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LOOKING FOR COMMON GROUND:
Aspects of Cultural Production in Hindi/Urdu, 1900-1947

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2012

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DECLARATION

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David J. Lunn
September 2012

ABSTRACT

This study follows scholarship that has charted the processes by which Hindi and Urdu were differentiated, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as both distinct and mutually exclusive languages and also as markers of communal and religious identity. Through an examination of cultural production and producers in the late-colonial period, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, it explores spaces, practices and discourses of commonality in journals and associations, in an effort to complicate and challenge the binaries of Hindi/Hindu and Urdu/Muslim, which are often seen as having been hegemonic in this period.

Whether in terms of invocations of a shared literary and cultural inheritance, the evolution of or insistence upon mixed literary registers, discourses of Hindustani as the language of the common people, or articulations of humanistic and secular ideals of tolerance, this study shows how a significant number of literary and cultural producers were invested in denying and overcoming the rigidity of linguistic and communal exclusivities at this time of increasingly strident nationalisms and normative impulses. It examines a variety of fora and forms – literary institutions such as the Hindustani Academy and journals like *Hindustānī* and *Zamāna*, poetry, short prose literature, and film – to chart the ways in which such strategies and impulses worked across them. It shows historical modes of resistance to such exclusive socio-linguistic norms to be widespread during the period, and offers speculations on their relevance to current tastes and practices.

In stressing contemporaneous multilingual practices of production and consumption, this thesis also makes a case for the necessity of reading the South Asian literary and cultural field comparatively and inter-linguistically. It offers insights into the literary and cultural expression of political ideologies of secularism, and seeks to contribute to broader debates on the dynamics of cultural production in historically multi-lingual contexts.

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 NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

All translations from Hindi or Urdu are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Rather than attempt to devise a unified system to encompass both the nagari and nastaliq scripts, I have chosen instead to use separate systems based on those used in the following publications: for nagari, R.S. McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*; for nastaliq, J.D. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English*.

In certain cases, I have harmonised the two: for instance, given the common phonetic value of “ś”, I have preferred this to Platts’ “sh”. In others, a degree of ambiguity exists: “ṣ” is commonly used to represent two different sounds in nagari and nastaliq; and I have retained McGregor’s use of “ṝ” for nagari’s *chandrabindu* nasalisation, along with Platts’ “ñ” for nastaliq’s *nun ghunna*. It seems that those readers familiar with the scripts and languages in question will recognise, and I hope be comfortable with, the differences, however. Transliterations have been made according to the script of the source in question. The full systems are listed below.

Devanagari

अ a आ ā इ i ई ī उ u ऊ ū ऋ ṛ
ए e ऐ ai ओ o औ au

क k कृ q ख kh ख़ kh ग g ग़ gh घ gh ङ ṅ
च c छ ch ज j ज़ z झ jh ञ ṅ
ट ṭ ठ ṭh ड ḍ ड़ ṝ ढ ḍh ढ़ ṝh ण ṇ
त t थ th द d ध dh न n
प p फ ph फ़ f ब b भ bh म m
य y र r ल l व v
श ś ष ṣ स s
ह h
ँ m

Nastaliq

ا a/i/u
ب b پ p ت t ٹ ṭ ث ṭh
ج j چ c ح ḥ خ kh
د d ڈ ḍ ذ z
ر r ژ ṝ ز z ژ zh
س s ش ś ص ṣ ض ṣ ط ṭ ظ ṣ
ع ‘ غ gh ف f ق q ک k ل l م m ن n
و v/o/ū ه h ی y/ī ū ṅ
ن (tanvīn) ڤ (silent و as in khyaaja) e (izafat)

So let us not place any particular value on the city's name. Like all big cities it was made up of irregularity, change, forward spurts, failures to keep step, collisions of objects and interests, punctuated by unfathomable silences; made up of pathways and untrodden ways, of one great rhythmic beat as well as the chronic discord and mutual displacement of all its contending rhythms. All in all, it was like a boiling bubble inside a pot made of the durable stuff of buildings, laws, regulations, and historical traditions.

– Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*

Does character develop over time? In novels, of course it does: otherwise there wouldn't be much of a story. But in life? I sometimes wonder. Our attitudes and opinions change, we develop new habits and eccentricities; but that's something different, more like decoration. Perhaps character resembles intelligence, except that character peaks a little later: between twenty and thirty, say. And after that, we're just stuck with what we've got. We're on our own. If so, that would explain a lot of lives, wouldn't it? And also – if this isn't too grand a word – our tragedy.

– Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*

LOOKING FOR COMMON GROUND

Sometime in the early 1940s, the prominent Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto weighed in on the Hindi-Urdu controversy with his trademark irony and wit. He prefaced his short story cum essay, 'Hindī aur Urdū' ('Hindi and Urdu'), with a note of bewilderment: prominent figures in literature and politics such as M.K. Gandhi, Tara Chand and Abdul Haq may have understood the controversy, but not Manto; the communal supporters of one language or the other were, to him, inexplicably wasting their time; and as his own attempt to address the issue, he could produce only the following fictional conversation. This takes place between two characters – Munshi Narain Prashad and Mirza Muhammad Iqbal – as they discuss the relative merits not of Hindi and Urdu *per se*, but of lemon and soda. Manto's allegory is at once seemingly straightforward, yet also deeply nuanced. To break it down to its simplest form, the Hindu Munshi prefers and extols the benefits of lemon – that is, we assume, Hindi – while the Muslim Iqbal maintains that soda, or Urdu, is superior. Neither denies that the other's preferred drink might have some merit, but equally neither is willing to adopt the drink of the other. Neither is able to give conclusive reasons why their preferred drink is superior, instead relying on decidedly spurious claims regarding the health benefits of one drink or the other, and instead of articulating their own opinions on lemon or soda respectively, both simply state that they had always been told by their elders

that their preferred candidate was the better drink. For a moment it seems that a mixture of lemon and soda might provide a solution, being palatable to both, yet even this attempt fails on the grounds of order, primacy, and nomenclature:

MUNŚĪ: *Dekhie is kā faiṣlah yūn ho saktā hai ki leman aur soḍā donoñ miks kar le jāēñ.*

IQBĀL: *Mujhe koī e'tirāz nahīñ.*

MUNŚĪ: *To is khālī glās meñ ādhā soḍā ḍāl dījie.*

IQBĀL: *Āp hī apnā ādhā leman ḍāl deñ – maiñ ba'd meñ soḍā ḍāl dūngā.*

MUNŚĪ: *Yeh to koī bāt na hotī. Pahle āp soḍā kyoñ nahīñ ḍālte.*

IQBĀL: *Maiñ soḍā leman miksḍ pīnā cāhtā hūñ.*

MUNŚĪ: *Aur maiñ leman soḍā miksḍ pīnā cāhtā hūñ.*

MUNSHI: Look, we can settle the matter by mixing the two.

IQBAL: I have no objection to that.

MUNSHI: Well then, fill this glass halfway with soda.

IQBAL: Why don't you fill half the glass with your lemon? I'll pour my soda after that.

MUNSHI: Makes no sense. Why don't you pour your soda first?

IQBAL: Because I want to drink soda-lemon mixed.

MUNSHI: And I want lemon-soda mixed.¹

So ends their attempt at compromise or coexistence – in failure, stalemate, and, apparently from Manto's perspective, frustrating banality.

Yet Manto's piece highlights many of the issues most pertinent to the Hindi-Urdu controversy, and not merely its apparent intractability. The space between the preamble and the text itself symbolises the slippage between the domain of high nationalist politics – that occupied by the likes of Gandhi, Haq, and Tara Chand – and the lived, day-to-day reality of the language issue as experienced by at least some of its professional practitioners and ordinary users. Manto's self-confessed inability to understand the issue, while certainly a rhetorical device, suggests a dissonance between discussions of the language issue at the political level and the more grounded domain of literary endeavour and

¹ Saadat Hasan Manto, 'Hindī aur Urdū', *Manto ke mazāmin* (Delhi: Saqi Book Depot, 1997 [1942]) 71-5, 75, tr. Muhammad Umar Memon, 'Hindi and Urdu', *Annual of Urdu Studies* 25 (2010) 205-8, 207-8.

creation. On the other hand, the characters themselves are very probably references to the then recently deceased Urdu and Persian poet Muhammad Iqbal and Hindi author Jaysankar Prasad, litterateurs who had strongly advocated Persianised Urdu and Sanskritized Hindi respectively.² Thus, Manto highlights the complicity of sections of the literati in this affair. The steadfast allegiance of each character to his preferred drink references the predominant, though not exclusive, communal affiliations with language – Hindi with Hindu, Urdu with Muslim – that prevailed at the time. Meanwhile, the recourse by each to the justification that they preferred one drink to the other because they had been told by their elders of its superiority reminds us of the importance of inherited tastes, and prejudices, in the context of rapidly shifting linguistic structures and political imperatives.

The history of Hindi and Urdu, particularly the process of their differentiation both as languages and also as signifiers of religious and communal affiliations in the course of 19th and early 20th century north India, has been examined at some length.³ Given this

² Christine Everaert makes the same, albeit more tentative, observation in her brief discussion of the story. See Christine Everaert, *Tracing the Boundaries between Hindi and Urdu: Lost and Added in Translation between 20th Century Short Stories* (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 67-8.

³ The classic, albeit problematic (for its overly straightforward genealogy of Sanskrit–Apabhramsha–Hindi), account is Amrit Rai, *A House Divided: The Origin and Development of Hindi/Hindavi* (Delhi: OUP, 1984). The most succinct study of the politics of this process of division is probably that of Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Oxford: OUP, 1994). For an account of the efforts of one prominent litterateur to promote Hindi in the 19th century, as well as a detailed mapping of the processes through which the cause of Hindi became associated with a revivalist Hindu nationalism, see Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras* (New Delhi: OUP, 1997). For details on the broader institutionalization of standardized, formalized and Sanskritized Hindi in contradistinction to Hindustani and Urdu in the high nationalist period, see Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2002). See also Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001) for a Hindi scholar's clear

carefully documented divergence, both literary histories and studies of the north Indian public sphere have until recently tended to proceed from the commonly held assumption that sees the literary and print worlds of Hindi and Urdu as having been largely if not wholly distinct during the nationalist period, or have at least examined them in relative isolation.⁴ This said, more recent studies have highlighted aspects of interrelatedness between these worlds, particularly in terms of the dynamics of commercial publishing,⁵ the proliferation of popular genres across barriers of script and language,⁶ and the broader cultural linkages that persisted prior to the hardening of linguistic and literary divisions.⁷

These latter efforts have demonstrated the limitations that exist in exclusive and

summary of the language's long-standing imbrication with communal and regional politics and *cri de coeur* for its redemption from the same. The best account of the historical development of Urdu up to 1850, though one that places rather too much faith in the machinations of colonial linguists and policy makers in the Hindi-Urdu controversy, is Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (New Delhi: OUP, 2001). A more recent study locates the roots of the "Islamization" of Urdu in the 17th century Deccan, further back than Amrit Rai's suggested 18th century, though this is probably best viewed as one poetic and artistic strain among many rather than a full-fledged effort to 'purify' the language along linguistic and aesthetic criteria – see Tariq Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011).

