

## Reviews

### *Muhammad Sadiq and the Historiography of Urdu Literature*

*A History of Urdu Literature*. By MUHAMMAD SADIQ. Oxford University Press: Delhi; second edition, revised and enlarged, 1984. Pp. xv, 652. Rs 225/\$39.50.

Following in a worthy line of English histories of Urdu literature, particularly those by Ram Babu Saksena<sup>1</sup> and T. G. Bailey<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Sadiq's *A History of Urdu Literature*, first published in 1964,<sup>3</sup> proved itself by superseding practically all histories of the subject. It quickly established itself as *the* history of Urdu literature. The monument was raised to the achievement of five hundred years of Urdu's 'living tradition,' with its beginnings in the sixteenth century in the Deccan. The older literature in Urdu (rather like Old English, and going back to the twelfth century according to some Urdu scholars),<sup>4</sup> in scripts other than the standard Persian, is recognized in both the editions though not gone into. The 'Preface to the Second Edition' explains convincingly that the works in question are difficult to evaluate from the standpoint of style, as they are written in an unfamiliar idiom, and for that reason 'they have their value for the student of the Urdu language'; thus they may become accessible some day to the student of literature as well.

The book is divided in two parts, and each part is preceded by a chapter titled 'The Historical Background' and symmetrically closes with one titled 'Conclusion'. Part I, a little less than one half of the book, brings the story of Urdu Literature through the Middle Ages to the advent of the British in the Subcontinent and 'The Age of Ghalib'; while Part II concentrates on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Medieval Urdu poetry, Ghalib, and Iqbal receive exemplary critical treatment and excellent chapters overall; that Iqbal is given a full chapter to himself alone in the present edition is an improvement on the previous omnibus titled 'Muhammad Iqbal, Chakbast, Hafiz Jalandhari,' creating need and room for another now called 'Iqbal's Contemporaries,' and yet another, 'Firaq, Josh, Hafiz and Others'. A separate chapter is devoted to Nazir Akbarabdi as well, in Part I, as against the sub-chapter status in the earlier edition. Also, the new sections on 'Humorous Verse', 'Humorists' (Prose), and 'Sketch, Autobiography and Travel Writing' add dimensions

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Urdu Literature* (Allahabad, 1927).

<sup>2</sup> *A History of Urdu Literature* (Calcutta, 1932).

<sup>3</sup> (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> See the remarks made by Ahmed Ali in the introductory chapter of *The Golden Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), as well as the early-period surveys in Jamil Jalibi's *Tarikh-e Abad-e Urdu*, vol. I (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Adab, 1975; vol. II of this history appeared in two parts in 1984) and Saleem Akhter's *Urdu Adab ki Mukhtasir-tareen Tarikh* (Sang-e Meil Publications, 1971; Eighth Edition, 1981).

which need to be better known and understood by the Urdu scholarship. Both Part I and Part II generally benefit from revision, reorganization, amplification, and rewriting, though there are exceptions to which I shall turn in a moment.

Certainly the fact that the present edition adds a good two hundred pages to the book is impressive in itself. It is even better that it incorporates the material contained in Sadiq's *Twentieth Century Urdu Literature*,<sup>5</sup> which the author decided to exclude as he finished the manuscript in 1957 (for publication in 1964). Now there is the occasion for a consideration of the post-Iqbal literature. This edition evidences superior organization (new chapters and appendices), and wider scope and a still richer substance, greater room for Sadiq's trenchant *obiter dicta*, a more polemical preface that avers the superiority of literary standards over those of any other kind, judgement without asperity, and throughout, as before, a strong underpinning of mid-century EngLit which any section of the book will readily betray.

The excellence of this *History* must be acknowledged with a warning about what *not* to expect: a comprehensive bibliography and index. There is a section, 'References and Notes', and an 'Index', too, but these are barely adequate. Use or awareness of recent Urdu scholarship is evident in places but not acknowledged bibliographically. The 'Criticism and Research' section in the chapter (XXIV) titled 'Miscellaneous Prose' is fine hard-nosed commentary on a number of major contemporary Urdu critics, but their works are not documented in detail. The printing of this volume being inferior to that of the earlier edition, the presentation is certainly not helped by the bagful of errors and inconsistencies of text. Misspelling or misprinting aside, of which there is plenty, the particulars are not reliable. Often the date of publication of items noted is missing, sometimes given, sometimes given correctly. The absence and/or inaccuracies of fact, such as the 'dates of birth and death', in the former *tazkirahs* [annals/chronicles] are called 'serious omissions' (p. 41). In the *History*, the dates of birth and death are given for Firaq, but not for Josh. Rashed receives six pages with dates; Faiz, three pages without dates (or a date); and so on.

The present edition gives the date of the founding of the Progressive Writers' Association as 1938 (p. 534), not 1936 as in Sadiq's *Twentieth Century Urdu Literature*,<sup>6</sup> obviously the gremlin's work, not Sadiq's. Rashed's dates of birth and death are given as 1912–1976, while recent issues of *The Toronto South Asian Review*<sup>7</sup> and the *Annual of Urdu Studies*<sup>8</sup> are certain of 1910–1975 and d. 1975, respectively. The date of birth given in Sadiq's *Twentieth Century Urdu Literature* is 1910. Clearly, further verification is required.

