

## BOOK REVIEWS

*An Anthology of Modern Urdu Poetry*. Edited and translated by M.A.R. HABIB. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003. Paperback. 195 pp. \$9.95.

AN EXCELLENT versatile, and reliable book like this one is a rare treat to find, and a real pleasure to discuss. As front matter the book provides a general “Introduction” (20 pages), some “Suggestions for Further Reading” (2 pages), a discussion of “Principles of Translation” (6 pages), and a list of the “Primary Texts” (1 page) from which the poetry is drawn. Then comes the poetry itself. Ten poets are included, though with very different allocations of space. Each receives a brief biographical introduction of half a page or so. The ten poets included are Faiz (14 poems), N. M. Rashed (10 poems), Miraji (9 poems), Akhtar ul-Iman (3 poems), Majid Amjad (2 poems), Munir Niazi (3 poems), Saqi Farooqi (2 poems), Fahmidah Riaz (7 poems), Kishwar Naheed (5 poems), and Akbar Hyderabad (1 poem).

The general reader will readily, and rightfully, enjoy this book; the introductory and explanatory matter is suitable and well-written, and the translations are done in fine and subtle English. On the whole, they’re reliable, too, so the general reader can use the book with confidence.

For the teacher and serious student, naturally, the stakes are higher. One might do a small amount of academic nitpicking about the introductory account of Urdu literary history. The author still thinks Urdu began as an “army camp” language (xiii-xiv); and indeed S. R. Faruqi’s crucial *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History*, which thoroughly discredits this British-era notion, is missing from his bibliography. And he identifies the language itself not as the Indic one that it is (defined in linguistic terms by its Khari Boli grammar), but confusingly as “a hybrid of Persian, Arabic, and northern Indian dialects” (xiv). These little quibbles are greatly outweighed, however, by the sophistication, elegance, and general well-thought-outness of the work. Its most helpful scholarly feature is its facing-page Urdu text (with large and legible script) along with the translation arrangement. For long poems, the page equivalences are well laid out and carefully maintained. Thus the student at whatever level can easily compare the English with the Urdu, and find vocabulary, grammatical examples, idioms, etc., conveniently at hand.

In his “Principles of Translation” section (the very presence of which is a cause for admiration), Habib provides a long explanation of why literal translation is sometimes less desirable than faithfulness to the mood, etc.: instead of saying

“Awake, candle of the bedchamber of union,” he plans to say “Lamp of Love’s chamber, awake!” (xxxvi-xxxvii), and the like. Needless to say, it’s not hard to grant any translator the right to do something about *izāfats*. And sometimes he’s quite legitimately inventive: in Rashed’s “Khvāb kī Bastī” (“City of Dreams”), which is identified by Rashed as a “sonnet,” the translator has worked hard, and at the cost of taking some liberties, to come up with an enjoyable sonnet-like rhyme scheme in the English as well (39).

As an example of both the virtues and the defects of the translator’s approach, let’s take the poem he himself cites: Rashed’s “Darīčē kē Qarīb” (“Near the Window”) (40–3). Here I present his translation, together with, in square brackets, a translation as near to a literal one as I can manage to make. My version uses only Rashed’s original punctuation.

- (1) Lamp of Love’s chamber, awake!  
[wake oh candle of the bedchamber of  
union]
- (2) Wake from this joyful floor of soft dreams,  
[wake from this joyful carpet of the velvet  
of dreams!]
- (3) Your body still tired from night’s pleasure;  
[even if your body is now worn out from  
the pleasure of the night—]
- (4) Come by me, lover, near the window  
[come, my life, to me, near the window]
- (5) And see with what passion dawn’s rays  
[look with what love the rays of dawn  
kiss]
- (6) Kiss the minarets of our city’s mosque  
[the minarets of the city’s mosque]
- (7) Whose height brings to mind my  
[from the height of which to me]
- (8) Age-long desire.  
[comes the thought of my years-long  
longing!]
- (9) With your silver-white hands, my lover,  
[with silver-colored hands, oh life, just]