⁴ This assumption applies, in the main, to pre- and post-independence literary histories of both Urdu (for example, T. Grahame Bailey, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Karachi: OUP, 2008 [1932]), Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Delhi: OUP, 1984 [1964]), Ram Babu Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1999 [1927])) and Hindi (for example, R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974), Ramchandra Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās* (Benares: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1990 [1940])), as well as to studies of the public sphere of the period (for example, Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*) and those of particular literary moments (for instance, the largely Urdu-centric studies of the Progressive Writers Association such as Talat Ahmed, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009) and Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005)).

⁵ Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

⁶ Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literatures and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009).

⁷ See the essays in Francesca Orsini ed. *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010).

monolingual perspectives on literary and cultural production in India, the inadequacy of literary-historical approaches that seek to carve out wholly distinct identities and genealogies for Hindi and Urdu language and literature, and the fruitfulness of considering languages, literary genres, tastes and practices as fluid and subject to persistent reinvention, reinterpretation and cross-fertilisation.

Building on just such insights, this study seeks to apply a similarly inclusive and expansive perspective to the early 20th century Indian context. Its motivation is the evidence of the existence of significant 'grey areas' between the poles of Hindi/Hindu and Urdu/Muslim during this period, whether in the form of a discourse about Hindustani as the language of the people, the creation of mixed registers of literary language, or the invocation of a common literary heritage, the continued use of Urdu by Hindus, the incorporation of Urdu forms into Hindi commercial genres, and the decided malleability and instability of both register and genre in the face of the new media of film. These discourses and practices, as we shall see, were manifest not only in the world of print journals, but also in the realms of literary and cultural production more generally and in the building of institutions linked to literary and linguistic activities. The overarching hypothesis of this thesis is that despite the divergence there was in fact a significant amount of overlap, and indeed interaction and mutual awareness, between the realms and practitioners of Hindi and Urdu, and that these spheres of production are perhaps best considered in the context of a north Indian field of cultural production. Furthermore, I suggest that it was these grey areas that constituted a forum for the working out of a mode of cultural and societal coexistence that has been largely overlooked in literary, linguistic

and intellectual histories of the period. Finally, I hope to demonstrate how this situation is also important for our understanding of the region's political and social history, as it represents a largely unexplored forum in which ideas of 'community', 'nation', 'language', 'secularism', 'history' and 'modernity' were deployed and contested in vernacular forms.

Ultimately, and perhaps most profoundly, Manto's story-essay speaks to the search, no matter how frustrating or inconclusive it may be, for a cultural, literary and linguistic common ground by speakers and writers of Hindi and Urdu. It is this search that is both the project and the subject of this study, a study which explores the literary, cultural and linguistic common ground between Hindi and Urdu during the nationalist period, and analyses the attempts by members of the cultural establishment to find, or create, the same.

This introduction highlights the main areas of literary, linguistic and political history and scholarship of significance in the context of this thesis, before outlining the theoretical and methodological approaches that underpin this investigation of literary and cultural production across the Hindi-Urdu divide.

I BEFORE THE DIVIDE? THE LONG HISTORY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Any account of the conjoined and contested histories of Hindi and Urdu as languages and literatures begins with the issue of terminology. What is meant by each name changes according to time, place and speaker. Furthermore, these shifts lie at the heart of the historical and contemporary debates over the languages, their origins, and their

relationship; indeed, precision is itself elusive in such discussions. This issue is familiar to scholars of Hindi and Urdu: Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, for instance, writes of the “fortuity of nomenclature” that has contributed in significant measure to a degree of and continuing propensity for either inept or wilfully misleading literary and linguistic scholarship.⁸ Following him, our story must begin with the variety of historical terms that have been used to describe what today is known as Urdu, keeping in mind the distinction between linguistic and literary terminology.

Faruqi lists the following, in roughly chronological order, as precursors to the name Urdu: *Hindvī* (Hindavi), *Hindī*, *Dihlavī*, *Gujrī*, *Dakanī* and *Rekhtah*, with *Dakanī* persisting until the 19th century as the name for the variety of the language spoken to the south in the Deccan. As a succession of terms, they are best viewed as referring to “a plethora of north Indian vernacular dialects that from an outsider’s point of view were simply called Hindavi, (‘language of India’), or Bhakha, (‘language’), to distinguish it from Persian and Arabic on the one hand and from Sanskrit and Prakrit on the other.”⁹ The key point to take away from this terminological diversity is the absence of ‘Urdu’ as a name for this evolving language in its early days; as we shall see below, it was British colonial intervention that resulted in the first serious use of the name.

Urdu’s literary lineage is almost equally elusive, though literary scholars from the 19th century onwards have built a long genealogy. Faruqi, however, is rightly circumspect in declining to identify a definite start date for what we might describe as Urdu literature,

⁸ Faruqi, *Early Urdu*, 22.

⁹ Imre Bangha, ‘Rekhta: Poetry in Mixed Language: The Emergence of Khari Boli Literature in North India’ in Francesca Orsini ed. *Before the Divide*, 21-83, 22.

going only so far as to posit its possible origins in the non-extant Hindi *divān* (poetry collection) of Masud Saad Salman Lahori (1046-1121), and the later figure of Amir Khusrao (1253-1325), Sufi disciple and poet in the courts of the Delhi Sultanate, whose Persian verse suggests his limited interest in vernacular (or Hindavi) composition.¹⁰ As Imre Bangha has succinctly argued, such putative origins are impossible to substantiate textually,¹¹ and Faruqi is on more stable ground locating the serious beginning of Hindavi or Urdu literature in the figure of the 15th century Gujarati Sufi Shaikh Bahauddin Bajan (whose dates, 1388-1506, seem problematically long).¹² Even so, Bajan referred to his own poetry as variously “Hindavi”, “Dehlavi” and notably “Hindi”, and several of his poems had the simple title “Gujrī”. By the middle of the 15th century, then, substantial literary activity in Hindi/Hindavi had spread from modern-day Gujarat to the Deccan, intermingling in the hands of especially Sufi practitioners with the forms and metres of Persian poetry along with local vocabularies in a flowering of literary and cultural cross-fertilisation.¹³ In time, this literature was to continue its spread across the subcontinent, with a developed critical tradition, a “true beginning” in the north, and the eventual establishment of a peculiarly Delhi-based and court-sponsored idiom as the dominant form of what, by the end of the 18th century, was in the main referred to as Hindi or *Rekhtā*.¹⁴ Faruqi’s account makes plain the vagaries of historical literary and linguistic labels, which same imprecision was to have important consequences well in to the 20th century; it also highlights aspects of literary and

¹⁰ Faruqi, *Early Urdu*, 65-6.

¹¹ Bangha, ‘Rekhta’, 23-4.

¹² Faruqi, *Early Urdu*, 71.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78-8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109-10 and ch.4.

linguistic heterogeneity and interaction which retain a similarly enduring significance in the context of later language debates.

Yet the term ‘Hindi’, while certainly used in some instances to refer to what we now call Urdu, also has a wider valence.¹⁵ Revealing its Persian roots, the word referred to anything “Indian” in the hands of various, especially foreign, observers – hence the use of the term by the 11th century Arab traveller Al-Biruni to refer to Sanskrit.¹⁶ Yet Stuart McGregor asserts its predominant use to refer to a set of mixed north Indian vernaculars, exhibiting a greater or lesser extent of Persian vocabulary depending on context and user, from the 13th to the 18th century.¹⁷

In its modern usage – as in Modern Standard Hindi – however, ‘Hindi’ corresponds most readily with the Khari Boli dialect of this same set of mixed and inter-related languages, albeit purged of its Islamicate elements of Persian script and vocabulary. This Khari Boli existed in close relation to the dialects of Braj Bhasha and Avadhi, which became the preferred languages of composition for the *bhakti* and courtly traditions of north India by the 16th century. These languages and their expansive literatures have a problematic

¹⁵ Harish Trivedi has taken issue with Faruqi’s association of the term Hindi with historical Urdu, and advocates a stronger link between modern standard Hindi (a term he disavows) and older, non-standardised forms of the language (such as Braj Bhasha and Avadhi) on both literary and linguistic lines. I would support such a contention to an extent, while phrasing it in less combative terms: an acceptance of the essentially unfixed and indeterminate nature of these names, and their malleability in the hands of a variety of historical actors, seems prudent. See Harish Trivedi, ‘The Progress of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation’ in Sheldon Pollock ed. *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 958-1022, 960fn and 960-1.

¹⁶ Stuart McGregor, ‘The Progress of Hindi, Part 1: The Development of a Transregional Idiom’ in Pollock ed. *Literary Cultures in History*, 912-57, 912. This duality of terms is exemplified in the Urdu poetry of Mir Taqi Mir: see Bangha, ‘Rekhta’, 25.

¹⁷ Ibid.

place in the canon of Hindi literature, especially as it was formulated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (about which more below). For, beyond the devotional poetry of the likes of Tulsidas, Surdas, and Kabir lay the Rajput and Mughal courtly context of the early 17th century wherein, as Allison Busch has shown, Braj Bhasha was not only a “highly versatile poetic idiom”, but also “newly ascendant” as the medium for the composition of what has come to be known as *rīti*, or refined/high-style literature.¹⁸ As such, Braj received substantial court patronage – and possessed an attendant degree of prestige – prior to the ascendancy of the Delhi idiom of Hindi/Hindavi/Urdu in the 18th century.

In the context of the Mughal court and imperial system, however, Persian was the dominant language of culture and communication. With a subcontinental literary history and system of patronage stretching back to Mahmud of Ghazna in the 11th century, and an even longer history of peripheral interaction beforehand, it was the preeminent language of both cultural prestige and imperial administration.¹⁹ Yet the courtly context, whether in the Mughal capital of Delhi or the other sub-imperial or later successor state capitals, was a multi-lingual one, as the patronage systems make clear. This multi-lingualism extended beyond the narrow confines of the courts too, resulting in a complex and fluid linguistic economy. This linguistic fluidity was part and parcel of the multi-language portfolios that individuals possessed and drew upon – not to cement or affirm their broader social or

¹⁸ Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: OUP, 2011) 6-7. She notes that Braj Bhasha has its own inadequacies as a term, reinforcing the “Vaishnava orientation on the Hindi past” that focuses rather too narrowly on forms of Hindu devotionalism, and ignoring or eliding the wider uses of the language that she has so richly detailed. *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹ See Muzaffar Alam, ‘The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan’ in Pollock ed. *Literary Cultures*, 131-98; also Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘The Making of a Munshi’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (2004) 24(2): 61-72

religious identity, but in response to and as appropriate in varying social situations. This multi-lingual situation was jarringly unfamiliar to those new arrivals on the South Asian stage – the British – under whose influence great changes were wrought on the linguistic economy of South Asia.

II COLONIAL (MIS-)UNDERSTANDINGS

The colonial influence on the development and differentiation of Hindi and Urdu as languages and literatures is key to an understanding of the 20th century context, as litterateurs and politicians adopted, adapted or challenged colonial constructs of language and identity, and as they petitioned and interacted with all levels of the imperial government before and during this period.

As regards the role of the British colonial presence in the Hindi and Urdu debate, Alok Rai has pithily observed that “[t]he prime candidates for initiating the modern process of linguistic division are, by popular consent, the pedants of Fort William College.”²⁰ Faruqi certainly supports such a view: indeed, he goes further in ascribing to the Fort William professoriate and the colonial enterprise more broadly a clear motive, of divide and conquer, whereby the colonial state’s language policies become a sinister and cynical attempt to drive a wedge between India’s two largest religious denominations. Whether we think of this colonial intervention in terms of pedantry or predatory opportunism (and, given the well-intentioned efforts of Gilchrist and others, I hold more closely to the first

²⁰ Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, 21.

view), the fact remains that the colonial intervention at the start of the 19th century fundamentally altered the linguistic economy of South Asia.

