EVENTS, INQUIRIES, NEWS, NOTICES, REPORTS

A NUMBER of Urdu writers and patrons left us since *AUS* #15 (April 2000), among them: (2000) Akhtaruzzaman Nasir, Ali Sardar Jafri, Anis Dehlavi, Anjum Roomani, Anwar Azeem, Anwar Zahir Khan, Bal Krishan Betab, Hafeez Merthi, Iftikhar Ahmad Siddiqi, Inam Ahsan Hareef, Iqbal Azeem, Ishrat Kiratpuri, Kalim Usmani, Lala-e Sehrai (Chaudhri Muhammad Sadiq), Majrooh Sultanpuri, Manzar Kazmi, Minhajur Rahman Khan Sahar Afghani, Mirza Shakoor Beg, Naushad Noori, Qadir Imtiaz, Qamar Jameel, Ruhi Qadri, Saeed Anjum, Shahab Jafri, Syed Hamid Husain, Yunus Adeeb; (2001) Hakim Abdul Quddus Aziz, Man Mohan Talkh, Raisuddin Faridi.

I

The following is an inventory of scholars and the papers which they presented at conferences, seminars, and symposia:

South Asian Islamic Aesthetics: Music and Literary Production (Chapel Hill, North Carolina Center for South Asia Studies and Triangle South Asia Consortium, 13–15 April, 2001)

Amy Bard (Harvard University): "'He Made Me Able to Light Up the Gathering': Zahida Baji and the Mediation of Music and Text in Shi'i Majlis-e'aza."

F. Nalini Delvoye (École Pratique des Hautes Études and Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Aise du Sud, Paris): "Dhrupad Songs in Braj Language: Catering to the Taste of Indo-Persian Rulers in Medieval India."

Christopher Lee (Iowa State University): "Traditional, Progressive, Modern and Timely: Four Discourses of and About Urdu Poetry in Varanasi, India."

Kelly Pemberton (Universityof California at Berkeley): "Shattering the Mirror: Urdu Literature, Reformist Discourses, and the Shaping of Muslim Consciousness in the Sufi Milieu."

28th Annual Conference on South Asia (Madison, 13–15 October 2000)

Amy Bard (Columbia University): "'To Whom Shall I Sing Lullabies Now?' Form, Function, and Feeling in 'Women's Songs' as Poetic Genres of the Shi'i Mourning Assembly."

Kelly Pemberton (University of California at Berkeley): “Islamicizing Discourses: Ritual Performance, Decotional Texts, and the Reformist Challenge.”

Christopher Lee (Iowa State University): “‘A Promise in the Name of Bearing Witness’: Urdu Poetry, Memory and the (Re)Construction of Muslim History in Varanasi, India.”

Geeta Patel (Wellesley College): “Crossroad Not Borderzone: Miraji’s Plays of Identity.”

Priyamvada Gopal (Connecticut College): “Seedhi Si Baat, Ya Mirch Masala? Translations of the Progressive in the Cinematic Aesthetic of K.A. Abbas.”

Raza Mir (Monmouth University): “Dream and Nightmare: Progressive Urdu Poetry’s Flirtation With Modernity.”

Ali Hussain Mir (Indiana-Purdue University): “The Season of Coercion, the Season of Choice: On the Margins of Progressive Urdu Poetry.”

Afroz Taj (North Carolina State University): “Constructing Hybrid Identities on the Nineteenth Century Hindi-Urdu Stage.”

Poetry and Religion in Hindu, Islamic and Judaic Traditions (2001 **Haverford College Symposium, Haverford, 1 April 2001**)

Scott Kugle (Swarthmore College): “The Ambiguous Object of Desire: Sacred and Profane in Persian and Urdu Ghazals.”

II

On 28–30 September 2001, the Southern Asian Institute at Columbia University will host an international conference, Urdu Scholarship in Transnational Perspective, in honor of Professor C.M. Naim of the University of Chicago. The occasion will publicly recognize Professor Naim’s contributions to Urdu and South Asian studies as a teacher, scholar, translator, and man of gracious ways and liberal views. It will also provide an opportunity to reflect retrospectively on the expansion of transnational, interdisciplinary scholarship based in Urdu-language sources in the United States, Europe, India, and Pakistan over the last forty years.