Histories are continually nagged by their narrative decisions, by their choices of content and style, and Sadiq in his preface calls the matter of 'inclusion and exclusion' nothing but 'a very trying question', pleading for a 'personal standard'. Most of the choices made in this volume, I must concede immediately, are judicious to a high degree within the author's self-imposed limits (particularly in the modern period). The exclusions, according to him, are not 'on account of . . . ignorance', but rather 'intentional'. The idea of self-

<sup>5</sup> (Baroda, India: Padmaja Publications, 1947).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Toronto, vol. I, no. 2 (Summer 1982), p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> Chicago, no. 4 (1984), p. 126.

imposed limits is very useful indeed, for otherwise stretching the material to cover the same ground, as we occasionally notice, is neither dependable history nor good writing. The chapter (XXV) on 'Drama', for example, gets more pages in the Second Edition but adds little to the insights contained in its earlier version in the original book. Sadiq does not think much of the contemporary novel (no mention of Abdullah Hussein, Intizar Hussain, Enver Sajjad and others), and instead devotes a chapter to the short story, where also one may not find all the well-known names. Qurratul-ain Haider is discussed, but without Sadiq's usual critical vigour. While the chapter on drama is too diffuse and dated (no notice of recent developments), the one on journalism is both particular and illuminating, even if rather short.

But, perhaps, some of these are niggling points, and resipiscence will be followed by a reprint which will quickly correct the accidentals and infelicities of a mechanical kind. Indeed, Sadiq's compact, one-volume *History* does more than any other for the entire body of Urdu Literature; but a need is felt already for separate studies and histories to understand in greater detail certain movements and institutions which have influenced, and partly directed, the course of Urdu Literature particularly in this century. Some outstanding examples of such an endeavour are *Urdu Men Taraqqi-pasand Adabi Tahrik* ['The Progressive Literary Movement in Urdu'] by Khalilur Rahman Azmi,<sup>9</sup> 'Urdu Poetry, 1935–1970: The Progressive Episode' by Carlo Coppola,<sup>10</sup> and *Halqa-e Arbab-e Zauq* ['Circle of the Persons of Good Taste'—which is said to be one of the oldest continuously active literary groups of its kind in the world] by Yunus Jawaid.<sup>11</sup>

Besides adding much new material, Sadiq *has* revised the text, including the chapter titled 'Characteristics of Medieval Urdu Poetry.' In view of the 1970s revivalism in Pakistan and elsewhere (with the so-called Islamic legislation and state-appointed Prayer Wardens and *Muhtasibs* in 1980s), one wonders why Sadiq let stand the following without revision: (*Muhtasib* is the superintendent of police/ombudsman)

It is well to remember that the Persian poetry so copied by Urdu poets, was not conventional at one stage. When the early Persian poet declaims against the *Muhtasib*, or unmarks the strait-laced, hypocritical theologian, or describes his mystical yearnings, or his rapture over the wine-cup, he is true to himself as well as his age. But to take an extreme example, when an Urdu poet today describes his encounter with the *Muhtasib*, he is not true either to himself or his age. From this it naturally follows that great care should be taken in deducing a poet's habits, views, or ideas from his compositions. Much of the riot and rebellion in our poetry is merely a make-believe, or an academic exercise, and should not be taken as a transcript of experience, unless there is strong internal and external evidence to support the conclusion. And the same is true of mystical and moral yearnings . . .

(p. 41; p. 33, First Edition)

I wonder if the recent socio-political developments in the region have not already had the effect of reconverting convention into a degree of experience, thus necessitating a reconsideration of the status of *ghazal*, as well as of the whole

<sup>9</sup> (Aligarh, India, 1972).

<sup>10</sup> Unpublished Ph.D.diss., University of Chicago, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> (Lahore, Pakistan, 1984).

question of 'decadence' (at least formal decadence) in Urdu poetry. The question to ponder is whether the new context has recharged the powers of this old form, given it a fresh validity, and allowed it once again to shape the raw present reality into genuine esthetic experience. As for the passage above, surely some periodization is called for, as well as the need always to localize levels of realism and representation, symbolism, convention, and abstraction.

Sadiq follows Anatole France's idea of criticism as 'the adventures of a soul among masterpieces—the response of a cultured mind to the impact of a work of art' and 'in addition to the biographical and historical methods [makes] a cautious use of the psychological method' so that 'the significance of a work of art is more thoroughly grasped'. In that the main emphasis is on 'movements', 'tendencies', and 'insights into the minds of the writers' (These quotations are from 'Preface to the First Edition'), the spirit of the work is French, as of E. Legouis and L. Cazamian with regard to English Literature, seeking to satisfy in their *A History of English Literature* 'that need for connected composition, for the presentment of a chain of facts and ideas, without which the French do not easily assimilate the matter they study'<sup>12</sup>; even as Sadiq has the instinctive understanding of his subject, a concrete style, and does not fail to note the workings of genius or eccentricity. Sadiq's use of method is characterized by a firm grasp of the historical background (personal, socio-economic, literary) and deft summarizing of literary works, matched by an equally penetrating stylistic analysis. Scholarship remains at the service of intelligent criticism, but hardly ever gets the better of it. Minor figures are glossed apace, critical points are illustrated from texts, and the commentary is laced with learned quotation, is lively, pointed, and persuasive.