Armed – or, rather, encumbered – with European-based Enlightenment understandings of an existential and fundamental link between language, community, and nation – that is, modern “linguistic ethnicity” – the colonial enterprise was focussed on a ‘discovery’ of “something which science told them had to be there...the root and standard forms of the vernacular.”²¹ The drive to codify produced an array of dictionaries, grammars and other linguistic works, while the perceived need to bypass supposedly unreliable native interpreters and to equip the officers of the East India Company to administer effectively its possessions resulted in the production of standardised teaching texts and primers for these newly disciplined languages of command.²² It was in furtherance of this cause that Fort William College was established in Calcutta in 1800, with John Borthwick Gilchrist as its newly minted Professor of “Hindustani”.²³

While allowing that instances of ‘Hindustani’, as both a language name and an adjective, occasionally occur in Persian texts of the 16th and 17th centuries, Faruqi is correct in attributing its wider diffusion, as a term denoting both a language and a citizen of India, to 18th century British philologists.²⁴ The desire to master what was perceived as the key language of everyday interaction, both in the Mughal court and beyond, led to an

²¹ David Washbrook, “To Each a Language of His Own’: Language, Culture, and Society in Colonial India’ in Penelope J. Corfield ed. *Language, History, and Class* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 179-203, 189-91.

²² Bernard Cohn, ‘Command of Language and the Language of Command’ in Ranajit Guha ed. *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: OUP, 1985), 276-329

²³ For a full account of the college, see Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College of Fort William* (Calcutta: Orion Publications, 1978).

²⁴ Faruqi, *Early Urdu*, 30

innumerable array of attempts at classification and codification from the 17th century onwards. Bernard Cohn lists some of the terms that were employed to denote this “vulgar” vernacular – ‘Moors’, ‘Indostan’, ‘Hindoostanic’, and ‘Hindowee’ among them – all of which came to be replaced by the term ‘Hindustani’ through, in particular, the work of John Gilchrist.²⁵ Gilchrist was determined to document this language, which he regarded as the true *lingua franca* of the subcontinent, and while his efforts have been derided as flawed and his competence as deficient,²⁶ many of his conceptualisations had a profound and lasting effect on both colonial and Indian understandings of the language question. Perhaps most significant is his understanding of ‘Hindustani’ as existing on a linguistic spectrum or continuum, an area of ‘authentic’ language located somewhere between the poles of what we would now refer to as Sanskritised Hindi and Perso-Arabicised Urdu. Thus he wrote of his frustration, while attempting to compile his English-Hindustani dictionary, with the tendency of his Indian interlocutors to supply him with terms he considered abstruse – they were

some of them with their mind’s eye roaming for far-fetched expressions on the deserts of Arabia, others were beating each bush and scampering over every mountain of Persia, while the rest were groping in the dark intricate mines and caverns of Sanskrit lexicography.²⁷

Correspondingly, David Lelyveld describes the three broad variations of Hindustani identified by Gilchrist as differing “according to the extent that they used Sanskrit, Persian,

²⁵ Cohn, ‘The Command of Language’, 300-1.

²⁶ Faruqi, *Early Urdu*, 33.

²⁷ John Gilchrist, *A Dictionary of English and Hindoostanee: part II* (Calcutta: 1790) xiv, quoted in David Lelyveld, ‘The Fate of Hindustani: Colonial Knowledge and the Project of a National Language’ in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer eds. *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 195.

and Arabic, or unmarked Hindi words”,²⁸ and Gilchrist’s preference for the latter was clear. However, the terminological confusion that dated to the plethora of terms (Moors, Hindustanic, etc.) was perpetuated through the colonial administration’s conflation of Hindustani with Urdu, clearly evinced in the replacement of Persian with vernaculars for the purposes of administration in 1837.²⁹

Yet even if a true middle Hindustani was Gilchrist’s ideal form of that aforementioned, ill-understood variety of vernaculars, the fact remains that the College’s major impact on the Hindi-Urdu linguistic landscape was through literary endeavours which served to codify the idea of literary duality (for more on this process, see §1.1), in tandem with Government language policies through the course of the 19th century. The model of linguistic ethnicity furthered the profoundly damaging misconception that Urdu, as it came to be described, was not only a product of the interaction between Persian vocabulary and script with Indic grammatical structures, but was the linguistic ‘property’ of India’s Muslims. Furthermore, if the Muslims were to be defined through a convenient coalescence of religious and linguistic markers, north Indian Hindus would be defined in a similarly slipshod manner – through Hindi.³⁰ Colonial teleologies thus set the stage for an enthusiastic appropriation of linguistic nationalism in the latter half of the century and, as chapter 1 in particular demonstrates, both these 19th century efforts and the governmental

²⁸ Lelyveld, ‘The Fate of Hindustani’, 196.

²⁹ The vernaculars that replaced Persian varied from province to province, and met with varying degrees of favour and resistance across the subcontinent. See King, *One Language*, 54-63 & chapter 3 passim. Gilchrist’s confusion regarding native classifications, distinctions and terms for language certainly did not add clarity – see Faruqi, *Early Urdu*, 34-5.

³⁰ See King, *One Language*, ch.3 for a full account of government language policy and its impact on the Hindi-Urdu debate.

apparatus in the 20th century retained a place of importance in the efforts of literary and linguistic reformers.

III LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND PROGRESS: THE WILL TO REFORM

The Indian rebellion of 1857 was to have a profound impact on not only the social and political landscape of South Asia, but also the languages and literatures of the region. The institution of direct Crown rule in the aftermath of the Mutiny, as it came to be called, accompanied a radical revision in the minds of India's colonial masters of their opinion of their Muslim subjects. David Lelyveld has summarised the new political reality facing this group in the wake of the revolt:

Widespread British antagonism to Muslims as the authors of the 1857 revolt, popular dissatisfaction with the 'amla class' as exploitative, efforts to encourage English educational prerequisites for office, and finally, a new kind of organised political campaign for Hindi as the language of the courts – all this threatened those Muslim families that had an interest in getting official employment for their sons.³¹

The political reality – that is, the final loss of ruling power by the Muslim elite, especially in Delhi (albeit largely symbolically) and Lucknow – was accompanied by the rise of a newly assertive Hindu intellectual elite, whose most profound contribution from a literary and linguistic standpoint was to campaign for, and secure, equal status for Hindi in the Nagari script first in the courts of the North West Provinces and Oudh, and then more widely. This linkage between language – or register – and script was important, and Alok Rai has argued persuasively that the movement's drive to “establish and gain recognition for an

³¹ David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Oxford: OUP, 2003 [1978]) 101.

irreducible and non-negotiable difference”, revealed in its opposition to both Persian and Kaithi script, was the unambiguous and proactive “impulse to divide” that was conspicuously absent from the colonialists’ early misunderstandings and later policy positions.³²

By this time, as Faruqi notes, Urdu “commanded a cultural prestige quite out of proportion to its antiquity.”³³ Combined with the colonial and later Hindu nationalist perception of its direct association with Muslims in general and Muslim elites and rulers in particular, this prestige became something of a handicap, as notions of decadence and irrelevance became inextricably bound up with the language itself.³⁴ Moreover, this situation was intensified by the “denigration of Urdu on moral and religious grounds” by Hindu proponents of its Hindi alternative.³⁵ Narratives of decline, and the will to progress, became widespread in the latter half of the century, with the rise of a number of Islamic reform movements, including the Aligarh movement with Sayyid Ahmad Khan as its leader.³⁶ A causal rhetorical link was formed – imbibed in no small part from colonial discourse – that saw the progress of a nation and a people as both mirrored in and directly impacted by the state of its literature.³⁷ The collective internalisation of such a discourse

³² Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, 51.

³³ Faruqi, *Early Urdu*, 17.

³⁴ On the supposed decadence of Urdu literature, see §2.I, and Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

³⁵ Faruqi, *Early Urdu*, 46.

³⁶ See Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation*, for details of Khan and his reform programme. For details of another prominent reform movement, see Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

³⁷ The colonial, Victorian ideas of degeneracy, immorality and particularly effeminacy had a profound impact on the literary traditions of Urdu in particular: see Scott Kugle, ‘Sultan Mahmud’s Makeover: Colonial Homophobia and the Persian-Urdu Literary Tradition’, and Carla Petievich,

found its early and enduring literary expressions in the works of Muhammad Husain Azad – with his literary canonical “battlefield triage”, *Āb-e ḥayāt* (‘The Water of Life’, 1880)³⁸ – and Altaf Husain Hali – with his own 1879 discourse on the role and themes of poetry, the *Muqaddama śī‘r-o śā‘irī*, and his resounding (albeit ambivalent) call to progress in his *Musaddas* (1879/1886).³⁹

Such concerns were in no way restricted to either the Urdu sphere or to Muslims, however. A similar narrative of decline prevailed among Hindu intellectuals, of which Bhartendu Harishchandra was the 19th century’s foremost exponent. In the famous speech he gave at Ballia, outside Benares, in 1884, entitled *Bhāratvarṣ kī unnati kaise ho saktī hai*, or ‘How can India progress’, Harishchandra called for the unity of all Hindus, the basing of reform, progress and uplift on dharma or religious duty, and a proactive investment in (implicitly Hindi) language and literature.⁴⁰ Harishchandra was centrally involved in efforts to promote Hindi, and particularly its Sanskritised variant, as the natural language of the Hindus of India, which had been warped and polluted by the advent of Muslim rule (and which, in this schema, it predated). Crucially for him, “the progress of one’s own language

‘Doganas and Zanakhis: The Invention and Subsequent Erasure of Urdu Poetry’s “Lesbian” Voice’, in Ruth Vanita ed. *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2002). For a discussion of the same discourses in particularly the Bengali context, see Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial masculinity: the ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

³⁸ Muhammad Husain Azad, *Āb-e ḥayāt: Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry*, tr. & ed. Frances Pritchett (New Delhi: OUP, 2001)

³⁹ For a translation, as well as a discussion of Hali’s somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the progress represented by the colonial presence, see Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed, *Hali’s Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam* (Delhi: OUP, 1997). On the *Muqaddama*, see Laurel Steele, ‘Hali and his *Muqaddamah*: The Creation of a Literary Attitude in Nineteenth Century India’, *Annual of Urdu Studies* 1 (1981) 1-45.

⁴⁰ Dalmia, *Nationalization*, 21-7.

is the root of all progress” (“*nij bhāṣā unnati ahai sab unnati ko mūl*”), thus linguistic advancement would spur the return of the Hindus to their rightful place as a dominant, unified group in a liberated polity.⁴¹

The existence and contours of these reformist drives are well known in the fields of Hindi and Urdu literary history. What I hope to show, however, is that examining the simultaneity and similarity of these movements across the divide between Hindi and Urdu throws light on shared discourses, practices and moments of resistance. Particularly evident in discussions on poetry (see §2.I and 2.II), and especially on questions of literary canon and canon formation, approaching these debates as part of a broader whole allows us to examine moments and spaces of cross over, mutual influence and free experimentation that clearly demonstrate the strong interrelatedness of Hindi and Urdu poetic practice in this period.