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Dr. Zakir Husain Study Circle, in collaboration with National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, held a symposium on “Urdu Agenda in the Twenty-First Century” (Delhi, 8 February 2001). The participants included, among others, Theodore P. Wright, Jr., David Matthews, and Christina Oesterheld.

III
"Free Style" Islam in Iraq (1942)[1]

Colonel Muḥammad Khān

We are, so to speak, born with a reverence in our hearts for the Muslims of the Middle East. But when we go to these countries this reverence begins to be shaken somewhat. This is not really the fault of the Arabs; it is our own fault. Simply because they are Arabs we have wrapped them up in sanctifying cotton wool, and we expect nothing from them except that they should get up in the morning, perform their ablutions, and go on giving the call to prayer all day, or else go on performing *nafal* [supererogatory prayers]. We forget that the Arabs too are human beings of flesh and blood like ourselves with a heart in their breast which sometimes overflows, and in fact, under the influence of geographical compulsions, overflows rather more than ours. In other words, in matters of the heart our Arab brothers are helpless, just as we are, and it is the clearest injustice to expect wholesale virtues of them.

However, in one matter the Arabs are far in advance of us and this in recitation (of the Qur'ān). There is magic in the voice of an Arab reciter and enchantment in his melody. Whenever we have heard the Qur'ān in the voice of an Arab we have gone into ecstasy. But there is one matter in which the Arabs were not able to induce ecstasy in us but on the contrary caused us astonishment, and that was their manner of saying the prayers. What we saw on one occasion was of course quite evidently the prayers, but it was a strangely free style worship. It was ʿĪd, and my dear brother Aṣghar was insistent that we should go and perform the ʿĪd prayer in a Basra Mosque. When we reached the door of the first mosque it was locked. The House of God, locked? Never mind, there must be some good reason. We went to another mosque. Fortunately it was open. We performed our ablutions and went inside. When we looked we saw that the ʿĪd prayer was being said not in congregation but individually. We were astonished, but we said to ourselves, "Never mind, there must be some good reason for this too." But we were pleased at any rate to see that along with the men the women too were taking part in the prayer. But after that we saw something going on, and at the sight of it our pleasure changed first into astonishment and then into horror.

We had only just begun the prayer when those who were praying with us, right in the middle of the prayer, turned their heads and began without the least hesitation to stare at us. Sometimes they would look at me and sometimes at Aṣghar, at the same time going on with their prayers. It seemed as though they would at any moment be inquiring after our health, but perhaps they had reached the "Āmīn" [Amen]. Suddenly turning their faces towards the House of the Kaʿba they went into *rukūʿ* [kneeling posture]. I was still trying to recover

[1]This is a literal translation of an extract from the authors *Ba-Jaṅg Āmad.*

from this shock when Aṣghar said, “Look over here,” and what should I see but an elderly lady who was in *at-taḥiyātu* [2] holding a lighted cigarette in the fingers of her right hand and from time to time taking an extremely satisfying puff at it and producing coils and arches of blue smoke in the House of God. We were astonished, but what could we say except: “These are delicate matters; whatever may be your will, do it.”

We said our prayers and came outside.

—Translated by Ralph Russell

*

Basant of the Sufis and Saints

Intiẓār Ḥusain

“One should have the right to laugh and make merry. It should be considered a fundamental human right.” This view was expressed by Aḥmad Bashīr, who was presiding over a literary gathering held on the eve of the *basant* festival.

Lahore literati celebrated *basant* in their own way, some by feasting, others by holding intellectual discussions. Far from the maddening noise of kite-fliers, a goodly number came together in a relatively peaceful corner of the Tea House and launched a discussion of the cultural significance of this now controversial festival.

