

## COLUMNS

### Plagiarize and Prosper

THERE WAS A TIME when people wrote a literary piece and then ascribed it to someone whom they held in high esteem out of love, admiration, reverence or some other strong sentiment. Jalaluddin Rumi wrote a magnificent volume of ghazals but did not put his name to it. It has always been known as *Dīvān-e Shams-e Tabrīz* (The Divan of Shams of Tabriz). An unknown poet wrote another, smaller divan of ghazals and ascribed it to Khvāja Mu‘īnu’-d-Dīn Čishtī of Ajmer. Later some other people concocted “table-talks” of some of the Chishti Sufis and circulated them as genuine collections. In Urdu literary history, two examples of something similar immediately come to mind. When Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād desired to publish a definitive edition of the ghazals of Shaikh Ibrāhīm “Zauq,”—the first poet laureate of Bahadur Shah “Zafar”—he felt no qualms in composing new ghazals and verses to fill in the gaps he felt his beloved master would have filled in himself. Then there is the fascinating case of one of the foremost modern poets in Urdu: when Šanā’u’l-Lā Ḍār took on the name “Mīrājī” after a woman named Mīrā whom he obsessively loved, he might have had in mind the exemplary bond between Rumi and Shams.

Urdu literary culture, however, has known many more cases where someone took the work of another person and claimed it as his own. Particularly among the poets. The practice of *ustad/shāgirdī* in Urdu poetry encouraged it. Many an *ustad* or master poet earned his meager living by giving away his verses to his pupils or *shāgird*, who in turn provided for his needs. Some *ustads* openly sold verses to anyone who came with money the night of a *mushaira* (a gathering of poets). A *nawab* or king would appoint some good poet as his *ustad* and then quite as a norm expect him to put together a volume of ghazals in his name. It also happened in prose. Imām Bakhsh “Šahbā’ī,” a contemporary of Ghālib and teacher at the famous Delhi College, reportedly wrote for a Mughal prince a *taẓkīra* or account of the poets of his time. The book *Gulistān-e Sukhan* carries the name of Qādir Bakhsh “Šābir” as its author, but Ghālib always referred to it as “Šahbā’ī’s *taẓkīra*.” Much later, when the Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdū (Association for the Development of Urdu) published *The Standard English-Urdu Dictionary* in 1937, the organization’s Sec-

retary, Maulvī ‘Abdu’l-Ḥaq (aka “Father of Urdu”), put his own name on the cover as its editor, instead of the Anjuman’s. But at least he was honest enough to clearly acknowledge in the introduction that the work had mainly been done by Dr. ‘Ābid Ḥusain of Jāmi‘a Millīa. Since then, however, things have been going downhill in Urdu, particularly in its academia. The late Aẓhar ‘Alī Fārūqī of Allahabad earned his living by writing Ph.D. dissertations for others, with the full knowledge of the university’s professors. I personally witnessed how he worked.

In the old literary culture plagiarism of the ordinary kind was also common and not made much of. The stakes were not high then. But now the stakes are quite high in the academic world. Ambitious university teachers no longer can make do by merely taking care of their patron’s grocery shopping and milk cows—I witnessed both at Aligarh. Now they must publish “research” in order to get coveted promotions and titles. Sadly, quite a few take to plagiarism as the shortest route. I became involved in the case of one such ambitious academic at Aligarh back in the early 1980s. The Department of Urdu, Aligarh Muslim University, had obtained some money from the government for a professorship in Aesthetics, and advertised the job. One of the candidates was a Reader in the department, who was far better known for his fiction than research—he wrote at least one superb novella that will always be admired. In no time that gentleman managed to publish a volume on Urdu Aesthetics. I was most surprised when I came across the book in our library at the University of Chicago. Having known the person since our shared college days, I could not imagine him as the author of the book. A couple of hours of digging around in the library solved the mystery. The talented academic had taken a well-known book on Aesthetics in English by a Bengali scholar and diligently translated most of it into Urdu. Dutifully I prepared a short article, presenting page-and-line references to the original. It was published in Urdu, and received plenty of notice. But nothing actually happened. The gentleman did not get the job—no one did, as I remember—but he went on to become a full professor, and soon chaired the department for a while. Needless to say he received—justly, I must add—a “Padma Shri” as a fiction-writer.

