

EVENTS, INQUIRIES, NEWS, NOTICES, REPORTS

A NUMBER of Urdu writers and patrons left us during the past eighteen months, among them: (2005) Abdul Haq Siddiqi, Abdul Karim Abid, Abdur Rahman Bazmi, Aftab Ahmed, Ahsan Faridi Faruqi, Ali Amjad, Amrita Pritam, Atiqullah Shaikh, Firooz Mukherjee, Ghulam Mustafa Khan, Habibullah Auj, Hamid Ali Shah, Haneef Ramey, Hanif Asadi, Hasan Abidi, Hifzul Kabir Qureshi, Ismail Merchant, Jagdeesh Bimal, Jamal Panipati, Jameel Bismil, Mirza Hasan Askari, Mushfiq Khwaja, Nasrin Fatima, Qaiyum Aitisami, Rana Safdar Jang, Salma Zaman, Saqi Amrohvi, Shabbir Ahmad, Shamim Naved, Shanul Haq Haqqee, Tahir Abbas Bukhari, Taqi Raza Bilgrami, Ummid Fazili; (2006) Rashid Hasan Khan.

I

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

58th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (San Francisco, 7–9 April 2006)

Jennifer Dubrow (University of Chicago): “The Novel and the Newspaper: Serialized Pleasure and the Everyday in Ratan Nath Sarshar’s *Fasana-e Azad*.”

34th Annual Conference on South Asia (Madison, 7–9 October 2005)

Aditi Chandra (University of Minnesota): “Subverting Authority through the Fantastic, in Saadat Hasan Manto’s ‘Toba Tek Singh.’”

Mehr Farooqi (University of Virginia): “A Fine Madness: The Humorous Sketch in Urdu.”

Deepti Misra (University of Illinois): “Sketching Violence: The Very Short Fiction of Saadat Hasan Manto.”

Julietta Singh (University of Minnesota): “Deconstruction Sites: The Politics of Necrophilia in Manto’s ‘Cold Meat.’”

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Laurel Steele (Independent Scholar) presented her paper on “Freedom at Midnight’ or ‘The Pleasure of Dreaming?: Two Urdu Poets Explore the Partition of India Through Remembered Metaphors,” at the 2005 Annual Convention of the Midwest Modern Language Association.

II

[Apparently the following was sent to urdulist@columbia.edu and a list member passed it on to the general body of Urdu-wallahs; edited for the *AUS*.]

Dear List-valo,

In Delhi, I observed two related things: (1) the Urdu script is in rapid and major and probably terminal decline; and (2) Urdu vocabulary is flourishing, both in speech and in Devanagari printed form, and is very much a part of the mainstream.

The decline of the script has been continuing for decades, and though there are other causes too, a lot of it is related to the refusal of Uttar Pradesh (UP) authorities to provide the kind of first-language schooling that the Indian Constitution guarantees to all families (if they constitute a certain smallish percentage of the local population). This means that thousands of UP Muslims have grown up without the Urdu script, and with a strong knowledge of Devanagari script. Thus, in the Urdu Bazaar you can see the Qur’an itself, and other Islamic religious materials, being widely sold—and bought by people who are clearly Muslims—in Devanagari script. And the trend toward publishing versions of Urdu literary texts (both prose and poetry, both old and new) in Devanagari script is gaining ground. Of course, those Devanagari versions are often sloppily and casually prepared; but that doesn’t seem to bother the readers. (And in any case, the same casualness is all too commonly applied to Urdu-script publications as well.)

The wide circulation of the speech means, in effect, a big boost to “Hindustani,” or *bōl-čāl kī zabān*, or whatever we want to call it. The cultivation of exclusively Sanskritic Hindi is now a specialized pursuit, not a mainstream activity, at least as far as I could observe. Writers and normal Delhi-vale routinely show knowledge about and interest in a wide range of “Urdu” topics, certainly including Ġālib and ghazals. Most people seem to have a wide range of vocabulary from both sides, growing fuzzy (but not nonexistent) as they move farther from whatever is their educational and cultural home base.

Many of my Urdu-vale friends are wringing their hands, and people bemoan the “death of Urdu.” But I don’t agree. Historically speaking, the forcible breaking-up of the great river of the language based on *kharī bōlī* grammar into two rigidly separated streams (in which a particular vocabulary had to be consistently used, and had to correlate with a particular script) is a wild anomaly and dates back only somewhat over a century. Before that period, people drew vocabulary from wherever they wished, and wrote in whatever script was handy or seemed suitable, as they wished, and nobody worried about issues of “compatibility” of script and vocabulary. (S. R. Faruqi has amply demonstrated all this in his book.) So it seems to me we’re really returning to the historical norm.