What seems to have irked them most was the persistent propaganda that *basant* is a religious festival of the Hindus and therefore altogether un-Islamic. So most of them went to lengths proving that it was basically a seasonal event. It signified the end of a chilly winter and the coming of spring, expressed chiefly in the blossoming of mustard and other flowers such as the marigold.

“But why are we apologetic about celebrating it?” asked Aḥmad Bashīr. “*Basant*,” he added, “is *our* seasonal festival and so we celebrate it. Period. Why apologize for it?”

As for Islam and *basant*, one fact needs to be clarified. Roughly speaking, two versions of Islam—one emanating from the preaching of the orthodox clerics, the other from the teachings of Sufis and saints—have existed alongside of each other throughout the history of Indic Islam and time and again it’s the orthodox version that has stirred up controversy about this or that, *basant* included, being Islamic or anti-Islamic. The Islam of the Sufis, who were a visionary and liberal-minded people, has rarely encouraged controversies of this sort.

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[2]These words occur in the course of the prayer.

As I had occasion to mention in one of my previous columns, Amīr Khusrō and Khvāja Niẓāmu ’d-Dīn Auliyā’ were among the first Indian Muslims to take notice of the seasonal character of the *basant* and to adopt it as a festival of their own. It was perhaps mainly due to the blessings of the Sufis that *basant* became popular among the Muslims of the capital and in time even won the patronage of the Mughal court. As per the history of the later Mughals, it used to be celebrated by Muslims in Jahānābād with much fanfare. The celebrations lasted for a week or so, each day dedicated to the memory of one or another among the saints buried in the area; hence Shāh Čirāgh kī *basant*, Sarmad Shahīd kī *basant*, Bakhtiyār Kākī kī *basant*, and Niẓāmu ’d-Dīn Auliyā’ kī *basant*. Take for instance Khvāja Bakhtiyār Kākī kī *basant*: on that day devotees all clad in yellow would troop down to the *dargāh* (shrine) of this saint, offer the *basant* greetings with strings of yellow flowers and celebrate the occasion by singing *qavvālīs*.

One day would be reserved to pay homage to the king. On that day the revelers would go out to the royal court and offer their *basant* greetings to him. It so happened that one year Bahādur Shāh’s birthday coincided with the *basant* celebrations, which doubled the enthusiasm of the people, whether Muslim or Hindu. The whole city became bathed in yellow.

The musicians took the cue from the saints’ devotees and started the tradition of celebrating *basant* on the tombs of their *ustāds* (teachers).

Such were the celebrations of the *basant* in the capital of the Mughal empire. Back then it crossed nobody’s mind to dub the practice un-Islamic.

Here I might also mention the attitude of the poets—the second most prominent group after the saints to exercise a powerful influence over people’s thinking—regarding *basant*. And poets, let’s recall, have rarely been in tune with the clerics, instead they drew their inspiration from the mystical tradition. Their response to the festival was akin to the response of the saints. Hence, one finds frequent celebration of *basant* in Urdu classical poetry. The poets looked upon it as the harbinger of the spring season and went to lengths singing its praises. Poets Naẓīr Akbarābādī and Amānat Lakʰnavī especially stand out for their poetic exuberance regarding *basant*. Naẓīr in particular has portrayed this colorful occasion with all its festive celebrations current during his time. Among the modern poets Nāṣir Kazmī comes to mind. He was much inspired by the color yellow, doubtless for its association with *basant*. And the mustard flower, a symbol of *basant*, so excited his imagination that he called it his “contemporary.”

Well, then, this has been the status of *basant* in our poetic tradition—the tradition of saints and Sufis—and in the hierarchy of Muslim rituals.

[Thankfully reproduced from *Dawn* (Internet Edition), 25 February 2001. Edited for the *AUS*.]

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Imtiaz Ali Taj: The Flower That Bloomed

Dr. Mahmudur Rahman

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a publishing house was established in Lahore which came to be known as the pioneer in the publication of children's books. The founder of this prestigious institution, Dāru 'l-Ishā'at Panjāb, was Shamsu 'l-'Ulamā' Maulvī Mumtāz 'Alī, a close friend of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Maulāna Ḥālī and 'Allāma Shiblī Nu'mānī. He was married to Muḥammadī Bēgam, an intellectual woman from Delhi.