Presently the Urdu literary/academic world has been violently shaken by what must be termed “the mother of all plagiarisms.” Instead of the out of fashion field of Aesthetics, it is the currently much more fashionable field of Literary Theory that is at issue, and the person at the “heart of darkness” is no less than Dr. Gopi Chand Narang, Professor Emeritus, Delhi University, who from 2003 to 2007 presided over the Sahitya Akademi and has received two “Padma” awards from the Indian state—

the latest being “Padma Bhushan” in 2004. (A full list of his honors and publications may be seen at his website.) At the center of the scandal is the book *Sākhtiyāt, Pas-e Sākhtiyāt aur Mashriqī She‘riyāt* (Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and Eastern Poetics), for which Dr. Narang received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1995. The title suggests that it might be a comparative study, bringing out the commonalities and oppositions between two contemporary Western literary/linguistic theories and their counterparts in Sanskrit and Urdu—a rather curious undertaking—but in reality it only describes and explains the three topics in the book’s title, and the major thinkers who contributed to them.

As far back as 1997, an Indian Urdu critic named Fuḏēl Ja‘farī had explained in some detail how Dr. Narang’s book shied away from original thinking and analysis, limiting itself simply to what X wrote and Y said in Western languages (*Zabn-e Jadīd* (Delhi), no. 22–23). In fact, he described the book as a “compilation” (*ta‘līf*), adding that it was not an original piece of writing (*taṣnīf*). Now a young scholar Imran Shahid Bhinder, a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at the University of Birmingham, U.K., has made a much more serious charge. Bhinder published in 2006 in the annual issue of *Nairānḡ-e Khayāl*, a Pakistani journal, an essay entitled “Gopi Chand Narang is a Translator, Not an Author.” A year later, a revised and expanded version of the essay appeared in the journal *Jadīd Adab* (July–December 2007), which at the time was printed in New Delhi—now allegedly stopped under pressure from certain people—and published from Germany. (It is also available on the web). In 2008 Bhinder published two more articles in *Jadīd Adab*, the first in its January–June issue, entitled “Plagiarism in Urdu Literature—How Long Will It be Defended?” and the second in the July–December issue, entitled “Gopi Chand Narang’s ‘Truth’ and ‘Context’ [as] Thievery.” Both articles found plenty of circulation in both India and Pakistan, and excerpts were reproduced in a couple of Indian journals. Now a Pakistani journal, *‘Akkās*, published from Islamabad (also available online), has brought out a special issue devoted to Dr. Narang’s oeuvre and career, including a more detailed analysis by Bhinder.

In summary, Bhinder has most convincingly established that Dr. Narang’s achievement in that award-winning book is not that of an author but only of a translator, and that too of a reprehensible kind. According to Bhinder, Dr. Narang did not read the original authors—Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and others. He read only their well-known interpreters, and then transferred the latter’s analyses and interpretations into Urdu, doing so verbatim and without giving the reader any indication of

what he was doing. In his third article mentioned above, Bhinder has given extraordinary details of the Dr. Narang's "authorial" enterprise. He has quoted excerpts from the Urdu book and then placed them next to their unacknowledged English original. Further, he has listed with precision the countless pages in Dr. Narang's book that correspond almost word-for-word with the English pages of American and British scholars. For example, pages 79–106, 234–40, 243–67, and 288–329 of Dr. Narang's book, according to Bhinder, are exact translations of pages 27–42, 149–58, 86–103, and 49–70, of Raman Selden's book, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (1985). The other exploited scholars that Bhinder similarly identifies are Terence Hawke, Catherine Belsey, John Sturrock, Jonathan Culler, Christopher Norris, and Robert Scholes. (I must add that Bhinder's critique has some other dimensions too that are important and relevant for all academics in a general manner. (See: <http://pakaffairs.com/about-2/>.)

