impact in comparison to that of Hali. Western-influenced thinking was the order of the day. It was the age of periodicals and newspapers. The printing press had come into its own. Near the beginning of our period (1858), Munshi Naval Kishor had established his press and publishing house at Lucknow, soon to be followed by his newspaper, the *Avadh Akhbar* (1858). Nazir Ahmad had inaugurated the era of the novel. It fast outdid in popularity the traditional narrative, or *dastan*, which was essentially an oral romance. The tension between the oral romance and the novel can be seen in the works of Ratan Nath Sarshar (1846-1902). On the one hand, he wrote novel-like narratives like *Sair-e kohsar* [An Excursion in the Hills], and published a translation of *Don Quixote*. On the other, he produced the immense *Fasanah-e Azad* [The Story of Azad] (1880), which is in essence a *dastan* labouring under the strain of trying to masquerade as a novel. Hali had criticised the *masnavi* [long narrative poem] genre for its characters' lack of verisimilitude. The historical novels of 'Abdul Halim Sharar (1860-1926) and the social novels of Mirza Muhammad Hadi (1858-1931) proposed to remedy this unreality. Although Hali's authority wasn't directly invoked, clearly he was the one who gave the cue to these authors.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a great age of translation. English education had spread, and the prestige of English literature was high, not least due to Hali, Shibli, and Muhammad Husain Azad. Poets like Durga Sahay Surur (1873-1910), Nadir Kakorvi (1857-1912), Nazm

Tabataba'i (1852-1933), Pyare Lal Shakir, Suraj Narain Mihr, and scholars like Maulavi Inayatullah, produced copious translations of English poetry, drama, and scholarly writings. This age could also boast Urdu's greatest satirical poet, Akbar Ilahabadi (1846-1921). Akbar epitomises many of the conflicts and contrasts that run through the entire course of modern Urdu literature. Akbar was a civil servant, yet his sympathies were with Mahatma Gandhi. Although his success in life was due to the Western education which had become possible for him only through the cultural climate created by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Akbar opposed the Westernising policies of that great reformer. Akbar's satirical poems are a commentary on the Muslims' intellectual and political disarray which resulted from the rise and fulfilment of British power in India. The fact that he gave up writing traditional-style ghazals--a genre at which he excelled--and took to satire suggests that he perhaps wanted to pay Hali back in Hali's own coin.

Hali's formulations earned sharp literary opposition too. The most powerful criticism came from Hasrat Mohani (1875-1951). Hasrat, an old-style B.A. from Aligarh Muslim University, could apparently speak with first-hand knowledge of English, and his defence of Urdu poetry was therefore bound to be accorded a good deal of respect. Unfortunately, Hasrat Mohani was no theoretician. Worse still, he too was bitten by the English "liberal" bug. So he himself ended up condemning many things in Urdu poetry which Hali too had disliked and criticised. All wordplay, all interest in ideas for their own sake, all complexity of expression, all indirectness of communication, were either thrown out of Hasrat's court entirely, or relegated to the position of menials and jesters. Hasrat Mohani came out in favour of an "emotional" poetry, that is, a poetry that made a direct appeal to the emotions. Reduced to its essentials, this concept was as Western as anything Hali propounded. But Hasrat didn't realize this. The insidious influence of Western or pseudo-Western thought which Hasrat had imbibed during his years at Aligarh was now a part of the intellectual baggage of most young men of his day. Hasrat himself was a considerable poet; he also has the distinction of being the first to introduce overtly political themes in the ghazal. His erudition, and his love for the classical poets, are amply demonstrated in his eleven-volume selection of classical poetry. But the trouble was that his perception of classical poetry and poetics was sanitized--in spite of himself, and perhaps unbeknownst to himself--in the course of his education at Aligarh College.

No one stopped to inquire whether Western ideas *per se* were true--or whether, if true, they were necessarily applicable to Urdu poetry, or assimilable into the Indian ethos. Even Iqbal (1877-1938), the greatest Indian poet of this century, and one of the few Indians of his generation not to have been abjectly dazzled by the West, stated flatly that poetry was no good if it did not "support and aid the forces of life." He didn't realize that he was echoing Jeremy Bentham, who preferred prose to poetry because prose was written from one end of the page to the other, while poetry wasted a lot of paper spreading itself out unnecessarily. Again, it was Jeremy Bentham who asked, "Of what use is a nightingale unless it is roasted, and what is the use of a rose unless its oil is distilled and sold at fifty shillings a drop?" (or words to this effect). These and other utilitarian themes became so dominant in Urdu literature that when Mas'ud Hasan Rizvi Adib (1893-1975) wrote his refutation of Hali in his *Hamari sha'iri* [Our Poetry] (1926), all he did was to seek to prove that contrary to Hali's accusation, Urdu poetry was in fact highly moral and ennobling!