IV MULTI-CONGRUENT SYMBOLS: NATIONALIST IMPERATIVES

What needs to be stressed is that discourses of commonality were being articulated in the face of powerful political, communal and nationalist imperatives, many of which had subsumed language as a marker under a broader sectional identity. By the end of the 19th century, therefore, Hindi and Urdu had become associated to a significant extent in public discourse with discrete religious communities, though this process of identification was far from complete. Still, for our purposes, and by the time that this study takes as its starting point (1900), it was largely the norm to speak of Hindi and Urdu as two distinct languages.

⁴¹ Quoted in Dalmia, *Nationalization*, 202.

Hindi had become a rallying point in nationalist, and particularly Hindu nationalist, rhetoric. A number of societies had been established for its promotion, with the 1893 meeting of what was to become the *Nāgarī Pracārinī Sabhā* (Society for the Propagation of Nagari) presaging that organisation's successful campaign to have Hindi in the Nagari script placed on an equal footing with Urdu in the Persian script in the courts of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh. King characterises the 1900 decision as a permissive one, and a symbolic – rather than practical – victory for the Hindi/Nagari movement.⁴² Nevertheless, it provided the impetus for a range of responses from those, mainly Muslims, who saw the decision as a threat to Urdu's existence, expressions of anti-Hindu and anti-Congress sentiments, and eventually the establishment of the *Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdū* (Society for the Progress of Urdu) in 1903 as an offshoot of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental Education Conference, itself the forerunner of the All-India Muslim League.⁴³ Also particularly noteworthy was the *Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan* (Hindi Literature Institute), established in 1910 and, with explicit links to the Indian National Congress, quickly to become the most prominent and vocal advocate for Hindi as the national language of India.⁴⁴ The battle lines were well and truly drawn.

It was in the 1920s that what had been a largely provincial internecine contest between the partisans of Hindi and Urdu became a national concern. There had been consistent efforts towards the institutionalisation and standardisation of Hindi in the preceding decades by the likes of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (editor of the influential Hindi

⁴² King, *One Language*, 156.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 141-61.

⁴⁴ See Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, for an account of the Sammelan's activities (especially §5.4 and 2.1).

journal *Saraswati*), Madan Mohan Malaviya (founder and vice-chancellor of Benares Hindu University) and Shyam Sundar Das (a founding member of the Sabhā and, from 1922, head of the newly formed Hindi department at BHU). However;

The growing support for Hindi, and its politicization in the 1920s on the wave of Gandhi's nationalism, changed the context of the language issue quite dramatically: suddenly the question of a national language (*rāṣṭrabhāṣā*) appeared plausible, even urgent.⁴⁵

Rhetorically supported by the likes of Gandhi as an alternative to English (to an extent – see further discussion below), the idea of Hindi as the national language ran into trouble as soon as its supporters tried to take “concrete steps” towards its implementation in official contexts.⁴⁶ Offensive to Muslims in the Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani heartland, and never popular in other regions of India (especially the south), this rejection provoked a literary, cultural and political retrenchment among the Hindi elite, furthering the exclusionary and divisive trends already there. Yet as the national language debate moved into the 1930s, as Orsini demonstrates, these same literary elites and their institutions – particularly the Sāhitya Sammelan – emerged as the sources of authority within not merely the Hindi literary sphere, but the public debate at large.⁴⁷ Their determined lobbying of Congress during this period resulted in Hindi's eventual “pyrrhic victory”, with its claim to subsume and supersede Hindustani, Urdu and other so-called variants firmly established in the political realm, but with this same exclusivity ultimately limiting its potential to truly become *the* national language of post-Independence India.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 125.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 136-41.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, §5.4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 364.

We yet lack a detailed mapping of the late-colonial Urdu public sphere of anything like the thoroughness and expansiveness of Orsini's study of the Hindi, yet the broad contours of Urdu's own appropriation by an exclusivist nationalism, and eventual imbrication in the successful demands for the creation of a separate Muslim state – Pakistan – are reasonably well-known. Scholarly consensus has tended to see the struggles to preserve the position of Urdu as the exclusive language of administration in the United Provinces as the concern of an established Muslim elite,⁴⁹ manifested most prominently in the activities of the Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdū under the leadership of Abdul Haq. Haq took over the organisation in 1912 (and remained in charge until his death in Pakistan in 1961), and set about transforming its activities along lines very similar to that of the Sabhā.⁵⁰ Financially supported by the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Anjuman became the most important organisation advocating the defence of Urdu, and by virtue of its membership and activities associated it ever more closely with the Muslim community and Muslim nationalism.⁵¹ And the efforts of the Muslim League were crucial in this process: the League had supported Urdu against Hindi from an early stage,⁵² and a 1937 resolution formalised the League's

⁴⁹ See Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974) 127-38, for a summary of this process.

⁵⁰ King, *One Language*, 163-4.

⁵¹ Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

⁵² Tariq Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: OUP, 1998) 74-8. See the speech of H.M. Malak at the fourth session of the AIML in Nagpur, December 1910: "There cannot be a shadow of a doubt that Urdu is the lingua franca of India...A language which possesses such inherent capacity and virtues deserves the solid support of the community and the country."; also Resolution VIII of the same session: "...the League hopes and prays that the Government will be pleased to discountenance all such attempts to injure Urdu." Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada ed. *Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents: 1906-1947: volume 1, 1906-1924* (Islamabad: Quaid-i-Azam University, 2007 [1969]) 140 & 184.

position vis-à-vis the national language question. Urdu became in the hands of the political elite, along with Islam, “the only identity-marker which could transcend ethnic and local loyalties”, and thus a powerful tool and symbol in the construction of a religiously and linguistically defined identity.⁵³ The ultimate, albeit self-aggrandising affirmation of this trend was Abdul Haq’s declaration 14 years after independence: “Pakistan was not created by Jinnah, nor was it created by Iqbal; it was Urdu that created Pakistan”.⁵⁴

Yet it was precisely such positions and processes that many of the practices and subjects of this study actively or implicitly challenged, especially as they related to language and literature. Paul Brass cautions us to see nothing inevitable in this separation of distinct Hindu and Muslim nationalisms, or indeed in the eventual Partition of the sub-continent:

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, men in India – Hindus, Muslims and British – made choices which ultimately led to the partition of India. No responsible Muslim political leader of any consequence conceived such an idea before the late 1930s, no political organisation adopted it as its goal until the Muslim League did so in 1940, and the idea had no chance of success until the Muslim League demonstrated its persuasive power in the elections of 1946.⁵⁵

Inevitability is a seductive historical narrative, but it has little explanatory merit. Just as with politics and Partition, so too with language and literature: and the overlooked efforts towards reconciliation and compromise were present throughout this debate, on the political and literary levels. As I argue throughout, we need to turn to those neglected or elided sources – institutions seen as outliers in the political tussle surrounding language, discourses and experimental practices that lay outside the mainstream of increasingly

⁵³ Rahman, *Language and Politics*, 77-8.

⁵⁴ Abdul Haq, *Qadīm Urdū* (Karachi: Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu, 1961), quoted in Rai, *A House Divided*, 264.

⁵⁵ Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics*, 124.

exclusive literary canons, literary creations that proactively and explicitly challenged communalism and its associated violence, and new media forms that were disregarded by the cultural elites – in order to appreciate the full extent of this literary and linguistic resistance.

V THE CONCILIATORY URGE

The various literary, cultural and institutional attempts in the early 20th century to keep Hindi and Urdu together, to deny or minimize their distinctions, and to resist their increasingly exclusive communal associations, are the main focus of this study. However, there were also contemporary efforts in this direction in the political sphere, of which the most prominent was Gandhi's.

As noted above, Gandhi expressed strong support for Hindi as the national language of an independent and unified India.⁵⁶ However, this advocacy was primarily motivated by a desire to replace English, and emphatically not as a position taken against Urdu *per se*. Thus, he forced the Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan to adopt his position of “Hindi-Hindustani” in 1935 – a definition based on a shared, spoken language, and one which ignored or sought to transcend the divide of script.⁵⁷ As Lelyveld has argued, the search for an inclusive definition for Hindustani was one that occupied Gandhi throughout the period from 1916

⁵⁶ This discussion draws on that of David Lelyveld, ‘Words as Deeds: Gandhi and Language’, *Annual of Urdu Studies* 16 (2001) 64-75.

⁵⁷ Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 359-60.

until Partition,⁵⁸ and his ultimate failure to effect reconciliation is an enduring testament to the power and persistence of this issue.

Hindustani itself was and is a contested term (discussed above, and in much greater detail in chapter 1). However, it would seem that Gandhi's own vagueness only served to exacerbate the issue. As Alok Rai has pithily and accurately observed:

Gandhi's compromise formulation "Hindi *or* Hindustani" was doomed to failure. That "or" could denote either alterity or identity. It could mean either that Hindi was the *same* as Hindustani, so the mullah was up in arms, or that Hindustani was an *alternative* to Hindi, so the pandit, quite as pugnacious, would have none of it.⁵⁹

Gandhi's two-script solution was a compromise too vague proposed at a point too late for it to have any traction in the political realm, serving only to incense the partisans of both Hindi and Urdu in equal measure. His romanticisation of the Indian village, and of the imagined linguistic harmony to be found in the speech of villagers, was ultimately powerless in the face of entrenched elite interests and oppositional nationalisms.

Yet this idea of simplicity – in shared registers of communication, day-to-day speech, village life, the common man, and in simple religion – was a powerful motif. As I examine at some length in chapter 3, this idea was employed to great effect by Hindi and Urdu short story writers in particular, and used in this context to advance a conciliatory argument of tolerance and co-existence based on shared understandings of humanism as the bedrock of both Hinduism and Islam. Furthermore, and perhaps regrettably, Gandhi had no appreciation for or interest in the cinema, which as I argue in chapter 4 was the realm in which Hindustani came to be most consistently employed. However, even this

⁵⁸ Lelyveld, 'The Fate of Hindustani'.

⁵⁹ Alok Rai, 'The Persistence of Hindustani', *Annual of Urdu Studies* 20 (2005) 135-44, 140.

cinematic realm of Hindustani highlights one of the major issues that advocates of Hindustani had to address: that of the perceived narrowness of a simplistic, restricted, register that, in eschewing highly Sanskritised or Persianised registers, could not possibly function as the language of either serious literature or educated communication (see §1.V for a reading of a selection of pieces on this issue). Was Hindustani a dumbed down compromise, neither Hindi nor Urdu, or did it instead stand for a free- and wide-ranging use of the full expanse of the Hindi-Urdu spectrum without regard for provenance or etymology? The answers to this question, as we shall see, were as many as they were varied.

VI PUBLIC SPHERES AND FIELDS OF PRODUCTION

A variety of excellent studies have in recent years taken as their focus the various language public spheres in South Asia.⁶⁰ They have on the whole opened up the world of colonial-era print and literature in revealing and nuanced ways, establishing beyond question the vitality and diversity of the vernacular print cultures of the period. Their monolingual focuses are their only drawback: one can only hope that such studies can act as the basis for

⁶⁰ Sumathi Ramaswamy has analysed how Tamil language became an object of devotion outside of the context of nationalism and nationalist historiography: Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Anindita Ghosh surveys the world of Bengali publishing in the colonial period, highlighting the diversity of interests and identities in this print world and moving beyond previous studies which concentrated on the opposition between the cultural worlds of elite Bengali and English: Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society* (New Delhi: OUP, 2006). Lisa Mitchell, meanwhile, takes a more ethnographic approach in her investigation of the processes and politics attendant in the creation of Telugu as both mother tongue and the defining feature of India's first linguistically defined state, and with due sensitivity to the multilingual context of the same: Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

a future, collaborative, and truly multilingual and comparative study of the colonial public sphere, which will inevitably open up insights that monolingual studies would otherwise miss.⁶¹ This study aims to be a tentative step in that direction.