- (10) Open those wine-dark, bewildering eyes:  
 [open wine-colored, madness-arousing  
 eyes!]
- (11) See this minaret  
 [look at this very minaret]
- (12) Watered by early light:  
 [even if it's verdant with dawn light]
- (13) Beneath its shadow—do you  
 remember?—  
 [beneath the shadow of this very minaret  
 is something of a memory]
- (14) A mournful, penniless priest  
 [like his useless god]
- (15) Drowsing in some dark, hidden corner  
 [there dozes in some dark, hidden  
 chamber]
- (16) Like his useless god:  
 [worn out by poverty one melancholy  
 mullah]
- (17) A demon, dismayed!  
 [one *'ifrit*—sad]
- (18) Here is the stain of three hundred years,  
 [a sign of three hundred years of  
 abasement]
- (19) An indignity without cure.  
 [an abasement such that it has no cure!]
- (20) See the crowd in the marketplace  
 [look at the crowd of people in the  
 bazaar]
- (21) Moving, an endless flow.  
 [like an immeasurable torrent moving]
- (22) As jinns in the wastelands

[the way Jinns in the deserts]

- (23) Emerge at early evening, bearing torches,  
[bearing torches have emerged at the start  
of evening,]
- (24) A bridelike figure sits  
[in some corner of the breast of every one  
among them]
- (25) In the corner of each man's heart:  
[someone/something adorned like a bride  
is seated]
- (26) The tiny lantern of Self flickers  
[the tiny, flickering candle of selfness]
- (27) Without strength to burst into  
[but not even this much strength]
- (28) Spinning flame.  
[that it would grow, from it some leaping  
flame would emerge!]
- (29) Among these are the poor, the sick  
[among them are poor ones, are sick  
ones]
- (30) Enduring tyranny below the heavens.  
[but they go on enduring tyranny beneath  
the heavens!]
- (31) I an old, weary, ambling horse  
[an oldish, worn-out courser am I]
- (32) Ridden by Hunger, hard and robust,  
[the expert rider of hunger]
- (33) —  
[is a tight-gripper and also robust;]
- (34) I too, like others in the city  
[I too, like the people of this city]
- (35) Go out, after each night of love, to

[on the passing of each night of passion]

- (36) Gather all this rubbish  
[go out to collect dried grass and straw]
- (37) Where the sky is turning.  
[where the sky is a whirlpool]
- (38) At night I return to this same house;  
[in the evening, I return again to this very  
house]
- (39) See my helplessness! I peer again  
[just look at my helplessness—for I]
- (40) Through this window  
[at the minarets of the city's mosque]
- (41) At the minarets of our city's mosque  
[from out this window again glance]
- (42) To see the red sky kiss them a sad  
farewell.  
[when in the mode of departure, the  
sunset kisses them!]

This example well illustrates the many virtues of the translator's approach. As an approach to the poem in English, it is obviously pretty satisfactory. So much so, in fact, that I have the luxury of discussing not major problems, but interesting subtleties and small quibbles.

The small problem that most strikes me is a puzzling one. While Rashed throughout refers to "this city," the translator at every opportunity makes the speaker refer to "our city." Never does Rashed give us any cause to think that either the speaker in the poem (or even the addressee) is one of the people of the city. Quite the contrary in fact: the poet surely means for us to notice that the speaker presents himself as an outsider. For anyone trying to understand an already difficult poem, this kind of distortion only adds to the difficulty; and as far as I can see, it creates no literary benefit. Why then should the translator second-guess the poet like this?

Other small quibbles could also be cited: "gather all this rubbish" (36) is a misleading translation of "collect dried grass and straw"; possibly the intent is to gather fuel for a fire, but the reader of the translation would never know it. Since the word "*zillat*" occurs in two lines in a row, plainly as part of a single thought, to translate the first occurrence (dubiously) as "stain" (18) and the second as "indig-

nity” (19) obscures from the reader the fact that the poet was intent on emphasizing a single crucial term.