In spite of his westocentric ideas about the uses of poetry, Iqbal performed a great intellectual service. He was among the first Indians to have been directly immersed in Western culture and thought without being over-awed by Western technology or philosophy. In fact, he repeatedly warned the West of the consequences of its materialism. Much has been written about the various Western and Eastern

influences on Iqbal's thought. Yet it was as a poet that he spoke to his people; the appeal of his message wouldn't have been so powerful, or so lasting, if it hadn't come wrapped--in fact entirely dissolved--in his poetry. Iqbal's poetry, like his philosophy, was not without its external sources of inspiration. Ghalib immediately comes to mind; then there was Bedil. Among the Iranians, there were Khaqani (1106-1185), Sana'i (fl.11-12c.), Hafiz (1320-1398), and Rumi (1207-1273). Yet Iqbal was able to assimilate all these influences, and could evolve a style the like of which had not been seen before. This fact is important in determining Iqbal's position in our literary history. For in his time there were, as there had always been, intelligent poets who could model themselves on illustrious predecessors. There was, for example, Fani Badayuni (1879-1941), who was influenced by Ghalib. Yet Fani, for all his brilliance, couldn't be a substitute for Ghalib. Iqbal showed how a poet of the twentieth century, working from a different background, could be seen in a classical context.

In the same way, Iqbal designed his Persian collection *Payam-e mashriq* [The Message of the East] as a response to Goethe's *West-Ostlicher Divan*. The range of Iqbal's mastery can also be seen in the fact that in his Persian ghazals, he achieved almost the same flow and mellifluousness which characterises Hafiz; and in Urdu, his style is a unique synthesis of the lyrical and the reflective. The rhythms of his poetry were so strong that even an unsympathetic critic like Majnun Gorakhpuri (1904-1988) had to concede that even the most difficult poems of Iqbal could be sung to the most delicate tunes.

Iqbal's obvious greatness as a poet, and his wide reputation in the West, gave confidence to Urdu writers. Yet because Iqbal's utterances about the nature of poetry were cast very much in the Platonic (Hali-like) mould, he also helped strengthen the notion that our classical ideas about poetry were inadequate, not to say *inutile*--an embarrassing baggage, which we had luckily jettisoned in the course of our "progress."

For it is a fact that classical poetics was all but gone, as the example of Mas'ud Hasan Rizvi's book shows. In many ways, Iqbal's poetry can be taken as the fulfilment of Hali's mission. Hali inaugurated modern-style theoretical and practical criticism in Urdu. He taught us comparative literature; he made us look beyond our immediate literary and cultural environment. There is no one writing in Urdu who is not in his debt. But he also gave us a terrible guilt complex. In making us revalue our past, he played on the Indo-Muslim predilection for self-doubt and self-denigration. By shaking our once-firm belief in the superiority of our literary values, he broadened our perspective--but also narrowed it. For after Hali it became very difficult for an Urdu writer to value poetry for its own sake. In his *Yadgar-e Ghalib* [Memorial to Ghalib] (1897), Hali salvaged some fragments of Ghalib for us, and a few other bits and pieces from here and there. It was not sufficient for our self-respect. Also, we had to be reassured that what we had salvaged was of real value; and this could be possible only when we had some Western master to say so.

Small wonder, then, that 'Abdur Rahman Bijnori's *Mahasin-e kalam-e Ghalib* [The Merits of Ghalib's Poetry] (1921) became the standard point of departure. Bijnori, who died quite young in 1918, was well versed in European and Indo-Persian literature. He began his provocative book with the now famous observation, "India has two divine gospels: the holy Vedas, and the divan of Ghalib." He went on to say that from beginning to end, the divan has barely a hundred pages, but it contains all possible profundities of thought. And he peppered his book with first-hand references to Goethe, Rimbaud, Shakespeare, and other European writers. After Bijnori, it became the fashion to plunder whatever Western authors one could find (though never with the sensitive finesse of Bijnori) and apply ill-assorted quotes from them to Urdu literature, in order to bestow praise or blame.

So Ghalib remained our ever-fixed mark. But strange things were happening all around in the outside world, and once introduced to that world, Urdu literature could no longer remain immune to its influence. Urdu literature became socially conscious and politically mature. It emerged as a great vehicle for Indian nationalist thought. It contributed more than its fair share to the struggle for freedom. Its authors went to jail, they lost their lives or their means of livelihood. They saw their writings banned, their presses and newspapers shut down. In the vanguard were people of such different characters and backgrounds as Premchand, Iqbal, Brij Narain Chakbast (1880-1926), Josh Malihabadi, and Hasrat Mohani, along with a host of others too numerous to be mentioned here.

But the theoretical problems remained unresolved. There was ceaseless experimentation in form and theme. The first poem in blank verse appeared, from the pen of Maulavi Isma'il Merathi (1844-1917), around 1898. About the same time came the first modern play in verse, by 'Abdul Halim Sharar (1860-1926). Prose poems, by Niyaz Fathpuri (1886-1966) and a number of others, made their appearance around 1910. The first short stories proper--by Sajjad Haidar Yaldaram (1880-1943), closely followed by Premchand (1880-1936)--came around 1902. With Premchand and his immediate followers, like Pandit Sudarshan, Sultan Haidar Josh (1889-1953), A'zam Kurevi (d. 1955), and 'Ali Abbas Husaini (1897-1971), Urdu short story came of age. Premchand still remains our greatest fiction writer. For all his faults, Premchand, when at his best, excelled in plot construction, characterisation, and local colour. While his "realism" was somewhat linear and oversimplified, his evocative powers were great. Also, Urdu narrative prose achieved a modern and versatile character with Premchand. Around the same time, "romantic" fiction enjoyed a brief popularity through the works of Niyaz Fathpuri, Lam Ahmad Akbarabadi, Hakim Ahmad Shuja'at, and others.