Of all these investigations of the colonial public sphere, most germane for this study is Francesca Orsini's work on the Hindi public sphere of the 1920s and '30s. Perhaps the most valuable contribution made by Orsini is the way in which she describes the Hindi public sphere as a multifaceted and competitive arena, with its divisions delineated in terms of normativity and exclusion. Her study draws on the work of Nancy Fraser, who through her problematising of Jürgen Habermas' conceptualisation of the bourgeois public sphere in 18th century Europe⁶² opens up for further consideration what she terms the "post-bourgeois" public sphere.⁶³ Her investigation both of private/public divisions and of counter- or sub-publics informs Orsini's work on the participation of both women and lower castes/classes in the Hindi public sphere. Essentially, and critically for this study, she demonstrates the usefulness, whether in stratified or "egalitarian multicultural" societies, of considering "a plurality of competing publics" rather than a "single, comprehensive, overarching public" as a means of understanding the participation of various groups, dominant or subordinate, in public discussion.⁶⁴

⁶¹ A notable, multilingual exception is Rochelle Pinto's study of the world of colonial-era print culture in Goa, covering Portuguese, Konkani and Marathi, and the anti-colonial discourses of the Goan elite: Rochelle Pinto, *Between Empires: Print and Politics in Goa* (New Delhi: OUP, 2007).

⁶² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989 [1962]).

⁶³ Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy' in Craig Calhoun ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 109-142.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

Neither Orsini nor Fraser makes explicit use of Pierre Bourdieu's formulation of fields, and, given the difficulties inherent in reconciling some of Bourdieu's approaches with those of Habermas, perhaps this is understandable.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Fraser's conclusions on the nature of the post-bourgeois public sphere and the facility of understanding it in terms of a "multiplicity of publics" seem to be heavily influenced by a Bourdieuan understanding of overlapping and competing fields of production, or at least to amount to an essentially similar framework albeit arrived at by differing means. While noting that Bourdieu is not regarded as a theorist or analyst of the public sphere *per se*, Nick Crossley has argued that "much of his work on the media, artistic, educational and political fields involves a powerful analysis of the publics constituted therein. Publics, if we read Bourdieu in this way, are plural."⁶⁶ Similarly, we could read Orsini's depiction of the encroachment into realms of Hindi journalistic⁶⁷ and literary production of nationalist thought and imperatives – cultural, historical, linguistic *et al* – in terms of a Bourdieuan "colonisation" of fields: a process whereby the values of one field, in this case the political,

⁶⁵ See Nick Crossley, 'On systematically distorted communication: Bourdieu and the socio-analysis of publics' in Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts eds. *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 88-112, on which this explication draws. See also Craig Calhoun, 'Habitus, Field and Capital: The Question of Historical Specificity' in Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma and Moishe Postone eds. *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993) 61-88.

⁶⁶ Crossley, 'On systematically distorted communication', 88.

⁶⁷ It should be noted that the terms 'journal', 'journalism' and 'journalistic' are used here, in the north Indian context, to refer to the periodicals that feature as the subject of this study as well of those of Dalmia and Orsini. They constitute a mixed forum, in which one finds not only journalism in the contemporary sense of commentary and reportage on current affairs, but also articles on literary, historical and scientific themes as well as substantial amounts of new literature – poetry and serialised prose fiction.

undermine and supersede the values of another, in this case the journalistic.⁶⁸ Given the evident affinity of Bourdieu's terms of analysis, particularly field, to a study of a post-Habermas post-bourgeois public sphere, I will employ both this and other Bourdieuan concepts – including *capital* and especially *habitus* – to explore and explain the grey areas between Hindi and Urdu journalistic production.

The chief contribution I hope to make is to demonstrate the interrelatedness of the fields of Hindi and Urdu during the colonial period: the attempted institutionalisation of linguistic and literary unity; the continued interaction between their journalistic spheres; the mutuality of forms and genres, and efforts made towards ensuring and facilitating exchange; the simultaneous participation of a variety of actors in the literary realms of both languages; the shared concerns of members of the literati working in both languages and their responses to such concerns; and the encompassing embrace of the traditions, forms and practitioners of both languages within the new filmic context. Bourdieu's understanding of the field of cultural production – spread over diverse sites, competitive, and with authority unevenly sought and exercised – is the formulation that facilitates such an expansive reading.

VII INHERITED TASTES AND PRACTICES: THE PERSISTENCE OF *HABITUS*

Orsini draws on the idea of literary *saṃskāra* as a way to understand the modalities of literary taste and practice in the period. This term, she tells us, indicates “a taste, an

⁶⁸ “[Bourdieu] invokes an image of a process of colonisation which compromises the autonomy of fields and thereby the rational debate and critique they might otherwise generate.” Crossley, ‘On systematically distorted communication’, 88.

inclination *and* its source... a taste which settles upon other tastes according to one's individual experience of life."⁶⁹ Her focus on family *saṃskāras* reminds us of Manto's rather more sarcastic version of essentially the same phenomenon: his characters' reliance on "my father told me so" justifications for their linguistic preferences. I see useful links between this concept of *saṃskāra* and that of habitus, which bears brief discussion.

Pierre Bourdieu defines habitus as a set of enduring but, fundamentally, acquired dispositions that condition a societal agent towards certain actions and reactions in a given situation – in his own words, "a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations."⁷⁰ This concept relates particularly to individuals, and refers not only to how they experience and conceptualise society, but crucially how their concept of society can be and is an inherited one.⁷¹ Perhaps most useful, however, is the possibility that an engagement with habitus allows of examining both communal identity- and ethos-formation and individual action and reaction simultaneously; as J.L. Lemke has succinctly put it, habitus "mediates between a synoptic view of activity formations characteristic of a community and a dynamic view of the

⁶⁹ Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 43-8, 43-4.

⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Droit et passé-droit. Le champ des pouvoirs territoriaux et la mise en oeuvre des règlements', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 81/82, 86-96, quoted in Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, 'Introduction to the first edition' in Hillier/Rooksby eds. *Habitus: A Sense of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 19-42, 21.

⁷¹ Derek Robbins, *Bourdieu and Culture* (London: Sage, 2000) 27.

processes by which these activities are actually engaged on specific occasions by human actors.”⁷²

In their discussion of academic debate on the subject, Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby identify perhaps the most enduring and for us important debates as being concerned with “whether habitus is essentially static or whether its properties can change dynamically with different conditions.”⁷³ Bourdieu himself defended his conceptualisation from accusations that it was fatalistic or deterministic, that habitus represented an unchanging and immutable framework within which an individual was destined to act.⁷⁴ He maintained that it was a dispositional concept, what we might call inclinational, and that these dispositions were both acquired and modifiable.⁷⁵ As such, a consensus has emerged in more recent scholarship that sees habitus as something that can and does change.⁷⁶

⁷² J. L. Lemke, *Textual Politics* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995) 33.

⁷³ Hillier/Rooksby, ‘Introduction: Committed Scholarship’, in Hillier/Rooksby eds. *Habitus*, 3-18, 13.

⁷⁴ “The habitus is not a fate, not a destiny...The model of the circle, the vicious cycle of structure producing habitus which reproduces structure *ad infinitum* is a product of commentators.” Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Habitus’, in Hillier/Rooksby eds. *Habitus*, 43-9, 45.

⁷⁵ “[H]abitus is very similar to what was traditionally called character, but with a very important difference: the habitus...is something *non natural*, a set of *acquired* characteristics which are the product of social conditions and which, for that reason, may be totally or partially common to people who have been the product of similar social conditions...being a product of history, that is of social experience and education, it may be *changed by history*...Dispositions are long-lasting: they tend to perpetuate, to reproduce themselves, but they are not eternal.” Ibid. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984 [French original: *La Distinction, Critique sociale du jugement*, 1979]) and Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁷⁶ See for example Gail Weiss, ‘Can an Old Dog Learn New Tricks? Habitual Horizons in James, Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty’ in *Refiguring the Ordinary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008) 75-97; P. Sweetman, ‘Twenty-first century dis-ease? Habitual reflexivity or the reflexive habitus’, *Sociological Review* 51; 4 (2003) 528-49; Roxana Waterson, ‘Enduring Landscape, Changing Habitus: The Sa’dan Toraja of Sulawesi, Indonesia’ in Hillier/Rooksby eds. *Habitus*, 334-55.

This said, the quality of the durability or persistence of habitus is also highlighted by Bourdieu.⁷⁷ It is this concept then, of a habitus that is durable or persistent – formed as a result of acquired tastes, affirmed through exposure to pre-existing forms of taste and practice, and embodied through processes of socialisation and familiarisation – that provides the paradigmatic lens through which I examine the Hindi and Urdu litterateurs of early 20th century north India, while, following Lemke, employing a “synoptic view” of the processes and fields in which these actors were operating in an attempt to isolate and map the dialectical confrontation – the modification of the field by habitus, and the change wrought on habitus by the shifting dynamics of the field. It facilitates an appreciation not only of how particular groups may have apprehended and engaged with the shifting terrain and dynamics of the literary field, but also allows for individual, and even aberrant, reactions to these new challenges to be contemplated and contextualised. In almost all of the cases that concern us here, these reactions are against the exclusivist imperatives of linguistic and religious nationalisms, and take the form of attempts to either preserve or recover elements of a shared culture, to justify a taste for the “other”, or to experiment and create beyond the bounds of normative linguistic pressures.

However, while I regard this term and the investigation of the habitus of members of the Indian literati to be an illuminating investigatory principle, the fact remains that a

⁷⁷ “[I]n all the cases where dispositions encounter conditions (including fields) different from those in which they were constructed and assembled, there is a *dialectical confrontation* between habitus, as structured structure, and objective structures. In this confrontation, habitus operates as a structuring structure able to selectively perceive and to transform the objective structure according to its own structure while, at the same time, being restructured, transformed in its makeup by the pressure of the objective structure. This means, that in rapidly changing societies, habitus changes constantly, continuously, but within the limits inherent in its originary structure, that is within certain bounds of continuity.” Bourdieu, ‘Habitus’, 46-7.

full examination of this as a structuring principle through which to understand the evolving literary and cultural milieu of the period would require a detailed prosopography which remains beyond the scope of this study. It was my intention in the early days of this project to go down just such a route; however, a lack of bibliographic and biographic materials on all but the most famous individuals necessitated a change in approach. It remains an avenue and mode of inquiry to which I believe the field should aspire, but which as yet lies outside the competence of this author and the current epistemological resources of the available scholarship, with the possible exception of a few prominent figures (Premchand and Iqbal spring to mind, but few others).