The evidence Bhinder presents is quite irrefutable. When, for example, I checked the pages he points out in Selden's book, they indeed turned out to be the unacknowledged source of Dr. Narang's remarks. I also stumbled upon something equally interesting. Dr. Narang has a note on Michel Foucault (pp. 193–98) in the second chapter in his "Book Two," i.e., the second section of his book. The text on pages 194–96, as pointed out by Bhinder, is merely a translation of pages 158–59 in Selden's book. I checked the "sources" that Dr. Narang has helpfully listed for each chapter and found that he does list Sheldon's book as a source for that particular chapter. And gives exact page numbers too: 79–84 and 98–102. The first reference, however, turned out to be where Selden discusses Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. The second was equally curious: in Selden's book, page 98 deals with Frederic Jameson, but pages 99–102 contain only a bibliography. Again, the opening paragraph of Dr. Narang's note on Jonathan Culler (pp. 318–19) is, as per Bhinder, entirely Selden's (p. 62). But in the sources, Selden's name is listed with page numbers 106–27! In other words, while Dr. Narang twice went to the trouble of indicating precise—though unrelated—pages in Selden's book, he somehow failed to include the pages he had actually abused.

Bhinder's charges are extremely serious. They are also thoroughly documented. First made three years ago, his accusation has remained unchallenged—unlike in the past when the slightest criticism of Dr. Narang promptly produced a spate of articles in his defense and diatribes against the critic. This time he and his admirers are remarkably silent. And for good reason. They understand that any attempt would only bring more notoriety. Sadly, they also know that the academic circles in India in



able essay “Reflections on Exile,” in which he describes meeting Faiz sahib in Beirut one evening in the company of Dr. Eqbal Ahmed, who was one of Said’s oldest and closest friends in New York.

On Eqbal sahib’s death in 1999, the most moving and eloquent of the many tributes to emerge had been penned by Said. With the death now of Darwish, who passed away in early August in a Texas hospital at the age, like Said, of 67, it seems to me that an entire chapter in the cultural and intellectual history of the Third World has come to a close.

These individuals belonged to the last generation of writers and intellectuals to have come of age during the heyday of the mid-century anti-colonial struggles across the globe. Their writings, especially those produced later in life, speak not only of the hoped-for new dawn, as in an earlier generation, but also of opportunities missed and roads not taken. Their various writings are therefore marked by a certain melancholy of feeling that sits uncomfortably alongside a larger optimism about the possibilities for collective struggles and collective existence. This is even true of Faiz sahib’s later poetry—who was older than the other three—in such poems as “Ab tum hī kahō kyā karnā hai” (Now you must say what is to be done). It is not a coincidence that much of this verse of his was written in that final period of exile.

It is often said that Darwish was the Palestinians’ “national” poet. This judgment is only partially correct. There is little doubt that Darwish gave powerful expression to the collective experience of the Palestinian people, perhaps the most accomplished literary form ever given to that history of dispossession and dislocation. In this, he draws on the most ancient traditions of Arabic poetry, such as the *qaṣīda* about the life of the tribe in pre-Islamic Arabia. But it would be an error to think that his poetry is comfortable with the possibilities of ease and being at home that are offered by national identity, even as it gives voice to the powerful yearning for stability and settling that dogs the eternally dispossessed. Having peered into the abyss of annihilation, his verse ultimately directs a sharp rebuke to all those with a settled place in the world, the “triumphant of the world,” to quote an apt phrase from *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, the great novel of exile by the Indian writer Anita Desai. Darwish’s work turns the unique historical experience of the Palestinians into a universal standpoint, a place that makes possible a far-reaching critique of the modern world, which seems endlessly to produce populations of the dispossessed from its own midst.

Darwish grew up mostly in post-1948 Israel, and since his family had crossed back across the border after briefly fleeing to Lebanon during the war, they fell under the Orwellian Israeli rubric of “present-absentees,”

constantly challenged to prove not only their right to be present in Palestine, but the fact of that presence itself. His first volume of verse was published in 1964.

Jailed repeatedly as a young man—marked simply for traveling within the country without official permission—Darwish left for Moscow in 1970, then for Cairo and eventually Lebanon, thus beginning a life of wandering on a regional and global scale that came to an end only this month. This atmosphere of fundamental uncertainty provides the emotional ground of his writing—no firm resolution, no easy victory, and an unrelenting commitment to working through the solitary and fragmented experience.

This ethical stance of his poetry would not be unfamiliar to readers of Said himself, who once spoke proudly of preferring “our many wanderings” to “the clanging shutters of their return.” (This is of course a reference to the Zionists’ notion of a Jewish return to the Holy Land.) The book in which this passage appears is *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, whose title is taken from a line in one of Darwish’s well-known poems, from the 1980s:

Where should we go after the last frontier?  
Where should birds fly after the last sky?