Both Mumtāz 'Alī and his wife were public-spirited campaigners for female education. They decided to bring out a weekly magazine specifically for women. Sir Syed Ahmed proposed its name as *Tahżīb-e Nisvāṅ*. Its first issue was released from Lahore on 1 July 1898, with Muḥammadī Bēgam as its editor. It paved the way for the development of female education in the Subcontinent.

Since Muḥammadī Bēgam was greatly influenced by the Aligarh movement, she started a monthly magazine in 1940 called *Shīr-e Mādar* for educating mothers and creating awareness in them about nutrition of new-born infants and their upbringing. This periodical was undoubtedly the first of its kind in the Urdu language. It proved to be a guideline for mothers throughout the country.

It was in 1909 that Maulvī Mumtāz 'Alī started publishing *Phūl*, a weekly magazine for children. Also published from Lahore *Phūl* offered much reading material to the younger generation.

It was Maulvī Mumtāz 'Alī's illustrious son, Saiyid Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj, who developed this publishing house into the great institution that it became. He himself wrote a large number of books that stand out for their fascinating style and grasp of child psychology. He vigorously helped in building an impressive list of titles—several hundred in number—that were eventually published by the Dāru 'l-Ishā'at. Moreover, he emerged as a dramatist and won critical acclaim following the publication of his play *Anārkalī*.

Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj was born on 13 October 1900. His mother, Muḥammadī Bēgam, wrote a number of books for him, with charming poems and lovely stories. Later the Dāru 'l-Ishā'at published them and, hence, made them accessible to a large number of children.

At the age of ten Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj was enrolled in Central Model High School of Lahore. In 1915 he passed his matriculation examination and took admission in Government College, Lahore. In 1922 he graduated from Punjab University.

As a student Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj took a keen interest in *Tahżīb-e Nisvāṅ* and *Phūl* and helped his aging father with the editorial work. After his graduation, he turned his attention to *Phūl* and soon made it a popular magazine for children. With the help of young writers and translators Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj produced children's literature of a very high quality. This literature included retold classics and a series of folk tales as well as original stories. The editors of *Phūl* who worked under the direction of Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj, were among the renowned writers of their

time, among them Ḥafī Jāland^{h}arī, Rāja Mehdī ʿAlī Khān, Maulānā ʿAbdu ʾl-Majīd Sālik, Ghulām ʿAbbās and Aḥmad Nadīm Qāsimī.

The Dāru ʾl-Ishāʾat performed a pioneering role in setting a new standard and style in publishing. Its guidelines for submissions to *P^{h}ūl* stated:

> *P^{h}ūl* cannot accept writings in involved diction or vocabulary, or those marred by exaggeration. Some contributors use simple language, but scarcely pause to judge whether the ideas expressed by them are in keeping with children's imagination or comprehension. It is imperative that the language as well as the ideas should appear natural to young readers.

This suggestion paved the way for the production of high quality children's literature.

The other popular venture of this publishing house was the series better known as Paisa Library. The scheme was introduced in January 1939, and became a household word throughout the country. This project was meant for children and *P^{h}ūl* addressed them directly in its pages:

> Dear children! By saving just a *paisa* a day you can have a new book every month. Out of thirty *paisas* saved in a month, send us twenty-six *paisas* in stamps in a four-*paisa* envelope. Out of this amount, eight *paisas* will go towards the postage when we dispatch the book under postal certificate and only eighteen *paisas* will be left with us as the price of a beautiful volume containing more than 100 pages.

The main purpose of the Paisa Library was defined by Imtiāz ʿAlī Tāj in the following words:

> There are two considerations before us. One that the children should get good books, and the second, they should develop a habit of spending a part of their pocket-money on books. Moreover, they may come to realize that they are buying these books on their own initiative—and not on the prodding of their elders. It will certainly give them pleasure and entertainment.