VIII WRITING AND ORALITY: SOME IMPLICATIONS

When Bharatendu Harishchandra spoke in his speech at Ballia of his admiration for the English taxi-cab driver who, despite his low station, read a newspaper every day, he was describing a subaltern encounter with the printed, mechanically reproduced word and language which would not have been possible, imaginable or even desirable a few decades previously. The issue of script, then, was inextricably bound up with both the mechanics of modernity and the discourses of modernisation. Inseparable from the milieu of the colonial encounter, the issue of script came to dominate the late nineteenth century debates on the language of administration in the courts of the North West Provinces & Oudh, and was to

become the irreconcilable difference *par excellence* in the Hindi-Urdu debate from that point on.⁷⁸

However, as Gandhi's emphasis on the language of the common man and of everyday interaction suggests, we must also consider the implications of orality for any discussion of Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani. As David Lelyveld has put it;

It would be a mistake to look for the development of a public language only in the written word, especially in a society in which access to reading and writing was so limited and oral performance loomed so large.⁷⁹

Without going in to the long history of oral literature and oral performance traditions in the subcontinent, I want to offer some methodological observations on how we might view this issue in the context of a debate that has largely focussed on the printed word and printed literature. First of all, we should remember that the link between script and "language" was fluid prior to the 19th century, as the variety of scripts in which vernacular literature was transmitted in manuscript form attests. Moreover, we should take note of the low levels of literacy about which Lelyveld reminds us: even in the 20th century, the majority of the population who interacted with literary products did not interact directly with the written or printed page, but instead did so orally – at performances, recitations, group readings, and so on. The predominance of oral literature and oral performance more generally was only to grow in the late colonial period with the arrival of sound in films, and the huge popularity of this media has only grown in the post-Independence era. Yet although film arrived at a time when this controversy of language choice was at its most

⁷⁸ See King, *One Language*, for a full discussion of the issue of script.

⁷⁹ Lelyveld, 'The Fate of Hindustani', 203.

fevered, the media managed to avoid the most debilitating effects of the Hindi-Urdu debate. As I show in chapter 4, cinema became a realm of linguistic inclusion and free experimentation, which not only avoided *having* to make a “choice” with regard to register, but came to incorporate substantial qualities of the Hindi and Urdu literary traditions and outputs within its expansive and inclusive literary-cultural apparatus.

IX THE PRESENT STUDY

In this thesis, I examine spaces, practices and discourses of commonality in their various modes across four largely (albeit not wholly) distinct institutional or generic forms: literary institutions; poetry; prose; and film.⁸⁰ While these areas do not encompass the entirety of cultural production in Hindi and Urdu, they are perhaps the most significant for an understanding of the broad range of contexts and forms in which efforts to create, recover or simply assert commonality took place.

Chapter 1 focuses on the origins and pre-Independence activities of the Hindustani Academy, established in 1927 by an Act of the Legislative Assembly of the United Provinces. Inaugurated in Lucknow, and eventually based in Allahabad, the Academy was located geographically, temporally, interpersonally and almost existentially at the very heart of the Hindi-Urdu controversy, which raged most fiercely in the north Indian heartland. The

⁸⁰ Although Chapter 1 is the only chapter to focus on a formal institutional context, institutionality in the broadest sense is not absent from the rest of this thesis. Literary journals lay at the heart of ongoing and increasingly dialogic and diverse debates on the nature and direction of literary production. As the work of Dalmia and Orsini has ably shown, these were critical forums for the formation of new tastes and practices during the colonial period, and as such are a major source of materials and commentary for the majority of this study.

origins of the Academy and the motivations underpinning its establishment demonstrate conclusively the contemporaneous faith of litterateurs, politicians and educationalists in the efficacy and importance of such institutions to the attainment of both literary and societal progress.

However, the history of the Academy, its efforts, activities and attendant controversies, suggest that any such faith in the Academy as an instrument of literary and linguistic – and thereby communal – reconciliation may have been misplaced. Confusion and contestation over the name itself – “Hindustani” as an adjective for Indian, or a linguistic label defining a language or register in contradistinction to either Hindi or Urdu – in many ways prefigured intense disagreements over the aims and objectives of the institution – to promote Hindi and Urdu as so-called “twin vernaculars”, or to evolve, create, or even recover a separate and unitary form of the two languages as both a tool of linguistic, literary and communal reconciliation and a compromise candidate for the role of national language.

Charting what I believe was a conscious institutional policy of strategic ambiguity towards such pivotal questions, I examine the literary and publishing activities of the Academy in some depth over its 20-year pre-Independence existence. It is tempting to adjudge the Academy a failed project, as the creation of a truly mixed and formally recognised language of Hindustani never came about. I suggest, however, that its significance was simultaneously less formal and more fundamental: revealing significantly widespread interest in arresting the increasing bifurcation of Hindi and Urdu and the attendant processes of communal identification among a certain section of the literary

establishment; and providing an institutional and indeed semantic space for the development of a rhetoric of linguistic and literary commonality that had hitherto been lacking.

Chapter 2 turns to poetry as the both historically and contemporarily preeminent form of literary production in the subcontinent. As such, it was the site of some of the most animated discussions concerning tradition and canon in the respective fields of Urdu and Hindi, as well as the form most directly impacted by the colonial encounter. This chapter examines the Hindi and Urdu poetry of the early 20th century together as produced and consumed in literary journals of the period in order to look for evidence of commonality. The picture that emerges is an uneven one. Beginning with the issue of the historical poetic canons of Hindi and Urdu, I demonstrate how certain literary journals, both Urdu and Hindi, took expansive and inclusive approaches to the poetry and poets of the past, in contravention of both exclusivist rhetorical positions and reformist imperatives. I argue that efforts at poetic reform, with English Romantic poetry – with its attendant colonial prestige and widely perceived superiority – as a point of reference for contemporary poets in both languages, is best examined across the divide, as this reveals both the shared relevance of this rather narrow reading of the English canon to the poetics of both languages, as well as the moments of continuity in the reformist agenda as it worked across Hindi and Urdu poetic production.

The chapter goes on to highlight moments of generic, lexical and thematic overlap between – alongside moments of disjuncture in – what might conveniently be termed either “Hindi” or “Urdu” poems published in Hindi and Urdu journals of the period,

demonstrating the limits of binary classification in the realm of poetry. Finally, it turns to two prominent litterateurs – Miraji and Upendranath Ashk – who were actively involved in breaking down barriers between the poetries of Hindi and Urdu, through individual creativity and efforts at inter-linguistic reading, representing and anthologising across the divide of script and between the perceived excesses of Sanskritised Hindi and Persianised Urdu. All this, I suggest, demonstrates the contested nature of the literary canon, and the unwillingness of certain writers and connoisseurs to abandon elements of their inherited literary tastes on the basis of external imperatives. It shows the fluidity of genre and form across the languages and their print worlds, and in its bilingualism contends that there was no simplistic or rigid divide between the poetic realms of Hindi and Urdu during this period.

Moving from the deeply historically rooted forms of poetry, Chapter 3 focuses on the short story as a relatively recent arrival on the Hindi and Urdu literary scene. Despite its recent historical genesis in the subcontinent, the short story quickly became the most popular genre of prose, as writers of all stripes and persuasions turned to it as the form most suited to making direct interventions in and commentary on contemporary situations. Often published initially in literary journals, and subsequently in single-author collections, Hindi and Urdu short stories of the period constitute a rich source for examining the attitudes of writers to developments in the political, social and literary spheres, as well as for lexical studies of the Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani continuum. As such, this chapter focuses on a selection of short stories by Premchand, Pandey Bechan Sharma ‘Ugra’, and Krishan Chander, dealing with issues of inter- and intra-communal relations. In it, I show how this

ideologically and stylistically diverse group of writers drew on similar and shared cultural resources to mount a critique of misguided or “bad” religiosity, developing a brand of literary humanism that corresponds in significant ways with later political articulations of Indian secularism. I suggest that these stories – the majority of them deeply unrealistic – allowed the reader to imagine a brand of religiosity that could function as a unifying, rather than dividing, force, at a time of intense inter-communal violence. As a mode of inquiry, this argument highlights literary, linguistic and thematic overlap between Hindi and Urdu short story writing, and explores the inter-linguistic project of a search for shared, indigenous cultural resources by these writers on which to base a strikingly similar critique of disharmony and division.

Finally, the new medium of film is the subject of Chapter 4, which charts what I describe as the crystallisation of Hindustani as the preferred and predominant register of the film industry in Bombay. Lying at a geographical remove from the intense Hindi-Urdu politics of the United Provinces and the Punjab, yet hardly unaffected by broader issues of communal disharmony, the film industry constituted a novel medium and forum in which language was used without either formal literary institutional or official government interference. The oral nature of the medium represented – in much the same way as with radio – at least the potential to transcend the issue of script that had so decisively prevented any formal compromise between Hindi and Urdu as literary languages. Yet this process was in no way inevitable, and the chapter begins with an examination of the quite distinct ways in which differing registers of Hindi-Urdu were used to mark out characters of different religious backgrounds. However, I argue that such linguistic marking should be

viewed within a wider framework of markings of class and humour, and rather suggests the comfort of scriptwriters with the full range of the linguistic spectrum. Moreover, such comfort is evidenced in the songs of these early films, which demonstrate the broad generic inclusivity of the film medium with regard to poetry and themes drawn from across the Hindi and Urdu traditions. I suggest that analysing such literary-filmic moments through what I term their “texture” allows us to fully appreciate both the affective power of these genres in the cinematic context, as well as giving a richer perspective on just how formal literary endeavour – such as published poetry – and more popular or populist cultural production related to one another through the figure of the poet-lyricist. Finally, I investigate the textual frames of the films – their titles, paratexts and advertisements – and posit a model of strategic inclusiveness operating among advertisers and producers, to show the various ways in which issues of script both impinged upon the idealised orality of the films, and were resolved in favour of the neutral use of Roman characters which prevails to this day.

X LOOKING FORWARD

Christopher King’s summary of the state of affairs regarding Hindi and Urdu in the nineteenth century is worth quoting at length:

No one can question that all the elements for the diverging of Hindi and Urdu, and their blending into opposing Hindu and Muslim systems of multi-symbol congruence existed at least as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century. On the linguistic level, we have the apparently unbridgeable differences between the Nagari and the Urdu scripts, and Gilchrist’s vivid testimony on the tendency of some of his colleagues to deliberately introduce Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian words into their writings. On the communal level we have the all-too-frequently described

social, cultural, and religious differences between Hindus and Muslims. *In looking back, the process by which language and religion became identified with each other seems inevitable.*⁸¹

King, it should be stressed, is no naïve observer of some kind of ineluctable or foreordained process, and his study of the Sanskritisation of Hindi in the 19th and early 20th centuries is both erudite and minutely concerned with the agency of the historical actors involved. The point is this: that the “voices of moderation or compromise”, however few and formally feeble, deserve and require their own analysis.⁸²

Indeed, what we see in many cases is an emphatic refusal to conform to the increasingly strident normativities of the exclusionary and intrinsically oppositional nationalisms of the period – a refusal to accede to apparent inevitability. These refusals in many ways exemplify the ambivalence that Homi Bhabha assures us is key to the modes of mimicry of the colonised, “radically revalu[ing] the normative knowledges”, here of linguistically bounded constructs of community and nation.⁸³ While many literati, intellectuals and politicians subscribed wholeheartedly to the various projects of linguistic nationalism, the idea that one’s literary, cultural and linguistic tastes, habits and practices should or even could be dictated on the basis of one’s religious identity simply did not fit with the lived realities, personal preferences and indeed political standpoints of a significant section of the literary and cultural elite. Moreover, just as “passions of the tongue do not readily map onto passions of the nation”,⁸⁴ so too nascent and even increasingly dominant forms of linguistic and religious nationalism did not preclude

⁸¹ King, *One Language*, 178 (emphasis added).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 189.