But the one final observation that I want to make isn't even a quibble, it is a problem of literary choice that I want to point to: for better or for worse, the word order and punctuation have been altered in ways that make the poem easier to read. Of course the translator did this on purpose, to help the reader avoid confusion, and his choices can certainly be defended. But they still involve losses. If we simplify a complex, ambiguous poem, are we necessarily doing the reader a favor? If the poet does something that's clunky or obscure in Urdu, should it be replaced by something that's simpler or more fluent in English? How much simplification is appropriate, and how much is an unwarranted flattening-out of a deliberately complex text? These questions can never be resolved; I mention them only as problems with which all of us translators must wrestle.

The moral (if there is a moral) is that taking liberties in translation is inevitably a slippery slope, though it's not one that can be avoided. A translator needs to be constantly attentive—to think very closely about the poem's original design, and see how much of it can be kept. Sometimes tradeoffs have to be made, but each one should be strongly justifiable in its own right, bringing with it clear and legitimate gains, and requiring the fewest possible losses. We already know that translators can never entirely succeed, but we still demand that they do their loving, traitorous work as well as they possibly can. And we owe a great debt of gratitude to those who, like the present translator, do a genuinely fine job. We should also be grateful to the Modern Language Association for producing this whole series of very helpful books on a number of world literatures.

—FRANCES W. PRITCHETT  
Columbia University

QURRATULAIN HYDER. *My Temples, Too: A Novel*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, in association with Kali for Women, 2004. 182 pp. Rs. 250.

QURRATULAIN HYDER is arguably the greatest living writer of Urdu fiction today. The only other novelist who is sometimes seen as a contender for this honor is Abdullah Hussein who himself regards her as the undisputed master (or mistress) of the genre. She did not merely inherit the genre but, rather, has transformed it in significant ways by pushing its boundaries and straining its expressive possibility to the maximum so that it now has the unmistakable stamp of her personality. Her position in Urdu fiction is so seminal that if one were to drop her from the post-independence fictional scene in India, very little would remain. Fiction, the chosen genre of the twentieth century, suited her temperament as it allowed her to explore the complexity of human relationships, relationships within groups and communities, and also provided a battleground for ideologies. Like all magnificent journeys, her literary journey—and what a magnificent journey it has been—has

also had its highs and lows, its pinnacle, and its less glorious moments. However, all of it, taken together, reveals a massive corpus that would do credit to any writer of formidable talent. From the publication of *Mērē Bhī Śanamkhānē* in 1949 and *Safīna-e Ġam-e Dil* in 1952 through *Āg kā Daryā* and *Ākhr-e Shab kē Ham-safar* and then *Gardīsh-e Rañg-e Čaman* and *Čāndnī Bēgam*, not forgetting the three volumes of *Kār-e Jabāñ Darāz hai*, four novellas and four substantial collections of short stories, we find the progress of a writer whose mind is ceaselessly addressing the fate of human beings on the Indian subcontinent, caught between their own individual aspirations and the larger forces of history and destiny. Each one of her novels and short stories not only offers us a compelling narrative of human relationship, but also asks, in the process, significant and sometimes uncomfortable questions about the “human condition.”