Yet the classical or "medieval" ghazal continued to be popular. It even continued to exact grudging admiration from "sincere" Westernized liberals who rarely felt comfortable with it. There is a long, thin, but powerful thread connecting Imdad Imam Asar (1849-1934) and Ram Babu Saksena (1892?-1957), through Kalimuddin Ahmad (1909-1983), to Professor Muhammad Sadiq (d.1984), author of the immensely influential *History of Urdu Literature* (Oxford, 1964). In his encyclopedic assesment of poetry Kashif-ul Haqa'iq [The Revealer of Truth] (1897), Imdad Imam Asar found it very hard to defend many things in the ghazal. He even declared that the effect of the ghazal is ruined by the use of metaphor. He prescribed "sweetness" and "simplicity" as the correct recipe for a good ghazal. In his own *History of Urdu Literature* (1927), Ram Babu Saksena was more sympathetic, though it is clear that he found it hard to come to terms with the "unrealism" and the "extravagances" of Urdu literature; he overpraised the folksy Nazir Akbarabadi (1740-1830) on the rebound. In his overview of Urdu poetry (1941), Kalimuddin Ahmad denounced the ghazal as a "semi-barbarous" genre. In Sadiq's *History*, we are informed that the ghazal "stands very low in the hierarchy of literary forms." It was proving more and more difficult to accommodate the ghazal's obvious appeal and equally obvious "uselessness" within a theory of literature as a socially and even politically useful activity. For in spite of Hasrat Mohani's occasional use of ghazals for political themes, a later similar use by the political leader, journalist and freedom fighter Muhammad 'Ali Jauhar (1878-1931), and the conspicuously non-erotic tone of the ghazals of Iqbal and Yaganah (1883-1956), the genre remained unashamedly and overwhelmingly a personal, lyrical one. Hasrat Mohani himself was a great advocate of the ghazal as a vehicle for erotic sentiment.

Among those who brought new life to the ghazal were Shad 'Azimabadi (1846-1927), Asghar Gondvi (1886-1936), Fani Badayuni (1879-1941), Jigar Muradabadi (1890-1961), 'Aziz Lakhnavi (1882-1935),

Safi Lakhnavi (1862-1950), Riza 'Ali Vahshat (1881-1965), Simab Akbarabadi (1880-1951), and a host of others. The 1920's also saw the rise of Shabbir Husain Khan Josh Malihabadi (1898-1982), who began as a disciple of 'Aziz Lakhnavi, but soon turned his back on the ghazal and gained great reputation as a writer of fluent and forceful, though somewhat verbose, poems in the realistic and the satirical mode. Some of his poems were banned by the British on account of their anti-British, nationalistic fervour; the nation honoured him with the title of *sha'ir-e inqilab* [poet of revolution]. In spite of the resolute rejection of the ghazal by Josh, the genre remained universally popular due to its inner flexibility and essentially protean character.

The ghazal's tenacious hold on life caused great discomfort to the modernizing theorists. For there was always the question: even if the modern ghazal could be weaned away from its love-fixation, how to treat the great masters of the past? What to do with Vali (1635-1707), Dard (1721-1785), Mir (1722-1810), Ghalib (1797-1869), and dozens of others whose names and poems were household words? An answer was provided by Akhtar Husain Raipuri (1912-) in his *Adab aur inqilab* [Literature and Revolution] of 1934. He dismissed all classical Urdu poets as degenerate representatives of a diseased, feudalistic society. The ghazal came in for his heaviest salvos. He said that future generations would be ashamed to know that they had poets like Mir and Ghalib among their predecessors. Raipuri was not a Futurist. Though a Marxist, he was perhaps not familiar with Mayakovsky and other Russian Futurists. His rejection of the past was on political, not literary or historical, grounds. But to Raipuri goes the credit for introducing Marxist thought into Urdu literature.

Raipuri, it must be noted, was a year ahead of the founding in London of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association; he was two years ahead of its first conference in India. Raipuri provided a number of ideas, but not a clear-cut literary and political programme. This latter came in the 1936 conference, when Premchand gave his famous presidential address. In it he said, "We'll have to change the standards of beauty." This remark has often been represented as a call for a new literary aesthetic. In fact, Premchand was referring to human beauty. He was reminding writers that rich or urbanized people are not necessarily beautiful people, and that the writer should learn to regard the poor village woman also as beautiful. However, the manifesto that came out of the conference had no such ambiguity. It said, "We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today--the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political suffocation."