The Paisa Library helped in building up an excellent list of books running into hundreds of titles. They included Stories of Dolls, Stories of Wisdom, Stories of Misers, Stories of Thieves, Stories of Kings, Stories of Sisters, etc., etc.

Later on, the series was converted into a monthly magazine entitled *Paisa Library Magazine*. It was cheaper to post the magazine, and the low cost gave a boost to the number of subscribers throughout India. Thanks to this inexpensive magazine, Imtiāz ʿAlī Tāj was able to stimulate among the children of the Subcontinent an interest in reading books. It was indeed a great service which he rendered in the early ʿ30s.

The production costs and even the postal charges went up dramatically after the First World War, leaving a much smaller profit margin to the publisher. As a

result the cycle of one book a month was broken. The "save a *paisa* a day" scheme—basically one that combined both psychological and commercial objectives—came to an end, and *Paisa Library Magazine* had to cease publication forever.

There cannot be two opinions that Dāru 'l-Ishā'at Panjāb, its weekly magazine *Pʰūl*, its Paisa Library scheme, and its cheaper-to-post *Paisa Library Magazine* were all veritable institutions in themselves as well as a training ground for writers of children's literature. The credit for the achievements of the publishing house, its magazines and schemes all go to Saiyid Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj, who was a major essayist and playwright in his own right. Interestingly, he wrote his famous Urdu drama *Anārkalī* while he was a B.A. student. He showed the script to the noted playwright Āghā Ḥashr Kāshmīrī, the doyen of Urdu drama, who gave him a pat on his back, saying: "I'd thought this genre would die after me. But I see the spring season has actually just begun in the field of drama." When this long play was published, 'Allāma Iqbāl read it with interest and commented: "The language is fluent, the style graceful."

Saiyid Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj was also active in the film industry. He played the role of Akbar the Great in his own play *Anārkalī*, which was directed by Hansu Rai in 1931. He also wrote a number of stories and dialogues for various films, among them *Svāmī*, *Khāndān*, *Pagḍanḍī*, *Jʰankē*, *Khamrish*, *Intiẓār* and *Zahr-e 'Ishq*.

Saiyid Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj contributed a number of plays to All-India Radio, Lahore, among them his best-known *Qurṭuba kā Qāẓī*. After Partition, he devoted his full attention to strengthening Radio Pakistan. He wrote a number of features, plays and talks on national issues. His program "Pākistān Hamārā Hai" was so popular that Mahatma Gandhi mentioned it in his *Pararihana*.

He was also a renowned humorist. Čačā Čʰakkan, a delightfully humorous character he created, won him much recognition in literary circles. Saiyid Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj joined the Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, Lahore, in October 1964 as its Director. Here he succeeded in publishing all Urdu dramas from the very beginning which are recognized as classics. This contribution of Saiyid Imtiāz 'Alī Tāj will go down in literary history as a landmark.

This pioneer of children's literature, this noted dramatist and humorist, who was an exceedingly loving man, was stabbed to death by two unknown persons on the night of 19 April 1970. His wife Ḥijāb Imtiāz 'Alī, a well-known short story writer, who was also attacked, writes about this tragic event:

> The violent hands of the murderer are stretching out in the darkness. He holds a dagger which snaps the worldly ties. One, who knows this human love, is soaked in blood and falls dead. He lies beneath the soil in his grave. The other partner of love is grievously injured and lies in pain on the bed.

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The Little Lahore in a Big Way

Nyla Daud

They come in two by two. Or maybe in singles. Or, as on a Sunday afternoon, the poets and the critics, the writers of fiction and fact come in regular droves—to read from their work … or just to listen. Others come armed for a dialogue. Then, of course, there are the "premier entrees," the junior lot for whom an entry into these "hallowed precincts" may well become the beginning of a new journey. So many have been the roads, taken and not taken, that have sprung from this crossroad of letters and learning. For the Pak Tea House in Lahore has been and still remains in more ways then one, the little Lahore in a big way!