*Mērē Bhī Śanamkhānē* was written in 1947 and its English translation, *My Temples, Too*, has come out almost six decades after that in 2004. Now, if we take a fresh look at the novel with the benefit of hindsight and in the context of the author’s entire oeuvre, we find that the seeds of some of her basic concerns and novelistic assumptions lay buried in that novel, although the author was barely out of her teens when she wrote it. The most important of these assumptions is that she takes the whole of India’s past as her heritage, and she regards the Indo-Muslim encounter as one of the most significant civilizational encounters in human history, having touched every sphere of Indian life. The novel is essentially about the dreams and aspirations of a group of young men and women from the upper-crust of Lucknow society. They are steeped in the composite culture of Oudh. The epoch is the twilight of the Raj, and the young people, secure in their feudal background, are out to enjoy and explore life to its uttermost extremes. Bliss it was, indeed, to be alive and young at that time! Their lives revolve around Ghufrān Manzil, Chatter Manzil and the Dilkusha Club, where they drink, play, socialize, discuss politics and philosophy, and make love, or what passes for it. The owner of Ghufrān Manzil, Kunwar Irfan Ali, has brought up his sons Pichu and Polu and daughter Rakshanda in the tradition of liberalism and freethinking. They were given the best of education in India and Europe. Their friends Kiran, Vimal, Don Anwar, Diamond, Christabel, Hafeez Ahmed, Ginny, Firoz, Saleem, and many others belong to the same charmed circle and cultivate the values of good behavior, friendship, helping others, respect for elders and preserving the family honor.

On a different level, it is the Forsterian world of “only connect” where individuals are trying to reach out to one another to build up meaningful personal relationships with the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence. Though most of them are from the landed gentry, they are crusaders for personal freedom and have taken up different professions to give an account of themselves as responsible citizens of the country. They bring out a magazine, the *New Era*, in which they espouse liberal causes and try to combat the communalism let loose by Syed Iftikhar, a supporter of the Muslim League and the two-nation theory, and his ilk.

Pichu is an officer with the Police Department, Vimal produces “Progressive” plays for the radio, Rakshanda is a lecturer in a college and writes editorials for the *New Era*, Saleem is a major in the army. The novel projects a unified vision inasmuch as it shows people from different communities working together, and in unison, for a better world, and distinctions of religion, caste and sex just do not matter. But as the narrative progresses, the glory gradually departs from the world and we are overwhelmed by a deep sense of pathos at the loss of all that was valuable in our composite culture by the onslaught of the communalism let loose during the days of Partition. The young men and women see the disintegration of their world right before their eyes and try their best to contain and combat it. Rakshanda and Kiran try to bring out the magazine against insurmountable odds and Pichu gives his life trying to save refugees from Pakistan. The others, shattered and disillusioned, withdraw into their private worlds.

*My Temples, Too* is essentially about the death of an epoch and its ethos and the total confusion of values that overtook a people that surrendered itself, however temporarily, to the forces of the dark. The Manto-like cameos of the brutality of Partition drawn by Hyder towards the end of the novel make for compelling reading:

This was the Delhi of Hindu refugee camps at Kurukshetra and Muslim refugee camps at the Old Fort and there was more rain, but this year when the rain fell, it did not fall on the picnickers at Qutub Shahi and in Qudsia Bagh. This year, the romantic rains were mingled with human blood which flowed in torrents on the earth below.... Corpses lay about in the streets or rotted in the sun or became decomposed and swollen in the rain. The bayonets of Gurkha soldiers flashed everywhere as they patrolled the corpse-ridden streets. The blood of the Muslim citizens of Delhi flowed in the lanes, dripped into gutters and mixed with muddy rainwater. It blocked the sewers and flowed in the drains on either side of lanes and roads. (p. 156)

The partition of the country is painful for Hyder not only because of the massive dislocation of people and the terrible tragedy it entailed, but also because it signaled a rupture in the continuity of the centuries-old shared experience of living together, of ingathering and community-making. The novelist is anguished at the disappearance of all that was valuable and enduring in India’s composite culture. However, the narrative voice does not wallow in self-pity. The mental attitude corresponding to Hyder’s temperament can be conveyed by André Maurios’s dictum that the most civilized way of being sad is to be humorous.