This manifesto swept the Urdu literary world off its feet. Among the older writers, besides Premchand, there were Daya Nara'in Nigam, 'Abdul Haq (1870-1963), and Hasrat Mohani who supported it. Practically all the intellectual young writers hitched their wagon to the Progressive star. In their zeal to sever their relations with the degenerate past, they favoured fiction and frowned on the ghazal. Their first collection of short stories, *Angare* [Sparks], jointly authored by Rashid Jahan (1905-1952), Sajjad Zahir (1905-1973), and Ahmad 'Ali (1910-), was banned by the British on the charge of "obscenity." Many new critics came to the fore, establishing Progressive writing as the literary movement of the day. A well-defined theoretical framework was nonetheless lacking. Literature was still proving too hard to classify as good or bad on political grounds. Sardar Ja'fri (1913-), a leading Progressive poet and critic, recalls his perplexity at reading Baudelaire in his youth, and admiring him in spite of himself. But as the movement gathered momentum, all such scruples were brushed aside. By 1947, Ja'fri was sharply attacking Faiz (1911-1984) for writing an ambiguous poem on India's Independence. Ja'fri criticized the poem for using metaphors, rather than expressing the Marxists' clear dissatisfaction with the kind of independence that India had achieved; he approvingly quoted, by way of contrast, a poem of Kaifi 'Azmi's (1918-) which displayed "the quality of oratory."

The Progressives gave us a large body of poetry and criticism. Much of it sounds and feels dated even now. But they did impart a sense of urgency to literature, linking it as they did to important issues of culture, society, and the political system. They made Urdu writers realize that the role of literature as a weapon for social change was quite valid in the eyes of a large number of people. Their greatest--or at least most notable, even if not properly acknowledged or analysed--contribution was that they shifted the centre of literary experience from *afaq* [the universe in the abstract] to *anfus* [people and things]. In the Islamic and the Indo-Muslim traditions, the stress was on *afaq*. That's why our classical literature has so little nature poetry of the "concrete" type, and our traditional narratives have so little "characterisation."

Perhaps because of the fact that fiction lends itself more easily to social concerns, the Progressives' greatest achievements were in fiction, especially realistic fiction. While writers like Balvant Singh (1920-1986) and Ahmad Nadim Qasimi (1916-) wrote on Panjabi rural themes, Suhail 'Azimabadi (1911-1979) made the villages of Bihar his special area. Krishan Chandar (1914-1977) wrote about Kashmir and Telangana, and also about urban Bombay. Mumtaz Mufti (1909-), Akhtar Husain Raipuri (1912-), and Mahindar Nath (1923-1974) wrote with a tilt toward sex and psychology. 'Aziz Ahmad (1914-1981) produced some historical tales, as also some psychological ones. 'Ismat Chughta'i (1915-) wrote bold and finely observed stories and novels about Muslim middle-class women and girls.

Sa'adat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) stands out as the towering figure, with his stories celebrating the mystical dimensions of sex, as well as his stories about vagabonds, prostitutes, and the brutality and folly of human beings. Beginning as a translator of famous Russian short stories (through English) into Urdu, Manto soon developed into a writer of great originality. He had a phenomenal ear for speech rhythms, and a sharply observing eye. Both these gifts helped to make his stories notable for their convincing dialogue and vivid imagery. Although often accused of levity and a morbid interest in sex, Manto was a far more serious student of human nature than his critics allowed. He also experimented with various narrative techniques. His last short story "Phundne" [Tassels], although written in 1955, reads as though it came from the seventies. Manto's example inspired all later writers who wrote in the "abstract" mode. It's a pity that Manto fell a victim to alcoholism and died an early death, his full potential unrealised. He had composed an epitaph for his own grave, to the effect that here lies Manto, Urdu's greatest writer; he lies wondering if he or God is the greater fiction writer. Compared with Fani's epitaph for his own grave, which was to the effect that Fani lived as if he had no God, Manto's words provide a key to the new, anthropocentric way of thinking that the Progressives had introduced into our literature.

It's not that the Progressives didn't have important poets. The most notable, and the finest, was Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984), who was able to combine a delicate, highly lyrical style with the correctness of doctrine which Progressive poetics demanded. His imprisonment by the Pakistani authorities for his involvement in what came to be called the Rawalpindi conspiracy (to overthrow the Pakistani government) invested him with a heroic halo which remained with him to the end of his life. He was arguably the most famous Urdu poet of our time. Sardar Ja'fri, who also suffered imprisonment at the hands of the Indian government, is much more versatile than Faiz; he has written successful long poems, shorter poems, and very short poems in the experimental mode. He has also made documentary films. In addition, he is an excellent critic, and has contributed much to Iqbal studies and to Progressive criticism in general. Majruh Sultanpuri (1919-) began in the romantic mode, but went on to produce some of the finest ghazals to come out from the Progressive movement.

The Progressive doctrine hardened within a very short time. The Progressive Writers' conference of 1948 declared that a non-Marxist writer could not be considered Progressive. By 1949, most of the nonconformists or individualists in the Progressive movement had fallen by the wayside, or had been officially expelled. Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Rajindar Singh Bedi (1915-1984), Muhammad Hasan 'Askari (1920-1979), Miraji (1912-1949)--each of them greater than any of those who remained in the movement--went their different ways. Miraji in fact died in a Bombay slum in 1949. Desperately poor, with a shocking addiction to dirt and drink, he died without fulfilling his whole promise. But in his short life of thirty-seven years he achieved more for Urdu poetry and criticism than most who lived to be twice his age.