Between the Urdu script and Urdu language/speech, there’s no question in my mind but that the latter is far more important. Now, rather than being (further) marginalized into a small, specialized Urdu-script ghetto, most younger Indian Muslims have been pushed into the orthographic mainstream; this is good for them in many ways, and also good for the mainstream through the infusion of their powerful literary and cultural influence. (Of course, it was done for hostile and communalist reasons, but bad intentions often backfire, as in this case.) There are now “Urdu novels” that are written and published entirely in Devanagari script, complete with *izāfats*.

Naturally, any serious scholar will need, and instantly want, to learn the Urdu script. That was exactly the attitude I found among the Urdu students I met in Delhi; some of the most dedicated were not Muslim by background, but loved the literature for its own sake. And I myself do love the script, and feel sad to see all this great material running around in Devanagari only. But then I remind myself that the one and only time I met the great Ġālib scholar ‘Arshī Sahib, at the Raza Library in Rampur many years ago, he insisted on arguing with me about the desirability of writing Urdu in roman script. I was horrified, and thought he was joking; but he wasn’t. His argument was seriously intended, and he pursued it throughout our conversation, and rejected all my counter-arguments.

Just some thoughts about a very fascinating and rapidly-changing milieu,

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[Frances W. Pritchett]

P.S. Needless to say, the REAL long-term issue is not Hindi vs. Urdu but ENGLISH vs. everybody else.

III

[The following was received from Ather Farouqi (Delhi) on 26 April 2006; edited for the *AUS*.]

Hamidullah Bhat, Director, NCPUL, Delhi, Arrested for Fraud

Mr. Hamidullah Bhat, the erstwhile Director of the National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language (NCPUL), an advisory body of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, was arrested on 30 September 2005 after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), an intelligence agency under the Office of the Prime Minister of India, conducted a raid on his house and office premises. As per the reports which appeared in print and electronic media, Mr. Bhat, during his tenure as the Director of the Council, had amassed assets worth more than Rs. 2.2 crore in New Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) alone as per the documents seized. Apart from the cash recovered by the CBI, the sources confirmed in the media that the market value of his assets is more than ten times the amount indicated in the documents. According to the newspaper reports, Mr. Bhat's assets in Kashmir are not included in the estimate and the CBI will look into them at a later stage.

Mr. Bhat began his career in Delhi in 1990 as an OSD [Officer on Special Duty] in the Jamia Hamdard, where he was elevated to Registrar. He subsequently resigned, in 1995, much before the completion of his tenure, amid charges of corruption. He was later appointed as an OSD of the Jamia Millia Islamia but was unable to take up the post owing to the protests of students and teachers over his corrupt practices at the Jamia Hamdard. Prior to Jamia Hamdard, now a central university in New Delhi, Mr. Bhat was a Deputy Registrar at the Kashmir University where, again, he was known for his nefarious activities. He became the Director of the NCPUL in 1998. NCPUL has an annual budget of Rs. 12 crore, and all of his assets under scrutiny were acquired after he assumed responsibility at the Council. Sources in the Ministry of Human Resource Development confirm that his services at Kashmir University were transferred to the Ministry of HRD during the BJP [Bharatiya Janta Party] rule with several omissions in the service rules, even while his first appointment in the Kashmir University as an Assistant Registrar was politically enabled and did not conform to the relevant norms of the Union Public Service Commission. A CBI officer was quoted by media saying, "Though it is difficult to immediately explain how Mr. Bhat amassed properties, it is clear that he was misusing his powers as the Director of the NCPUL. As Director, he was handling all the projects that the Council was handling [*sic.*] He had been under watch for a while." Such arrests are rare and undertaken only if the accused falls under the exceptionally corrupt category on the basis of recovery of cash and documents. He has been suspended from the services and will remain so unless he is exonerated in the trial in the subordinate court.

The NCPUL is now operating under a nominated body of members and a vice chairman. The Minister of Human Resource Development is the *ex-officio* Chairman and noted critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi is the Vice Chairman. Mr. Bhat had made the NCPUL an outlet of the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] during the BJP rule.

The CBI initiated a probe against Mr. Bhat and put him under watch following the publication of my article, "The Great Urdu Fraud," in the New Delhi English fortnightly *Milli Gazette*. The article appeared in two consecutive installments (1-15 and 16-31 May 2005) and highlighted Mr. Bhat's involvement in one of the projects of the Council.

—ATHER FAROUQUI

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N O T E : 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*. —*Editor*