*My Temples, Too* also displays both Hyder’s strengths and her weaknesses in portraying her characters. While the women characters have been fairly strongly individualized, the male characters, by and large, have remained types. The character of Rakshanda is portrayed with depth and sensitivity. She combines in herself the poise and elegance of the olden days along with the ideals of the social

change that is inevitable in order to secure justice for everyone. Though she and her family become victims of the communal outrage, she tries to keep herself sane and face the challenges with determination and foresight. Her fate overwhelms us by its terrible sense of pathos. Shahla Rahman is the proverbial social climber who must undergo alternate spasms of ecstasy and agony. The portrayals of Gul Shabbo and Shulapari, the housekeepers in *Ghufran Manzil*, are both lively and lifelike. They possess the residual charm of feudalism as much as they refute the allegation that Hyder cannot convincingly draw characters from the lower strata of society.

When a writer translates her own work—and particularly when the time lag between the original and the translation is substantial—there is a natural propensity to rework the original in terms of new literary values and sensibilities, with the result that the process of translation turns into rewriting. That is what happened with *River of Fire* (the English translation of Hyder's monumental novel *Āg kā Daryā*) which, of course, she characterized as “transcreation,” presumably, to disarm nitpicking reviewers and critics. Although the changes in the case of *My Temples, Too* are not as drastic as they were in the case of *River of Fire*, there are indeed instances of substantial pruning and a discernible effort by the writer-translator to sound more politically correct in her turn of phrase. Walter Benjamin described the translation of a work as its “afterlife.” This could not have been more true of *Āg kā Daryā*. Just when we had become accustomed to hearing the same kind of homilies from Urdu critics and literati about *Āg kā Daryā* for close to three decades—the homilies did not of course mean that this many people had read the book because such literary monuments are normally paid homage to rather than read—its English version came out and rescued it from general indifference and oblivion. The reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement (TLS)* had commented that *River of Fire* is to Urdu fiction what *A Hundred Years of Solitude* is to Hispanic literature, and then went on to compare its author with her illustrious contemporaries on the world scene, like Marquez and Kundera. This one translation played a significant role in bringing Qurratulain Hyder, though a little late in the day, the acclaim she so eminently deserves. One wishes for a similar afterlife for *My Temples, Too*.

—M. ASADUDDIN  
*Jamia Millia Islamia*

C.M. NAIM. *Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays of C.M. Naim*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004. 273 pp. Rs. 495.

C.M. NAIM needs little introduction. As Professor Emeritus of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, he has been one of the most influential teachers of Urdu in the United States, and he has trained numerous students who are now established scholars in their own right. *Urdu Texts and*

*Contexts* pulls together thirteen essays, revised and updated, which were published in various journals and edited volumes from 1967 to 2001.

Naim prefers the essay form to lengthier treatises, and this volume collects his critical interventions into Urdu literature, which address both contemporary and historical issues. The essays show his wide range of interests. The earliest contribution explores the consequences for Urdu literature of the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War by focusing on a selection of poetry and criticism produced in both India and Pakistan during this period. An essay on the “Pseudo-dramatic’ Poems of Iqbal” classifies Iqbal’s use of dialogue. Another essay describes the history and transformation of poetic gatherings in premodern and modern times. In an article focused on Akbar, Bīrbal, and Mullā Dō-Piyāza, Naim examines the relationship between jokes and political history.

Some of Naim’s most effective articles address complicated questions of gender and sexuality while analyzing controversial literary forms; in the process Naim works to both expand and reevaluate the established canon of Urdu criticism. Although “The Art of the Urdu Marsiya” begins by describing the formal and operative features of the *marsiya*, it also provides a strong corrective to the usual charges against the genre—that it is repetitive, monotonous, unrealistic, and effeminate—by focusing on its historical and performative context. Another article reevaluates the development of *rekbtī* poetry, which has also been disparaged as effeminate. Looking at the social context of this genre, Naim concludes that it can best be described as “transvestic,” meaning that although it is written in a woman’s voice, its authors never stop being men. In an article on pederasty, Naim examines the history of *amrad-parast* Urdu poetry and speculates on the attitudes towards homosexuality in the Indo-Muslim milieu. To do so, he contrasts this poetry with that of the English-language “Uranian” poets, a seemingly odd comparison which proves surprisingly fruitful. Naim concludes that Indo-Muslim society was neither “sex-positive” (like the ancient Greeks) nor “sex-negative” (like Judeo-Christian England) but rather that attitudes were somewhere in between. He characterizes the Indo-Muslim milieu as “indifferent” to homosexuality—meaning attitudes could range from censure to tolerance. His analysis historicizes homosexuality, and he carefully argues that it was pederastic and hierarchical, with very different goals from “the mutuality of an ideal gay love.”