Miraji did not found a new literary aesthetic. But then, neither did the Progressives. They had little notion of socialist realism, as practiced and theorized about in the West. About how to reconcile this realism with the Urdu tradition, they knew even less. They had learnt their Marxist theory from Marx, from Engels, from Rajni Palme Dutt. But their literary masters were the callow Caudwell and the pedestrian Ralph Fox. It was only much later that they heard about George Lukacs. Even today, their ragged remnants are unfamiliar even with Raymond Williams, not to mention Louis Althusser, Lucien Goldmann, or the inflammatory Terry Eagleton. They didn't know about the Marxist evaluation of the English and French symbolists made by Edmund Wilson in his *Axel's Castle* (1931). Sajjad Zahir and 'Abdul 'Alim did say that socialist realism did not mean kissing literary values goodbye. But how one could manage to serve both ideals at the same time was a question that they answered with inane generalities, if at all.

The major ideologue of the Progressives was Ihtisham Husain (1912-1972). He had a fine mind, but his prose was extremely murky and dense, unsuited to theoretical exposition. Instead of offering theoretical formulations, Ihtisham Husain laced his essays with remarks about class struggle, class consciousness, historical forces, the progress of mankind, and so forth. More than his theory, it was his practice which created a theoretical aura around the literary perceptions of the Progressive movement. He was suspicious of Iqbal, but waxed sentimental about Nazir Akbarabadi, because Nazir was folksy and was a "Marxist" of sorts before there was any Marx. Ihtisham Husain looked askance at the subtle, ironic, and sometimes shocking stories of Sa'adat Hasan Manto, and largely ignored Rajindar Singh Bedi, the second great name (after Manto) in Urdu short story. Neither of these writers showed the class consciousness which he saw as the source of all literature.

Miraji's great contribution was his demonstration of how it was possible to be both traditional and modern at the same time. If he admired and in some ways imitated Baudelaire and Poe, he also admired Amaru, Bhartrihari, and Miraba'i. He wrote his meditations about time, death, the mystery of human desires, the sorrows and pains of loving, the sin and rapture of sex, in a variety of forms: free verse, regular verse, prose-like verse, git, ghazal. He invented the short, intensely pointed poem, influenced perhaps by the Sanskrit. He wrote illuminating and provocative analyses of contemporary poetry. Without having been aware of the American New Critics' emphasis on "the words on the page" and "the poem itself," Miraji wrote brief essays on individual contemporary poems which are very like what Cleanth Brooks and others were doing with English poems of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Miraji and Muhammad Hasan 'Askari had become disillusioned with the Progressive movement at about the same time. While Miraji was active in another group called Halqah-e Arbab-e Zauq [The Circle of Connoisseurs], and gathered a number of promising writers around him, 'Askari went his lone

way toward interpreting Western literature for Urdu-knowers, and toward rediscovering the Urdu tradition for himself. Both men shared a love for the French Symbolists, especially Baudelaire, but while Miraji had little formal schooling, 'Askari was one of the newer generation of Urdu writers who had a direct and intimate knowledge of European, particularly English, literature. 'Askari's teacher Firaq Gorakhpuri (1896-1982) was among the first of that early group, followed by Kalimuddin Ahmad (1909-1983), A. A. Surur (1911-), and many others. Firaq could have said about 'Askari what I. A. Richards said about his own pupil Empson: he seemed to have read more English literature, and more recently, and better, than Richards himself.

What distinguished 'Askari from the rest was not only his formidable command of French and his inexhaustible intellectual curiosity, but also his powerful cultural consciousness. As a young man he was often seen as an unabashed Francophile, but only by those who chose to disregard his interest in Ezra Pound, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Garcia Lorca, Freud, and Wilhelm Reich on the one hand, and the classical Urdu ghazal and dastan on the other. 'Askari's was a great liberating influence, but it was also constricting, as he went on to formulate his theories about literature as an expression of cultural consciousness. In the case of Urdu, 'Askari came to see this consciousness as predominantly Islamic-mystic. But 'Askari did provide telling answers to the simplistic, overzealous demands of the Progressives. Askari also made a notable contribution as a short story writer and translator from French and English; thus he further widened the horizon of Urdu literature.

Independence wrought a number of changes in Urdu literature. The bloodbath of Partition not only produced some unbearably powerful writing, depicting with unmitigated, almost morbid courage the *danse macabre* of violence that shook the nation's consciousness; it also necessitated an urgent reevaluation of old ideals, and fears about the survival in India of the Urdu language itself. The Progressives made a panic call for the adoption of the Devanagari script. (They later withdrew from this position: in 1970, Ihtisham Husain, who had favoured the switch in 1948, condemned the advocates of the switch as fascists.) Unrelieved gloom fell on the Urdu world. Enrollment in Urdu classes dropped dramatically. Urdu as a medium of instruction ceased to exist almost everywhere by 1950. Speaking favorably about Iqbal was considered risky by many (A. A. Surur and Jagannath Azad (1918-) were two honorable exceptions).

Urdu gradually pulled back, on its own, from its living grave in the gutter, though not to regain its preeminent position in the Indian literary scene. (By no coincidence, it was Urdu writers who founded, and for a long time dominated, the Indian Progressive Writers' Association.) Yet the great and lasting damage had been done: in their eagerness to shore up the collapsing enrollment in graduate and postgraduate classes, the heads of Urdu departments in the Indian universities had persuaded themselves and the authorities to lower the standards of eligibility for admission to Urdu courses. The result was a line, apparently destined to stretch to the crack of doom, of inferior, inept, unmotivated graduate and Ph.D. students in Urdu. They in turn became Urdu teachers and professors, and produced their clones, and so on in an endless dreary succession.