⁸³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2005 [1994]) 129-30.

⁸⁴ Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue*, 5.

linguistic and literary practices that defied easy, neat and binary classification: nationalism here, we might say, as a discourse only partially derived.⁸⁵ The dominance of exclusivity was never hegemonic, and while the advent of new forms, forums and associations in the modernising ferment of the early 20th century certainly provided the space for the assertion and inscription of these aforementioned exclusionary normativities, it also, as this study shows, allowed for modes of synthesis, spaces of coexistence, and discourses of commonality, which pushed towards a transcendence of such artificial boundaries, and retain an enduring significance for the cultural-linguistic realities of contemporary South Asia today.

⁸⁵ Cf. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

INSTITUTIONALISING UNITY: HINDI, URDU AND THE HINDUSTANI ACADEMY

If there were such an institution today, whose members were fully conscious of the requirements of literature and could come up with realistic plans for its progress, whose ideals were one, whose desires were blameless and viewpoints expansive, whose hearts were far from literary and other partialities and filled with sympathy for art and artists, who were sincerely devoted to the service of literature [Hindi: *sāhityasevā*, Urdu: *adab kī khidmat*], and if alongside this adequate funds should be made available for the propagation of literature, then is it not possible that this institution could do the work that over 100 years ago Gilchrist did alone?¹

Writing in an editorial in the first issue of two new quarterly journals, *Hindustānī*, Dr Tara Chand did not hesitate to aim high. He had, perhaps, some reasons for optimism. The Hindustani Academy, founded four years previously in 1927, was embarking on the publication of two quarterly journals, both named *Hindustānī*, one in Nagari/Hindi and the other in Nastaliq/Urdu.² Both the Academy and its publications were intended to promote

¹ Tara Chand, 'Sampādakīya', in *Hindustānī* (H) 1.1 (January 1931) 118-27, 126, and 'Adārīya', in *Hindustānī* (U) 1.1 (January 1931) 142-52, 151.

² This simultaneous publication of two synonymous journals presents some small difficulties in terms of referencing and indeed describing them. The designations *Hindustānī* (H) and *Hindustānī* (U) are used here as a convenient shorthand to refer to the Hindi/Nagari and Urdu/Nastaliq versions. Tara Chand, Professor of History at Allahabad University, was the president of the editorial boards of both versions of *Hindustānī*. The actual editor of *Hindustānī* (H) was Ramchandra Tandon (a Hindi scholar at the University of Allahabad, friend of and occasional collaborator with Premchand, literary critic, and translator of a diverse range of literature into Hindi, including Mirabai's poetry, European literature, and Nehru's *Discovery of India*), and that of *Hindustānī* (U) was Maulvi Sa'id Ansari (1894-1962; a scholar of Urdu and Persian, Ansari went on to teach at Jamia Millia Islamia in Aligarh and, after Partition, at Lahore University). It should be noted that Tara Chand himself refers to the journals as Hindi and Urdu editions, and does not attempt to apply a linguistic label of 'Hindustani'. Their contents were on the whole, with a few notable exceptions, distinct. See Tara Chand, *Report on*

the expansion and enrichment of literature in both Hindi and Urdu, but at the same time they tried, in a somewhat vaguely defined manner, to arrest or at least retard the ongoing distancing of Hindi and Urdu, and their users, from one another.

Tara Chand used this first editorial to place the Academy, of which he was the general secretary, in a long and grand tradition of endeavour toward scholarly, literary and indeed societal progress. He traced the histories of various notable academies – from those of Plato and Aristotle, to those of the Medici family during and after the fifteenth century in Florence, Richelieu’s *L’Académie Française* in seventeenth century France, and the Royal Societies and British Academy in England – and situated the Hindustani Academy in this genealogy; but he also emphasised the Indian context, suggesting not just a universal relevance, but also a particular timeliness:

Is dhāi hazār baras ke itihās se patā caltā hai ki ekeḍemī kā sthāpit honā jātiyon kī unnati meṁ ek viśeṣ mahattva rakhtā hai. Pratyek jāti ke itihās meṁ ek samay ātā hai jab jāti ke netāon ko yah anubhav hotā hai ki jñān aur sāhitya kā āśray jātiy lābhoṁ kī rakṣā ke liye āvaśyak hai.³

Is dhāi hazār baras kī tārikh se yah ma’lūm hotā hai ki ekeḍemī kā qiyām qaumoṁ ke naśv-o namā meṁ khāṣ ahmiyat dikhtā hai. Har qaum kī tārikh meṁ ek zamāna ātā hai jab rahnumāiyān-e qaum ko yah eḥsās hotā hai ki ‘ilm-o adab kī sarparastī qaumī mufād kī ḥifāẓat ke li’e zarūrī hai.⁴

Two and a half thousand years of history show that the establishment of academies retains a particular importance in the progress of a people. A time comes in the history of every people when the leaders of that people realise that patronage of learning and literature is essential in order to secure the prosperity of the people.

Tara Chand’s evident faith in the efficacy and leadership of academies, literary institutions and societies was by no means unusual for his time. Francesca Orsini has shown, with reference to the Hindi field, how the radical changes in the linguistic economy of north

the workings of the Hindustani Academy, United Provinces, Allahabad, 1927-39 (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1939) 39-41.

³ Chand, ‘Sampādakīya’, 121.

⁴ Chand, ‘Adārīya’, 146.

India and the major shifts in literary production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should be attributed in large part to the establishment of “new institutional contexts”.⁵ She has emphasised the profound effects of the institutions themselves in diverse arenas including, most pertinently here, the formation or inculcation of new literary tastes and normative effects on public discourse.

By the late 1920s, a plethora of by then already well-established institutions and societies existed to promote a variety of social, religious, and – particularly for our purposes – literary or linguistic causes.⁶ Yet the Hindustani Academy had its own peculiar origins and aims, as we shall see in this chapter. Its own attempts at negotiating these aims were, I will argue, at the heart of its apparent efforts to be many things to many people. As I show below, its origins lay in plans for a translation bureau attached to the Ministry of Education in the government of the United Provinces, making it a quasi-official body. In time, the proposed institution outgrew this rather limited conceptualisation, and became for its proponents an important tool in the wider and interlinked projects of literary and linguistic enrichment, education, and societal progress. Its commitment to Hindi and Urdu as the “twin vernaculars” of the provinces may well have been intended quite simply to patronise the two languages equally. In time, however, the designation of “Hindustani” was to raise debate and suspicion regarding the Academy’s linguistic policies; suspicions linked to, and not assuaged by, its quasi-official nature. Whether or not it measured up to its historical

⁵ See Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 17-18 & passim.

⁶ Consider, for instance, two of the most prominent: the *Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā* (Society for the Promulgation of Nagari), established in 1893; and the *Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdū* (Society for the Advancement of Urdu), established in 1903. For a brief discussion of these societies, see the Introduction, §IV.

antecedents as Tara Chand identified them, the Academy constituted a bold institutional intervention in the Hindi-Urdu controversy. Its aims, the strategies it pursued to achieve them, and the obstacles and opposition it encountered offer us a good vantage point from which to map the field of Hindi-Urdu/Hindustani in the 1920s and 30s: as a field of possibilities, of entrenched positions and habitus, and of dynamic actors. Was the limited success of the Academy due to its misplaced faith in the “impartial hearts” of the “leaders of the people”, to the comparatively greater pull of exclusivist cultural nationalisms, to inadequate resources and ineffective strategies, or to other reasons?

In what follows, I begin with an account of the Academy’s origins and foundation, highlighting the various and frequently competing goals that its early proponents assigned, or sought to assign, to it, in order to demonstrate the ambiguity and intrinsic tensions that affected the enterprise from the outset. Moving on to a study of its principal activity – namely, the production of what were chiefly literary publications in both Hindi and Urdu – I chart through an overview of the Academy’s publication strategies the effects of this institutional ambiguity as it pertained to the (perhaps unintentional) construction and affirmation of what were, in a large part, mutually exclusive historical canons of Hindi and Urdu literary production. However, while the Academy’s writings on literary history may have done little to challenge the dominant binary and oppositional construction of separate linguistic and literary heritages for separate religious communities, another set of publications reveals not only a commitment to Hindi-Urdu unity, but moreover a belief on the part of a section of the Academy’s institutional actors in the pre-existence of “Hindustani” as a linguistic model and a mode of inter-communal literary commonality. In

particular, the translations produced under the aegis of the Academy show a conscious attempt to bolster such a paradigm with working models of an easily understood, mutually intelligible register, as prominent litterateurs selected and prepared Hindi and Urdu versions of socially relevant literary texts drawn from contemporary and historical European literary traditions.

We will see, however, that such translations reveal two competing impulses that members of the Academy clearly felt: a tension between, on one hand, the demotic aspirations of the project, to provide accessible literature to “the people” and to model literary production on a register of social linguistic interaction that would be accessible and of interest to Hindu and Muslim alike; and, on the other hand, a preoccupation with questions of literary and institutional prestige and the accumulation of cultural capital that would ultimately enable the Academy, at least theoretically and potentially, to make definitive pronouncements on literary and linguistic matters on a provincial and ultimately national level. It was this latter concern that had led the Academy to adopt a policy of what I call “strategic ambiguity” or indeterminacy towards the central issues of, first, the nature of Hindustani as a language, register or discourse, second, the equally pressing question as to what, precisely, the role of the institution should be regarding the creation, resurrection or encouragement of such a mode, and third, the policing of the Hindi and Urdu literary fields. The lack of a clear position on these questions probably facilitated the inclusion within the ambit of the Academy of a broad range of literary figures and opinions – as an examination of a selection of articles on the language issue will demonstrate – but in the

end it was this self-same strategic indeterminacy that precluded the Academy from ever being able to make any authoritative interventions in the Hindi-Urdu controversy.

The Hindustani Academy was established at what its chief supporters and most prominent members considered to be a critical juncture. The high nationalist politics of the period, and the increasing tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the post-Khilafat period, culminating in the terrible riots in Kanpur in 1929, placed a particular burden upon the fledgling institution.⁷ Tara Chand himself seemed conscious of the weight of history, and the expectations of the moment, as he noted in the opening editorials;

*Kisī kā kathan hai ki 'jamā'at meñ karāmat hai.' Arhāt saṅgaṭhan meñ, ektā meñ, ek camatkār hai...Yah ek prayās hai jis kī saphaltā kā nirṇay bhaviṣya hī kar sakegā.*⁸

*Kisī kā qaul hai ki jamā'at meñ karāmat hai...*⁹

It is someone's saying that 'there are miracles in unity'. That is, in coming together, in oneness, there are wonders...This is an endeavour, the success of which only the future can judge.

While we know well that the Hindustani Academy never did manage to “institutionalise unity”, or to create the wonders in oneness to which Tara Chand alludes, it retains a particular significance in the history of Hindi and Urdu language and literature. Aside from its own tangible outputs – many of them valuable literary and scholarly products in their own right – the Academy constituted a physical institutional space, and a potential albeit diffuse discursive paradigm, in which linguistic and literary divisions based on religious affiliation were, to some extent, broken down. As such, it was an important institutional

⁷ For the historical and political context of the decade, see Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34: A Study in Imperfect Mobilization* (Delhi: OUP, 1978). For the tenor of anti-Muslim popular discourse in this period, see Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

⁸ Chand, 'Sampādakīya', 126-7.