A few of his essays seem to be dated, particularly those employing the techniques of New Criticism. “Yes, The Poem Itself” examines how the structural cohesiveness of two modern poems contribute to the unity of their “poetic experience.” Naim’s approach involves a literal translation (“here what? is naked darkness is / vacuum is sounds are thirst is”) followed by a close English translation (“What’s here? A naked darkness. / A vacuum; rustling sounds; a thirst”) followed by a structural analysis. While this approach does draw attention to certain formal aspects of the poems, the analysis itself is not particularly productive. Another essay, which uses a similar presentation style, focuses on a ghazal by Gālib. Very few people can read a ghazal the way that Naim can. Drawing upon

his enormous capacity for interpretative and intertextual analysis rather than strict attention to form, this essay transcends its methodological frame.

Naim's studies of the nineteenth century represent a powerful engagement with the historical changes wrought by colonialism. As such, they can be seen as part of the "Chicago School" of historiography, which has expanded the study of colonialism beyond the discussion of political economy to include the analysis of "forms of knowledge." "Prize-Winning *Adab*" examines five books written in response to an 1868 contest for nonreligious vernacular literature. The primary focus of the article is the literature of Nazir Ahmad. But by examining other prize-winning books, Naim contextualizes Nazir Ahmad and neatly demonstrates how *adab* changed in the nineteenth century. The relationship between social and literary transformations is further explored in an article contrasting Mughal and English patronage of Urdu poetry. While we often read dry accounts of the new focus on women's education in the mid-nineteenth century, Naim's article on "How Bibi Ashraf Learned to Read and Write" provides an accessible and heart-rending account of what one Muslim girl had to contend with in order to become literate. The final essay in the volume, "Ghalib's Delhi: A Shamelessly Revisionist Look at Two Popular Metaphors," challenges the image of Ghalib's Delhi as the last burst of light from a dying candle of Mughal culture by arguing that the pre-1857 "Delhi Renaissance" was not a period of revived Mughal brilliance but a product of Indo-British collaboration characterized by an orientation towards the future and not the past.

Naim's engagements with Urdu literary history complement his essays on the subject of Indian-Muslim identity, which have been collected in his *Ambiguities of Heritage: Fictions and Polemics* (1999). In its title essay, Naim turns his gaze onto his own identity, writing that

[O]ne is not just born into a tradition or heritage; one has to claim it and claim all of it, the "good" with the "bad." Only after claiming the whole can one proceed to the real task ..., namely to challenge it and be challenged by it." (186)

Rejecting the selective memory of the migrant, then, Naim has remained committed to questioning the assumptions of both political identity and literary taste.

His work can be seen as a stern reminder to Urdu scholars to always combine extraordinary attention to texts with a firm grounding in historical and social context. But he also reminds us that culture is an ongoing project. There is an underlying sense of hope flowing through his criticism, an orientation not towards a nostalgic resurrection of the past but rather towards the possibilities of the future.

—A. SEAN PUE  
Columbia University

*New Urdu Fictions*. Compiled by JOGINDER PAUL. Edited by M. ASADUDDIN. New Delhi: Katha, in association with Jamia Millia Islamia, 2004. Paperback. 287 pp. Rs.295.