In Pakistan, independence produced a different kind of trauma among Urdu writers. Urdu was the official language of Pakistan. But could there be a Pakistani Urdu literature, distinguishable from Indian Urdu literature? Could there be a Pakistani culture, distinguishable from the Indo-Muslim culture that had been shared by Hindus and Muslims alike in most of pre-Partition India? Could Mohenjo Daro, Harappa, the Greco-Indian remnants, the extant traces of the Hindu and the Sikh religious, cultural and literary heritage, be claimed as part of Pakistani culture? Should Pakistan look to

"Islam" to provide a cultural base and a literary theory? If so, which "Islam" should be chosen, the Indian, the Turco-Iranian, or the Arab?

These questions were never resolved. And they cannot be resolved now, when a Pakistani brand of fundamentalism seems to prevail. The lack of a sound and well-understood theoretical base has done more harm to the Pakistani sensibility and creativity than any amount of press censorship or constraints on free speech. As far as one can see, most Pakistani writers were thriving under censorship. But a people who cannot make up its mind whether it should include the likes of Ghalib and Premchand, the *Kathasaritsagara* and the *Dastan-e Amir Hamzah*, in its literary heritage, cannot be too far along toward achieving a viable cultural consciousness.

The Progressive movement rapidly became irrelevant during the fifties. One of the many reasons for its obsolescence was a fact which was incomprehensible to the leaders of that movement: the generation that came of age in the mid-fifties could not be persuaded that class struggle and class revolution could solve the problems of a world whose technological skills had put it well on the way to self-destruction. The fifties also saw a relentless growth of materialistic values all over the world--one that made the Progressives look increasingly anachronistic. Another reason for the movement's decline was the tireless insistence of the Progressive writers on putting politics above literature. A number of young Urdu writers wanted freedom of choice; they wanted to discover for themselves where in life new themes for literature were to be found. Many writers who came to maturity in the fifties broke away, or drifted away, from the Progressive movement, after beginning as members or sympathizers of it.

Yet another reason for the growing irrelevance of the Progressive movement was that by the sixties, the Progressive writers had all become highly respectable, prosperous, and almost indistinguishable from the Establishment itself. In Pakistan, the political climate was another contributing factor. Young people became disillusioned either way. Today, on either side of the border, there is not a single writer below the age of forty who calls himself a Progressive. Yet in Pakistan, the doctrine of literature as valuable for its content, not its manner of expression, found influential (if unexpected) spokesmen. For example, Salim Ahmad (1927-1984), the brilliant disciple of 'Askari, wrote a highly entertaining and provocative paper, *Na'i nazm aur pura admi* [The New Poetry and the Whole Man], in which he argued that much of modern Urdu poetry was valueless because it lacked the courage to look sex in the eye. Salim Ahmad later developed into a traditionalist Islamicist in the 'Askari mould. Thus his approach remained the same; only his concerns underwent a change.

Modernism [*jadidiyat*] was heralded in Urdu by a number of highly disparate Indian and Pakistani writers of the sixties. The Pakistani quest for new ideas on literature ended with the advance of fundamentalism in the late seventies. In India, modernism soon became identified--wrongly--with a mere rejection and negation of Progressive literature. How respectable the Progressives had become by then can be seen from the fact that the Modernists' rejection of Progressivism was also interpreted as a rejection of all tradition, all classical Urdu literature. The Progressives apparently found it hard to believe that any call to reject, or even revalue, their achievement, or any attempt to read literature for its own sake, would not be politically motivated. Just as the Progressives had to face stiff opposition in their day, so did the Modernists. With the difference that while the Progressives were opposed only by the so-called "Classicists," the Modernists were in the gunshots of both the "Classicists" and the Progressives.

Most of the early supporters of Modernism were dissatisfied Progressives, like the brilliant poet and critic Khalilur Rahman 'Azmi (1927-1978) and the poet and critic Amiq Hanafi (1928-1988). Some, like the noted critic A. A. Surur, were vaguely left-wing, though basically liberal. Others, like the poets Munir Niyazi (1923-), Balraj Komal (1928-), Bimal Krishan Ashk (1924-1981), and Muhammad Alavi (1928-), had begun writing in the very late forties and had no affinity for the ideas of the Progressives. They were soon joined by the critic, poet, and thinker Vazir Agha (1922-), who had been ploughing a lone furrow until the late fifties. Nor should one forget the precursors of Modernism. There were of course Nun Mim Rashid (1910-1975) and Miraji. Rashid was a highly original and careful artist. He was also an assiduous experimenter. He rejected the ghazal, and through his blank and free verse poems did more than anyone else to establish these two verse forms in Urdu. Akhtarul Iman (1914-) also rejected the ghazal, and produced astringent and ironical or nostalgic and dramatic poems. Neither Rashid nor Akhtarul Iman ever accepted the Progressive hegemony; both were generally cold-shouldered by Progressive critics in the heyday of the Progressive movement. It's only in recent years that Progressive critics like Sardar Ja'fri and Muhammad Hasan have come to recognise their merit.