As a contemporary, fashionable Lahore races away from its original epicenter and tries to root itself in the more modern localities born out of all shades of money; as people take pains to throw away the shackles of the historically correct umbilical chord that had for ages tied them to the narrow lanes of the inner city; as élitist hotels host glamorous book launchings; and as writers, poets, intellectuals and critics begin to taste a new prosperity—this small-time restaurant on the Sharae-i-Quaid-i-Azam fights on for its survival with sheer bravado.

Happily, there still exist men of letters and learning who, drawn by the eternal charisma of a cup of hot tea and heated literary debate, make it to the Pak Tea House, which once sported monogrammed teacups and ashtrays. All these are now a thing of the past as the Pak Tea House tries hard to withstand the blows of contemporary winds. Given the notes of dejection in current proprietor Zāhid's voice, there does not appear to be much of an incentive to keep the show running. Taxes, soaring utility bills, the seduction of mercantile culture, all seem to have become comrades in demolishing this last vestige of cultured Lahore.

Respected for its loyalties to art, education, culture and literature, Lahore has sported the sort of élitist patriarchy for its intellectuals that even Karachi would envy. And this in spite of Karachi being where it is: on the edge of the Arabian Sea. Karachi has historically been the final draining ground for all the brains that had poured into the country more than fifty years ago. Yet, what would its literati not give to be able to boast of a homing ground like Lahore's Pak Tea House where they could all get together for a weekly evening and give vent to the torturous teasing of the creative jinn.

A long time ago when Lahore was just beginning to awaken to the 20th century's call for letters and learning, the inner city area known as "Yakkī Gate" had been the conglomerate of the learned. A far cry from the chaos of today's sickening urbanization, the Bāzār-e Ḥakīmāṅ inside the Bʰāṭī Gate had been the place where you went if you wanted to savor the burgeoning creativity of the age

of the *baiṭʰaks.* Dā'ūd Rehbar's *Salām-o-Payām* bears testimony to the glory of those days. Then Lahore, always given to changes of horizon—moved on, straining the ties with its umbilical chord. So, the literati of the city came to confer under the walls of the Islamia College. Here, 'Allāma Iqbāl is said to have first recited his poems in *tarannum.* The Anjuman-e Ḥimāyat-e Islām held its meetings here. Across the road sat the legendary 'Arab Hotel—sadly a thing of the past now and of whose import future generations are not likely to have a clue—ruling the roost and taking into its bosom all who came to learn of the nuances of creative writing. Čirāgh Ḥasan Ḥasrat, 'Abdu 'l-Majīd Sālik, Muḥammad Dīn Tā'ṣ̤īr, Bukhārī Ṣāḥib, 'Abdullāh Malik were an intellectually creative collective by all definitions.

All newspaper offices and the houses of such literary giants as Akhtar Shīrānī were in the vicinity. Even today, one can find remnants of the generation of literati that had contributed to the glories of the 'Arab Hotel, though the building itself was pulled down long ago. Then, Lahore yawned again. Uprooted by the cataclysm of time, the literati of the forties came home to roost in the YMCA hall on the Mall Road. And that was when fortune began to smile on the Pak Tea House. Sometime in the late fifties, Pak Tea House got caught up in the chain of events.

The Ḥalqa-e Arbāb-e Żauq, which included big names like Yūsuf Ẓafar, Qaiyūm Naẓar, Mukhtār Ṣiddīqī, and Mīrājī among its pioneering fathers, had been meeting weekly at the YMCA and they would all troop down to the Pak Tea House after the meeting. The Progressives would also drop in. Somehow you needed an appearance at the Pak Tea House to be admitted into one of the literary circles. Cups of tea would flow endlessly as the literati, without any overbearing scholasticism, talked of letters and learning, threshing out, appreciating, criticizing anything from rhyming schemes to vocabulary patterns and literary worth. So, the Pak Tea House became in time an oasis of dialogue where the most scathing literary and, later, political themes were taken up. What made it a particularly joyful experience was that all these things were done in as civilized a manner as is possible in a literary dispute!