THE Urdu short story, in its modern form, is said to have begun in 1903. In spite of the tremendous progress it has made since, it has remained confined to Urdu readership alone. Barring Premchand, Sa‘ādat Ḥasan Man ō, Rājindar Siñgh Bēdī, and a few others whose stories have made a mark through translations and through television and cinema, very little has been done to introduce it to a cross section of the reading public. Given this situation, the publication of *New Urdu Fictions* is an important milestone for which both Katha and Jamia Millia Islamia should be congratulated.

Though the title page of the book announces that the stories included in it are “handpicked” by the veteran Urdu writer Joginder Paul, what is offered argues strongly against any suggestion of randomness or casualness. Indeed the stories are the result of very careful selection. Thirty-six in all, they cover a wide range of thematic and stylistic aspects of the genre—almost all representative trends and experiments in the Urdu short story have been showcased here.

The partition of India in 1947 not only divided the geographical map of the Subcontinent, it also cut across the human psyche on both sides of the border, to such an extent that the communal strife and riots of 1947 continue to occur in India even today. In their stories “The Dressing Table” and “Across the Raavi,” Shamoil Ahmad and Gulzar trace the dehumanizing impact of this historical event. Brijmohan of the “The Dressing Table”—who had robbed the prostitute Naseem Jaan of her dressing table during the riots, in spite of her repeated pleas to spare it because it was a gift from her grandmother—is shocked to observe the gradual changes in the behavior of his own wife and daughters under the influence of the new table. “It looked like Naseem Jaan had entered his home and would soon get out and spread into every nook and corner of the house” (42). Finally Brijmohan, to his amazement, discovers that not only his family members, but also he himself is beginning to undergo a change. “Were his values also ... hunh ... to hell with values. What kind of values he had that made him rob a prostitute?” (43). Accepting the gruesomeness of his own act of looting a prostitute, he resigns himself to his new state as being the result of a curse from Naseem Jaan.

Gulzar, on the other hand, uses ironic reversal in “Across the Raavi” to chronicle the profound destitution resulting from the dislocations of Partition. Darshan Singh’s lot is symptomatic of the misery all such displaced people had to suffer. Salam Bin Razzak’s “Faces” also traces the same dehumanizing impact of the communal riots, with the protagonist discovering to his utter shock and dismay that the faces of the dead unmistakably resemble his own.

Rajju in Ghayas ur Rahman’s story “Refuge” finds herself in a peculiar situation: her father has died, her young mother is married off by relatives because they find her a burden, and she herself is compelled to live with unwelcoming

relatives because her stepfather will not take her in. Her only source of solace, Zeenat Aapa, also leaves her after a while as she too gets married.

Ghazanfar's "One Who Sold Wonders" is a satire on the problem of unemployment in post-independence India, with its attendant red-tape and bureaucracy. Shafi Mashhadi's "Zuleikha's Daughter" focuses on the hind side of the processes of industrialization and urbanization in his powerful portrayal of the abject poverty of working-class people. Qamar Jamali's "Shroud" again highlights social issues with its focus on the lives of those below the poverty line and the apathy of the affluent toward the destitute.

Issues of gender struggle and the female psyche are taken up by Ali Imam Naqvi in his story "Munni of Bangali House," Tarannum Riyaz in "The Flame Burns" and Shamim Nikhat in "Justice." While both Munni and Reshma are uneducated, lower-class women, the protagonist of Shamim Nikhat's story is a highly-educated, emancipated woman. However, they are all equal victims of a gender-biased, patriarchal society which fails to understand their emotional problems.

"The Crow Chronicle" and "The Reflection" explore the transhistorical issues of the generation gap and the parent-children relationship. Syed Muhammad Ashraf delineates the basic human desire for communication and companionship through his protagonist Anwar. In "Sheesha Ghat" Naiyer Masud explores the implications of the failure of communication. "Good and Evil" by Muqaddar Hameed focuses on the topical issue of terrorism.