Immediately preceding the Modernists were Majid Amjad (1914-1976) and Nasir Kazmi (1925-1972). By virtue of his single-minded devotion to a highly introspective idiom, Majid Amjad became a kind of exemplar for younger writers. Nasir Kazmi drew his inspiration from Mir and Firaq Gorakhpuri. His ghazals were emotionally charged, yet dignified and not overly sweet; with their nostalgia-oppressed, semi-bohemian protagonist, they helped establish Nasir as a sort of cult figure in the literary circles of Lahore. Mumtaz Shirin (1924-1972), through her fiction, criticism, and literary journalism, did much to create a favourable environment for modernism.

Modernist fiction was somewhat slow in making an appearance, perhaps because of the huge success of Progressive fiction. Qurratul'ain Haidar (1927-), who began writing in the very late forties, was not at all accepted by the Progressives; she is now acknowledged as the most important precursor of Modernist fiction. Intizar Husain (1925-) has proved to be the more potent force in early modern fiction. In his search for the perfectly expressive story, Intizar Husain has tapped all narrative sources from the *Jataka* tales and the *Kathasaritsagara* on the one hand, to the Bible, the Qur'an, and the Urdu oral romance on the other. Zamiruddin Ahmad (1928-) wrote subtle, finely tuned stories, mostly about middle-class life; he has had no imitators.

Intizar Husain did not tamper with the structure of the short story so much as with its texture. It was left to the true Modernists to challenge--and attempt to destroy--the structure of the short story, which had remained practically unchanged since Premchand. Taking their cue from some stories of Manto, and the theory and practice of the French and American avant garde, modern writers like Balraj Manra (1933-), Surendar Parkash (1930-), and Anvar Sajjad (1935-), created highly wrought but very nearly opaque stories which refused to observe the conventions of plot and character. Ahmad Hamesh (1937-) wrote in a more conventional narrative mode, but he delivered a different kind of shock to his readers through his preoccupation with filth and dirt.

The young writers were so eager to move away from the Premchand and Krishan Chandar prototype that the "New Short Story"--as it came to be called--was widely cultivated, in spite of loud protests against its "incomprehensibility" and "refusal to face social reality." In fact, these charges were not well founded; it was just that the New Short Story was so different in manner that it perplexed, even exasperated, most readers. Short story writers of the seventies were somewhat different in manner; the social content in their stories was a little overt. They relied on allegory more often than had their

immediate predecessors. Their claims to the contrary notwithstanding, the short story writers of the seventies are not materially different from those of the sixties.

Modernist poetry in the sixties was dominated both by well-established older poets who were mavericks of the Progressive period (Akhtarul iman, Rashid, Majid Amjad), and by comparatively younger poets who had found the Progressive doctrine wanting on aesthetic grounds--Munir Niyazi, Khalilur Rahman 'Azmi, Balraj Komal, Qazi Salim (1927-), Muhammad Alavi, Salim Ahmad, and Ibn-e Insha (1927-1979) readily come to mind. Many of the latter gained reputations commensurate with their achievement or potential only during the Modernist period. Writers who made their mark in the sixties looked to one or more of the older poets for inspiration, or as models. Among the classical poets, Ghalib was often invoked. His comparative obscurity and cerebrality were often held out as precedents for the modern poets' apparent opacity. I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, William Empson, and Paul Valery also were invoked to provide theoretical justification.

Some of the new poets--Iftikhar Jalib (1936-), 'Adil Mansuri (1941-), Abbas Athar (1943-), Anis Nagi (1933-), Kumar Pashi (1935-), Nida Fazli (1940-)--placed the greatest value on experimentation. They also valued obscurity, informality, and new linguistic structures as attributes of poetry. There were others like Shahryar (1936-), Saqi Faruqi (1936-), Shahzad Ahmad (1932-), Zeb Ghori (1926-1984), Zubair Rizvi (1935-), and Shakeb Jalali (1934-1966), who were more inclined toward new moods, feelings, and experiences; they were not overly interested in formal experiment for its own sake. While Shahryar, Saqi Faruqi, and Anis Nagi have shown greater staying power, poets of both types were followed by a large number of young acolytes of the kind who couldn't have been even published, let alone encouraged and applauded, during the Progressive period.

A spirit of liberation and freedom was abroad. There was more creative activity during this time than during any two decades in the previous one hundred twenty years. Little magazines, and magazines devoted to modernist writing and literary controversies, sprang up almost overnight in places as far apart as Bangalore, Hyderabad, Calcutta, Patna, Malegaon, Bombay, Allahabad, Bhopal, Gulbarga, and Jammu. Much of this activity had been made possible due to the success and influence of the monthly *Shabkhun* [Surprise Attack By Night] which began publication from Allahabad in May 1966 and is still being published from there.

The Modernist critics were generally more well-read in Western literature than were the Progressives. They also had the advantage of being more eclectic, for they were not bound by the constraints of Marxist literary or political theory. They drew upon a wide variety of disciplines, ranging from anthropology to structural linguistics. Since they had almost the whole Western world from which to draw examples and arguments, they were better able to prove their case for a new poetics to replace the Progressive doctrine. The Modernists were often seen as being on a deliberate collision course with the Progressives. This was not quite true; but there is also no doubt that they were acting out the scenario inevitable according to Auden, who said that every new generation must begin by rejecting the achievement of its immediate predecessors.