Very soon the Pak Tea House that operated in close proximity to the famous Chinese Lunch Home—now the site of a commercial bank—the Coffee House and the Nagīna Bakery a little way off became a literary conglomerate of sorts. A new generation of intellectuals like Alṭ̤āf Gauhar and Ẓ̤iyā Jālandʰarī joined the fray.

In the Lahore of those times, the Mall, at one of whose corners the Pak Tea House stands, was the business center of the city. So in between working hours those with a taste for literature would snatch an hour or two's respite from the big bad world. Driven by some inexplicable compulsion, they would flock to this haven and spend every available half-hour here without a care in the world. A cup of tea was all that was needed to set the ball rolling, and most of the time it was an on-the-house affair with loose change being pooled by all who could do

so. For others the cuppa was free! Intiẓār Ḥusain reminisces: "There used to be this big plate doing the round at the table. Whoever could afford to do so would put in a rupee. In the end that paid for everybody's tea."

The Pak Tea House developed a culture of its own that drew enlightened visitors to town. It was the one place where you could meet the literati in an informal atmosphere. As ʿIjāz Ḥusain Baṭālvī puts it,

> Writers and poets have never been the social élite of this society. Neither the Gymkhana nor the Punjab Club would admit them. We were all middle-class people without the means to spend, so the Pak Tea House suited us fine.

Ask the wives of the Tea House crowd, and they would all say that they saw it as a hallowed precinct which afforded far more attractions for their husbands than any homely gathering. Falāḥat ʿIjāz Baṭālvī has said:

> I am used to the idea of Ijāz Ṣāḥib walking out of a family gathering at five on Sunday afternoons … the Tea House has brooked no rival. It still remains an addiction for those who have drunk of its pleasures.

Of course, there were others like Nāṣir Kāẓmī for whom the Pak Tea House became home and hearth rolled into one. He never left it before two in the morning.

Yet, the Tea House has all along had social codes of its own. Writers like Baṭālvī and Intiẓār Ḥusain, although the first among the Tea House regulars to own cars, continued to travel by bus for their meetings. In older days, a hired Tonga would do, or, if time necessitated a car trip, tradition and respect for the Tea House demanded that the car be parked at a discreet distance. The idea was to refrain from causing a dent in the bond of comradeship that the Tea House has maintained to this day.

The only non-conformist, as noted by Intiẓār Ḥusain in his memoirs *Čirāghōṅ kā Dʰu'āṅ*, was Baṭālvī. He had deposited a table napkin with one of the bearers in the restaurant. The napkin, it is said, did become a point of confrontation by another writer frequenting the Tea House of those days … but the "foreign educated" lawyer could not resist the urge to use the British table manners.

Lahore has also the tradition of dinner-party literary meetings. Ḥijāb Imtiāz ʿAlī Tāj had initiated the Mann-o-Salvā. Recently revived for a single meeting by her daughter and son-in-law, Yāsmīn and Naʿīm Ṯāhir, it used to be a monthly affair with poets and writers reading out their pieces, followed by a one-dish dinner; a tradition that in any case was not altogether too conducive to hardcore criticism! So the invitees came, read and listened with due respect and often left with their tongues and minds itching for criticism. Of course this tradition suited the bureaucrats among the writers, for not one of the intellectuals in the *bābū*-class, except perhaps Alṯāf Gauhar, could possibly stand criticism.

Bazm-e Hamsafarān was another such gathering that was the brainchild of

sisters Jamīla and Sā'ira Hāshmī. There have been and will continue to be other literary collectives, but not one could match the easy grace and freedom of the Pak Tea House.

Even today the natural habitat for whiling away time in literary pursuit, the Pak Tea House has hosted generations of writers and their hangers-on. It has weathered political changes; it has withstood progressive movements. Historically it is to be valued as a landmark, having survived martial laws and changing ideologies. It has lent its ears to the poems of Ḥabīb Jālib and the political tirades of Aḥmad Bashīr. An institution in its own right, it is perhaps the only "club" of its kind in this part of the world. Even the Delhi Tea House was forced to shut down during Indira Gandhi's Emergency. Pak Tea House has been for the last forty-five years or so a bastion of the intellectual élites of the city and their guests who come from far and wide to taste that special cup of tea.