The collection presents a broad range of narrative techniques employed by Urdu fiction writers. Thus, while the temporal canvas in Nigar Azim's story "The Reflection" spans a lifetime, it recoils into a few years in Muqaddar Hameed's "Good and Evil," into just one night in Syed Muhammad Ashraf's "A Companion," and is squeezed still further into just one moment in Anjum Usmani's "Inheritance." Naiyer Masud arranges time around elements of sequentiality and consequentiality, while Nigar Azim prefers an arrangement in which time moves cyclically. Gulzar traces external events and actions, while Tariq Chhatari delves deeply into the recesses of Kedar Nath's mind to capture the inner struggle of a man who is unable to recall the name of his dead wife. Salam bin Razzak and Shaukat Hayat both use symbolic overtones, but Sughra Mehdi and Gulzar prefer the realistic approach. If the genre attains a subversive quality in the fiction of Anjum Usmani, Qamar Jamali and Tarannum Riyaz, whereby the silenced and the marginalized in society are given voice, Shaukat Hayat and Syed Muhammad Ashraf use it to trace the struggle of the common man who is grappling with the enigmas of existence.

Mundane, murky, plain or symbolic, these stories recall, regardless of their theme or artistic nuances, some memorable experiences that truly jolt the reader out of his complacency and force him to reflect on some vexing questions of human existence. Whether it is Naseem Jaan's dressing table or Zeenat Aapa's parting act of smearing Rajju's palm with spit, Parya's innocent efforts to walk on

water or Darshan Singh's wretchedness after discovering that he has thrown his living child into the water of the Raavi, Munni's secretly saving money for her children though relentlessly abusing them outwardly, or Ali Jaan's innocent quest for Karbala—all these images cast such menacing shadows on the mind of the reader that it is difficult to free oneself from their spell.

The stories in *New Urdu Fictions* read well, and the credit for this goes to their translators. Because stories are inevitably interwoven in the texture of local culture, they do not, generally, transport well across languages that remain unfamiliar with that culture. Hence, the translator is left with two equally unsatisfactory choices: either look for the closest equivalent in English for culture specific terms, in which case the translated version risks losing much of the flavor of the original, or retain those terms and resort to footnotes, which makes for tedious and fairly cumbersome reading. This collection, however, deserves commendation, for here the translators have struck a judicious balance between these two choices. As a result, here language does not get in the way of the narrative flow, nor does the frequency of footnotes obstruct reading. Retention of expressions such as “Oui daiyya,” (43) “Uff, mere khuda,” (186) or “Hai Allah” (87) add a refreshing cultural flavor to the translated text, and discreet footnoting of terms such as “barahdari,” “moohbola baap,” or “Nashest” add unobtrusively to the reader's understanding of the cultural milieu of the stories. Translators Moazzam Sheikh and Elizabeth Bell do well to explain the problematic pronunciation of the word “Parya.”<sup>1</sup>

One might mention here that the “Young Writers” mentioned on the cover of the book is not entirely accurate; writers Naiyer Masud, Sughra Mehdi and Gulzar are clearly not young and have been practicing their craft over decades. And though the editor, M. Asaduddin, mentions Khalid Javed in his introduction as an important name, the omission of any of his stories in this collection is rather surprising.

Finally, inasmuch as these stories have been “handpicked” by the veteran writer Joginder Paul, a fuller introduction than the few lines given to him in “Notes on Contributors” should have been included. The reader needs to know Paul's own standing in the field and to have some discussion of his critical insight before being asked to trust his choices.

In sum, this collection is a laudable attempt by Katha-Jamia Millia Islamia to bring a rich storehouse of literature to readers who are otherwise not aware of its presence, and I am sure it will find favor among them.

—NISHAT ZAIDI  
*Jamia Millia Islamia*

---

<sup>1</sup>The credit for the note on “Parya” belongs, properly, to Griffith A. Chaussée who added it to the translation when it first appeared in *The Annual of Urdu Studies* in 1997. —*Editor*