The question has often been debated whether Pakistani Urdu literature is different from Indian Urdu literature. It is true that Modernism made its appearance somewhat earlier in Pakistan--perhaps because the hold of the Progressive Movement was weaker there--but there seems to be no difference of quality between the Modernists of Pakistan and India. The *nazm* as a genre, as opposed to the ghazal, seems to have done generally better in India in the early phase of Modernism; just as now the short story has

better and more numerous practitioners in Pakistan. The Pakistani ghazal has been generally considered superior to the Indian ghazal. One reason could be the immense prestige of Nasir Kazmi and his immediate junior Ahmad Mushtaq (1934-). Another reason could be the towering success of Zafar Iqbal (1933-), who has shown complete and unrivalled mastery over the ghazal in all its forms, from the outrageously experimental to the severely classical. The death of Rajindar Manchandah Bani (1932-1981) deprived Indian Urdu ghazal of a possible answer to Zafar Iqbal.

In one respect, however, modern Pakistani literature is different from its Indian counterpart: it has many notable women writers. Outstanding among them are Ada Ja'fri (1924-), Kishvar Nahid (1940-), and Fahmidah Riyaz (1946-). While Ada Ja'fri writes in a more or less gender-neutral mode, the latter two write consciously as modern women.

Among the critics who stood out as theoreticians of Modernism are writers as different as Vazir Agha, whose main ideas are based on anthropology and comparative religion; Gopi Chand Narang (1931-), who is a linguist and structuralist with a strong interest in stylistics; Iftikhar Jalib and Anis Nagi, who could be described as formalists; Varis Alavi (1933-), who is a synthesiser, but anti-structuralist; and Salim Ahmad, who passed through many phases, ending up as a critic of ideas and culture. Narang is by far the most influential in India, as Salim Ahmad is in Pakistan.

The greatest achievement of Modernism was that it largely righted the balance in favour of traditional Indo-Muslim poetics, and that it did so with arguments and practices assimilated from both East and West. Muhammad Hasan 'Askari wrote in a letter in 1946 that much contemporary Western literature could be understood better if one was aware of one's own traditions. And he was largely right, for in the West, Romanticism, Symbolism, and Modernism were essentially three consecutive efforts to reject the Platonic view of literature. The other great achievement of Modernism was that it wrested from the literary establishment the affirmation of free choice for the writer. In this, Modernism got valuable support from A. A. Surur, the one truly liberal critic in Urdu. Modernism was guilty of some excesses too; but which new surge of ideas is not? Some of its excesses were committed by its proponents against each other. In contrast to the tightly knit organization of the previous generation's writers, Modernists present the picture of a house divided on nearly all but the fundamental issues.

Modernism's great merit was its eclecticism. It assimilated ideas from classical poetics, linguistics, linguistic philosophy, mythology, symbolism, Western modernism, and a host of other sources. The tendency to appeal to Western norms to justify whatever is to be justified and reject whatever is to be rejected is no longer apparent. There is greater respect now for the Indian tradition than ever before. The heady days of the early sixties are over, days when everyone was in a hurry to thrash out every issue, when everyone was confident of having the uniquely right solution. Complaints against the obscurity of modern poetry were countered with disdainful allegations of the reader's obtuseness, or the nonexistence of readers. Questions of commitment, of the failure of language, of the new age justifying a new language, of the individual's isolation and the writer's alienation, were debated like issues in an election.

Things have settled down now, partly because readers have become used to the new writers' idiom. Even the Progressives have now admitted into their realm of discourse questions about the value of metaphor, symbol, individual expression. Muhammad Hasan (1926-), a latter-day Progressive, hastened to write a paper entitled "*Sachi jadidiyat--na'i taraqqi-pasandi*" [True Modernism: the New

Progressivism] (1971). The poet and critic Wahid Akhtar (1935-), regarded by many as a Modernist and by many others as a Progressive, wrote that Modernism was really an extension of Progressivism. Ironically, while there has been some softening in the Modernists' attitude in recent years, the Progressives have shown a touch of their old, hard stance. Generally ignoring the writers of the sixties, they have tried to woo the writers of the eighties. Fiction writers have engaged their benign interest more than poets. Perhaps because fiction unavoidably reveals overt social concerns--concerns which can, hopefully, be interpreted as Progressive. In an age of instant gratification, everyone expects immediate literary recognition; many new fiction writers do not seem to have resented or resisted the Progressives' blandishments. But then, Modernism never set itself up as the sole custodian of literary appraisal. In fact, it has always stood against the kind of hegemony which the Progressive movement had tried to establish in Urdu literature.

By 1975, Modernism was firmly established everywhere. In literary theory, if not always in practice, writers had also begun to forge close linkages with the classical past. From the West, the work of the Russian Formalists and the Structuralists had helped to shed new light on various issues connected with classical literary theory and practice. Some sort of a resolution, or interpenetration, seemed possible between the past and the present. It hasn't happened so far, and may never happen. Much of the history of Urdu literature during our period (1850-1975) would seem to work against such a resolution. But literary history has always been full of surprises; and the present literary scene is vibrant with possibilities.

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