Although post-Iqbal modern developments are recorded and discussed in this work, yet only insofar as they relate to the figures and movements which had made their weight felt by mid-twentieth century. Sadiq believes that 'the Partition [of India] offers a convenient halting place. It is not only a watershed in history, it is equally so in literature'. Notwithstanding certain career descriptions far into the later decades, effective history stops before the transition of the 1960s and Sadiq, modest though knowing historian, closes the matter by stating that he has 'nothing worthwhile to say about the present state of Urdu Literature'. 'But,' he notes, 'the depressing conditions prevailing in the country [Pakistan] since the Partition, the disillusion suffered, and the extinction of high hopes leaves them [the writers] completely isolated. They lack the earnestness which life at its greatest and most fruitful brings in its wake' (All these quotations are from pp. 620–1). Sadiq suggests, certainly, that a separate history of contemporary Urdu literature since 1947 is required. Account must be taken now of not only the writing in Pakistan and India, where Urdu is a major language (particularly in Pakistan, where it is pre-eminent), but also of Urdu writing overseas, which has increased fast in both volume and quality over the last half century and begun to command serious attention. That Urdu, variously spoken outside South Asia in dozens of countries, is now generative of imaginative literature is no longer news; and for

<sup>12</sup> 'General Introduction', *A History of English Literature*, Revised Edition, translated from French by Helen Douglas Irvine (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1930, with major revisions and additions in 1954, 1957, 1964 and 1967).

some years now institutions and forms like London's Urdu Markaz and Toronto's fine magazine, *Urdu International*, have been providing just such a picture.<sup>13</sup> The passing away in 1984 of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Rajinder Singh Bedi, and Muhammad Sadiq himself (no less than the deaths in early 1980s of such major Urdu writers as Josh, Firaq, Ehsan Danish, Hafeez Jallandhari, Khadija Mastoor and Ghulam Abbas) marks the passing of an era. To record and evaluate it is a task of some magnitude, which the future historian/s will need a good deal besides courage to undertake. Muhammad Sadiq's concise *History of Urdu Literature* (in its present complete form) is a high milestone of historiography of Urdu Literature, and surely a hard act to follow.

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*Canal Irrigation in British India: Perspectives on Technological Change in a Peasant Economy.* By I. STONE. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1984.

India's rural economy has experienced significant growth since the mid-1960s under the package of high-yielding seeds, tube wells, electrification, fertilizer and, latterly, tractors which have gone to make up the 'Green Revolution'. Yields of wheat, maize and rice have been raised substantially and overall grain production has almost doubled in less than two decades.<sup>1</sup> With this transformation in the rural environment much of the mid-1960s Malthusian gloom has withered away. This change in outlook has extended to economic historians in their interpretation of developments in late nineteenth-century India—another period of 'agricultural revolution' in many areas under the twin impulses of the proudest achievements of the Raj, railways and canal irrigation. During the 1960s and early 1970s the works of Bhatia and Whitcombe upheld the 'Nationalist' orthodoxy in viewing the late nineteenth century as a period of rising demographic pressure, holding fractionalization and declining per capita food availability as railways and canals encouraged an increasing shift towards cash crop production by hard-pressed cultivators in the clutches of vampire-like creditors.<sup>2</sup> The great famines of 1876–80 and 1896–1900 were viewed as the baneful outcome of this inexorable agrarian crisis. The debate on late nineteenth-century agrarian change in colonial India was reopened in 1966 by

<sup>13</sup> Urdu writers of European origin, particularly during the two centuries up to 1947, also belong to the history of Urdu Literature, and Ram Babu Saksena pioneered such scholarly interest with his *European and Indo-European Poets of Urdu and Persian* (Lucknow, 1941), and a recent special issue of the magazine *Afkar* (Karachi, no. 133, April 1981) acknowledged their significance by publishing a fine article and selections from the work of these poets.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, G. Etienne, *India's Changing Rural Scene, 1963–79* (Oxford, 1982), ch. 13; J. W. Mellor, *The New Economics of Growth* (London, 1976), table II–2 p. 39; *The Economist*, 18 August 1984, 'The Green Revolution Marches On', pp. 56–7.

<sup>2</sup> B. M. Bhatia, *Famines in India: A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India (1860–1965)* (London, 1967); E. Whitcombe, *Agrarian Relations in Northern India, vol. 1, The United Provinces under British Rule, 1860–1900* (Berkeley, California 1971).