The relatively brief book contains perhaps the most powerful writing ever done by Said, who was one of the most prolific writers of our times. It treats exile as an ethical experience, in sympathy with the thought of Theodor Adorno, the exiled German Jewish philosopher highly admired by Said: “It is part of morality,” Adorno famously wrote, “not to be at home in one’s home.”

For all the lyrical flights of Darwish’s poetry—the yearning for the Palestinian landscape, the almost mythical treatment of the village of Al-Birweh, which was the scene of his childhood and disappeared alongside 400 others at the hands of the Israeli state—what is upheld in the end is the dignity of displacement, as in another poem, written in the 1990s:

I’ll carry this longing for my beginning and  
its beginning  
I’ll follow this road to my end ... and to its  
end!

This justifiable pride of the Palestinians in their own morality when confronted with the blustering nationalists of the region, both Arabs and Jews, was once the hallmark of Jews, above all in Europe, confronted with the extremist nationalism of Germans and others—an historical irony



lievably huge quantity of data is available online. Referred to as a corpus, this data is revolutionizing the way we see a language and the way we compile a dictionary.

The Bank of English is one such repository. Established at the University of Birmingham, the English-language corpus contains about 650 million words of written and spoken material in machine-readable form, available online to researchers around the world. Though established basically as a repository to provide a maximum amount of reliable information to researchers and lexicographers, the corpus is not a word-list. It is a collection of material that shows the current and functional use of the English language and gives its inflected orthographic forms. The Collin's COBUILD English Dictionary is essentially based on this corpus and its fifth edition (2006) incorporates changes in the use of the language which the corpus has recorded over the years. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) contains some 385 million words. And these figures may be outdated very shortly since about a million new texts are added to the corpus every month.

Now, what haunts an Urduwallah like me is where Urdu stands in this world of cyber linguistics and computational grammar that is expanding at breakneck speed. You may be tempted to think that, as in other areas, we are lacking in this field, too. But all is not lost. There are some computer geeks who are also lovers of Urdu, though this is an extremely rare, or rather unlikely, combination to come by. Urdu and the computer are going hand in hand aiming to catapult our language into the future. Efforts have been afoot to establish The Bank of Urdu along the lines of the English corpora.

The Centre of Excellence for Urdu Informatics, established at the National Language Authority (NLA), or Muqtadira Qaumī Zabān, under Atash Durrani, has been working toward the establishment of an Urdu Data Bank. At a workshop held at the NLA in 2008 it was suggested that the name of the bank be changed since the Urdu Dictionary Board had the same initials. The Urdu corpus henceforth would be called The Bank of Urdu (TBU) and Urdu Mišāl Gh̄ar would be its Urdu equivalent. This database, working along the lines of The Bank of English and the COCA, will store Urdu texts in machine-readable forms so as to facilitate research on the patterns of Urdu and changes in its usage. This, in turn, will be an invaluable source for lexicographers of Urdu. Though the Urdu Dictionary Board's twenty-two-volume Urdu dictionary serves as an Urdu corpus, there are two problems: firstly, it is not machine-readable and, secondly, it generally only takes into account the literary usage of a word, while a corpus is supposed to draw examples from different types of current



Richie Rich-like character.

It goes without saying that these movies do not make any difference to life in the slums, which has a dynamic of its own. It is easy in the glitz to forget the Muslim ghetto that Delhi's Jama Masjid has become. It was reduced to this state 150 years ago and though it struggled to crawl out of its bitter history, and periodically succeeded in that effort, this time round it looks condemned to wallow in its increasingly brutalized existence for the foreseeable future.

I normally go to Jama Masjid—a generic name for the old quarter of Delhi and not just the beautiful Mughal mosque located there—with foreign friends who insist on savoring its “Muslim food” and “Muslim culture.” Last week I went there for a personal reason. Armed with a two-hundred-page, handwritten tome on Mir Anis, which my ninety-two-year-old mother in Lucknow has successfully culled from the vast collection of the nineteenth-century poet, I went looking for a calligrapher who would make a book out of it.

The search took me to the famed Urdu Bazaar on the southern face of the grand mosque. The place is, of course, a poor replica of the original. Mirza Ghalib had described its destruction by the British invaders thus: “This whole city has become a desert. Delhi people still pride themselves on Delhi language! What pathetic faith! My dear man, when the Urdu Bazaar is no more, where is Urdu? By God, Delhi is no more a city, but a camp, a cantonment.” That was in 1857. By the time Delhi hobbled back to its feet, 1947 came and along with it more death and destruction, and this time with helpless refugees in tow, most of them robbed of their last penny in what became Pakistan.