On the face of it, the Tea House culture remains alive and kicking, but somewhere in the shadows lurks an ominous future, one that suggests that though the owners still find intellectual satisfaction in its environment, the place may no longer be able to withstand the ravages of time for long. Already the receding guard like Intiẓār Ḥusain warn of portending doom for this bastion of intellectual dialogue.

Says Intiẓār Ḥusain:

> The Tea House syndrome that had brought together so many creative minds now faces imminent demise. Like so many other things in society, the Tea House is hard put to retain its old glory. The Tea House and its traditions are becoming a part of the collective breakdown of values. Now tea at the Pak Tea House is a much more élitist affair. They no longer pass the plate around for tea contributions because whenever occasion demands, the secretary of the Ḥalqa-e Arbāb-e Żauq hosts the party. The building itself is a dilapidated affair. It appears to be dragging its feet before the grand finale.

And while the Pak Tea House, at one time a platform for intellectual expression and discussion, fights a losing battle, some few "sad last grey hairs" try hard to retain its cultural finesse. How long they, and the Tea House, can survive is anybody's guess.[3]

[Thankfully reproduced from *Dawn* (Internet Edition), 28 May 2000. Edited for the *AUS*.]

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[3]As for "they"—they probably survive; as for the Pak Tea House, Intiẓār Ḥusain informs that it is no more. See its obituary by Ḥusain elsewhere in this issue. —*Editor*

Reviewing Alok Rai's *Hindi Nationalism*, Shahid Amin writes:

> To live in today's Delhi is to breathe largely the absence of a rejuvenating culture. The language that walks the streets is of the "Humko Binnies Mangta" variety, mauling the vernacular and replicating sans irony our colonial masters' compounding of *māṅgnā* (demand and order), with *čāhnā* (desire and affection). Our passions are ruled by copywriters, our early-morning thinking conditioned by liberal-majoritarian columnists.
>
> Coexisting with this brand of easy-going, frost-free Hindutva is the aggressive propagation of an artificial high-Hindi as the natural language of Hindustan: the sort that air hostesses mouth uncomfortably, and in which schoolchildren of Hindustani-speaking parents do uniformly badly. This "Hindi" has a longer and rather different genealogy from that of Babri-Hindutva, which is demanding fresh "ration cards" from so many long-term residents of this land, but it is marked equally by a standardization of both language and history. In this informed and impassioned polemic, Rai confronts this upper-caste, self-serving "Hindi" with its own history. "The suspect vehemence with which the Hindiwallah perceives the threat without—Urdu yesterday, English today—indicates," writes Rai, "a neurotic need to escape from its intrinsic difficulties." It is Rai's argument that these difficulties derive from Hindi's "deeply divided historical legacy which makes it only partly popular, democratic, reformist, progressive." Writing as a disappointed enthusiast, Rai provides an intelligent guide to the bitter and successful fight against a "feudal-foreign" Urdu which has been led by the UP élite on behalf of a linguistically-wronged Hindi/Hindu India. The success of the '20s Hindi élite was at the cost of making this language unrepresentative of popular speech. The status gained by official "Hindi" in independent India was scarred by the play of power politics. If Urdu from the days of the language controversy came to stand for the Gangetic Mussalman, the historical power of "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan" lay not only in its brevity. Concurrent with the census that for the first time enumerated a Hindu majority and a Muslim minority, it marked the immaculate conception of linguistic majoritarianism. The pre-December 6 nation-state has been as complicit as today's double-speak rulers in portraying the triumph of high "Hindi" as God's own handiwork.

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NOTE: If you have read a paper or published an item or know of a piece of information of interest to Urdu-wallahs, please do not hesitate to send it to us for inclusion in the next issue of the *AUS*. —*Ed.*