Apart from an elderly man who still ekes out a living by translating application forms from Hindi or English into Urdu in *nasta'liq* script, there was no one around to evince interest in the Anis project. There he was, perched precariously on a plastic stool in a small side-lane off the Urdu Bazaar. Clad in a crumpled suit and tie, he smiled politely in the knowledge that he would not be equal to the task. It did not take long for him to admit he was slow and of little use as a calligrapher for what he thought was an ambitious book. Having said that he resumed patiently working on a cash voucher. Someone had proffered it for a quick transcription, for a small fee.

There were no real calligraphists left anymore, a shopkeeper whispered to me trying to ease my frustration. He offered a cup of tea, a possible consolation for the disappearance of calligraphers from Old Delhi. Get it typed, he advised. That's the best way these days. I asked him if he could get the Mir Anis book composed for me, and perhaps sell

a few copies too. He comforted me instead with a couple of fairly oldish books on Anis. Akbar Hyderi, a Kashmiri scholar whose work on Anis was admired by Josh Malihabadi among others, wrote two of them. About my mother's book the shopkeeper was apologetic. "I wish I could help. But there is no room for literary books anymore. There is only one demand: religion and more religion."

For me there is never a visit to Jama Masjid that is complete without visiting Ghalib's *ḥavēlī*, or what remains of the house once occupied by the nineteenth-century word magician. Along the way from the rickshaw I saw wall posters with pictures of Kapil Sibal. He is India's minister for science and technology, elected to the Lok Sabha as a Congress Party MP from Old Delhi. Needless to say, Mr. Sibal's portfolio has had little impact on the lives of his Muslim constituents. They elected him because he seemed secular enough and the other candidate belonged to the Hindu right.

Mr. Sibal was fond of the Bush administration and he was chosen as the minister in waiting when President George W. Bush came visiting in 2006. It was a strange equation. Muslims from Jama Masjid who were jailed for opposing the Bush visit had elected his chief Indian ideologue as their representative in Parliament. Now, you could blow the Gaza Strip to smithereens, but you would never find a Palestinian voting an Arab Kapil Sibal into Parliament. That's the difference between a living people and the ghettoized.

Visiting Ghalib's *ḥavēlī* in Galī Qāsimjān was a heartbreaking affair. Visiting hours were over but the tall, wooden gates were still open with no one guarding the entrance. As I went in and pored over the facsimiles of the manuscripts once again, I noticed that in the list of food items Ghalib is thought to have liked, they have included various meats, kebabs, vegetables, and the hookah. The Government of India was obviously too embarrassed to admit that Ghalib loved his drinks, and that he celebrated the tippler in dozens of his beautiful couplets.

The unnecessary censorship was not the only problem I noticed this time. A portly man, probably hurrying to the mosque, had no inhibition in urinating against the wall, followed by quick ablutions and a prompt departure. There is a telephone booth and a beauty parlor in the other half of the *ḥavēlī*. I complained to the owner about the man who had just defiled what is a place of sacred pilgrimage to millions of Ghalib fans from across the world. His reply was unnerving. People had to find somewhere to ease themselves, so it was normal for passersby to use the *ḥavēlī* as a makeshift toilet.

Returning to the mosque, I headed for its eastern wall where a cluster

of shops sell a range of things from heavy motors to old music. My favorite shop is number 256 because its owner has collected some of the oldest 78-rpm records. Gauharjan and Kamla Jharia are passé. He played an old Hindi film song from the 1950s with music composed by the legendary Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. But you would have to wade through squalor and human filth to reach there. If you have a sensitive nose, you can catch whiffs of crude heroin and hashish that young boys and girls are smoking. Right there, two young women—sisters as it turned out—were hurling unprintable abuses at each other. And a man nearby smiled indulgently.

I am told that nights in the slums are hell for women and children alike. The day looks slightly better. For example, there was this policeman sitting by a metal detector to prevent terrorists from entering the Jama Masjid. Mir Anis will have to find a welcome somewhere else. □

—JAWED NAQVI

[Gratefully reproduced from *Dawn* (Karachi) (Internet Edition, World Section) 12 February 2009. Edited for the *AUS*.]