⁹ Chand, 'Adārīya', 151. The explanation of the phrase, and the concluding sentences, are absent from the Urdu version of Chand's editorial, though these seem to be the only significant differences.

expansion of the public sphere that both facilitated and represented a latent desire for a challenge to the dominant, but not hegemonic, normativities and the communal exclusivities that had come to characterise and restrict discourses on matters of language and literature.

1.I DIARCHY, UNITY, DUALITY: A GOVERNMENT PROJECT

It was in the wake of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 that Indian politicians had taken an increased role in the government of the provinces of British India.¹⁰ The reforms saw the transfer to Indian ministers of executive power over so-called “nation-building departments” and priorities including education, health, and local government,¹¹ while certain reserved subjects remained the province of the provincial governors and the British members of the Executive Councils.¹² It was in the context of this diarchy and from within just such a nation-building paradigm that the Hindustani Academy, as it came to be known, first took shape, as a project of the Education Department of the United Provinces.

Tara Chand provides a detailed account of the early years of the Academy.¹³ His report presents the history of the Academy’s conception and creation as largely untroubled.

As we shall see, however, the apparent consensus reached in the context of the Legislative

¹⁰ For a history of the reforms, see Peter Robb, *The Government of India and Reform: Policies Towards Politics and the Constitution, 1916-1921* (Oxford: OUP, 1976).

¹¹ Philip Woods, ‘The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms (1919): A re-assessment’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 17:1, 25-42.

¹² Despite this, Robb notes that the effective numerical balance of the councils favoured Indian members, marking in theory at least a “real advance in Indian influence” over even the reserved subjects. Robb, *The Government of India*, 111. In certain cases, including that of the United Provinces, Indian ministers were given control of law and order as well. Woods, ‘Montagu-Chelmsford’, 32.

¹³ Tara Chand, *Report*.

Assembly of the Government of the United Provinces masked fundamentally incompatible views on both the nature of Hindustani and the anticipated role of the proposed institution. What Tara Chand identifies as “the first definite proposal” in the direction of establishing the Academy was the resolution moved by Pandit Yajna Narain Upadhyaya¹⁴ in the UP Legislative Council in December 1925 “to establish a bureau of translation for rendering all useful books in modern sciences and other branches of knowledge into vernacular [sic] and to provide at least a lakh of rupees every year for this purpose”.¹⁵ The next iteration of this idea resulted in the broadening of the concept, from a translation bureau to an academy designed “to promote the growth of Hindi and Urdu literature”. In this resolution, Khan Bahadur Hafiz Hidayat Husain¹⁶ outlined what he felt should be the six most important objectives for the academy, namely: to award prizes for original works in Hindi and Urdu; to facilitate the translation of appropriate books into Hindi and Urdu; to arrange for the editing of old vernacular texts; to compile encyclopaedias, dictionaries, scientific glossaries and other reference works; to publish works from the above categories; and finally to provide financial support in the form of pensions to older Hindi and Urdu scholars, so that “the stigma of indifference to indigenous learning will disappear to the abiding credit of the

¹⁴ A graduate of the University of Allahabad, Upadhyaya was a member of the Swaraj Party and a Council representative for Benares.

¹⁵ See Tara Chand, *Report*, 9 and *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces* 26.9 (December 1925) 708. From the form and content of Tara Chand’s account, it seems likely that he was consulting these same proceedings.

¹⁶ A prominent lawyer from Kanpur, Husain was heavily involved in the Khilafat movement and had been a member of the legislative council since 1923. He was to go on to serve as secretary to the All-India Muslim League in the 1930s. Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*.

Government.”¹⁷ Husain withdrew his resolution after he was assured by Rai Rajeshwar Bali, the Minister for Education, that the Government was already proceeding in a very similar direction; correspondingly, the Government resolution of 20 January 1927 laid out the proposed organisation and constitution of the Hindustani Academy along lines very similar to those envisaged by Husain.¹⁸ The Governor of the United Provinces, Sir William Marris, duly inaugurated the Academy on 29 March 1927 at a ceremony in Lucknow.¹⁹ This, then, is the version of the history of the Academy’s inception that Tara Chand presented in his report: a straightforward and uncontroversial proposition that received support from assembly members, the minister, and the governor, and was celebrated as a noteworthy achievement in the advancement of literary and societal progress.

It is interesting, however, to consider Tara Chand’s invocation of John Gilchrist in his 1931 editorials (quoted at the beginning of the chapter), as the latter’s work had direct bearing on the question of Hindi, Urdu, Hindustani and the idea of the “vernacular” that arose even at this early, conceptual stage. Gilchrist’s influence had been most pronounced in his role as Professor of Hindustani at Fort William College from 1800 onwards, where he supervised the preparation of texts designed to aid the teaching of Hindustani to officers of

¹⁷ Khan Bahadur Hafiz Hidayat Husain, in *Proceedings*, 29.10 (April 1926) 606-608. The full text of Husain’s speech is reproduced in Tara Chand, *Report*, 67-70.

¹⁸ For this resolution, see *Proceedings*, 32.2 (January 1927) Appendix A, reprinted in Chand, *Report*, Appendix B.

¹⁹ The Academy was formed with an eight member executive committee comprising, in addition to Dr Tara Chand as General Secretary, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru as President, and Hafiz Hidayat Husain, Sajjad Haidar, Pandit Shyam Bihari Mishra, Lala Sita Ram, Shyam Sunder Das, and Daya Narain Nigam as ordinary members. It was this smaller body that was responsible for the running of the Academy, its day-to-day operations, and most of its strategic and organisational decisions. The larger Council had the powers to determine “general questions of policy”, and appoint the judges who were to determine the recipients of the various awards and prizes that the Academy instituted. See Chand, *Report*, 9.

the East India Company. Yet through the preparation of such teaching materials, as well as other assorted activities, Gilchrist and his colleagues and collaborators were to have a profound and lasting effect on the literary world of South Asia. As Rai puts it:

[t]he important thing that emerged from Fort William is the idea of two-ness, of linguistic duality. Fort William College gave institutional recognition to the notion that there were in fact two ways of doing Hindustani – one which used the available and mixed language, and another from which the Arabic-Persian words (i.e. words of ‘Muslim’ origin) had been removed in order to produce a language (register? idiom?) more suitable to Hindus.²⁰

By the 1920s – indeed, by long before then – this duality, or differentiation between Hindi and Urdu as distinct and communally specific, had become well established in public discourse.

Furthermore, the result of this idea of duality, and the ensuing branching off of Hindi and Urdu, was a context in which ‘Hindustani’ existed as a contested, ill-defined, and often suspect term. That this suspicion was to have an effect on the Academy’s activities was made clear even during the initial discussions in the Legislative Assembly, when the question of Hindustani *vis à vis* what was by then the prevailing dis-unity of Hindi-Urdu was raised in the early stages of debate over the question of “vernacular”. Thus, Muhammad Aslam Saifi remarked in the debate on the translation bureau resolution:

The point...is that my honourable friend the mover [Upadhyaya] only mentions “vernacular” in his resolution, and that *makes me suspect it a little*. I know that he did not mean it, and he had no intention whatever in that direction, but I think that if books are translated into one vernacular they will not be much use in the other vernaculars, because scientific works cannot be translated into everyday speech. Such simple language would not express the ideas which are usually expressed in scientific works. Therefore I hope my honourable friend in his second speech will himself put it to the Government that the translations may be made *in both the languages, Hindi and Urdu*.²¹

²⁰ Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, 22.

²¹ *Proceedings*, 26.9, 714, emphases added. Another member of the Swaraj Party, Saifi too had served in the Assembly since 1923, representing Agra, Meerut and Aligarh.

Upadhyaya quickly assured the Assembly that that indeed was his intention, and all subsequent references in this debate and others were to “vernaculars” (in the plural), “the two languages”, or “Hindi and Urdu”.

Yet Saifi’s point, at that time viewed simply as a request for clarification, struck at the heart of the complex web of issues that plagued the Academy throughout its pre-Partition history. He and others were evidently of the opinion that, at the level of expressing complex or scientific ideas, Hindi and Urdu were distinct languages, and that “everyday speech”, presumably the region in which the two overlapped and which we might term “unmarked Hindustani”, was insufficiently technical for such purposes. This was an issue that had already been recognised by various language activists across India, and there was a variety of institutional projects, pre-dating the establishment of the Hindustani Academy, which had already begun to make forays in the reform of individual languages so as to make them suitable vehicles for the prized knowledge embodied in Western science and modernity. As Kavita Datla has remarked with regard to one such institution, “[T]he burden of the project at Osmania University was to bring together elite languages of Western scholarship and common languages of conversation, to bring science to the people through their own language.”²² Osmania, founded in 1918, had the

²² Kavita Datla, ‘A Worldly Vernacular: Urdu at Osmania University’, *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 5 (2009) 1117-1148, 1120. The translation of Western science (both natural and human in this period) into various Indian languages has a long history in the colonial context: for Urdu, see the various papers in Margrit Pernau ed. *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857* (New Delhi: OUP, 2006), especially: Margrit Pernau, ‘Introduction’, 1-32, for an overview of the institution’s history; Avril A. Powell, ‘Scholar Manqué or Mere Munshi? Maulawi Karimu’d-Din’s Career in the Anglo-Oriental Education Service’, 203-32, for an investigation of the career of a particularly important translator of both literary and scientific texts; Mushirul Hasan, ‘Maulawi Zaka Ullah:

distinction of being India's first vernacular university and was the brainchild of the prominent Urdu educationalist and reformer Maulvi Abdul Haq. A key concern of those involved in Urdu education and publishing activities there, as well as elsewhere, was the adaptation, advancement and enrichment of Urdu as a language in order to equip it with a vocabulary that could express the terms and concepts of European science, and it was this same focus on scientific terminology that motivated Saifi's remarks. These remarks were made in the context of the debate on the proposed translation bureau, some two years before Husain's mention of the term "Hindustani Academy"; yet this same concern figured prominently in what was to be a crucial dilemma for the Academy. What precisely, in the context of 1920s and 30s north India, did the term "Hindustani" connote? Could one institution successfully promote both Hindi and Urdu together? How did partisans of one or the other understand and approach the concept of Hindustani? And, crucially, could this concept provide a middle way, in both literary and linguistic terms, which might prevent any further distancing?

Moreover, the debate in the UP Legislative Council reveals an implicit governmental recognition of the aforementioned duality of Hindi and Urdu, particularly as it related to questions of linguistic – rather than literary – progress and enrichment, that strikes a different note to Tara Chand's idyllic account of a consensual history of the

Sharif Culture and Colonial Rule', 261-98; and Christina Oesterheld, 'Deputy Nazir Ahmad and the Delhi College', 299-324, on this well-known writer's attitude towards the scientific education he received at the College and its compatibility with his and his co-religionists' Muslim faith. For governmental efforts in the context of the Sanskrit College at Benares, see Michael S. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770-1880* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), especially chapter 5. For the somewhat later efforts of the Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā in Hindi, see Christopher King, 'The Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Benares, 1893-1914: A Study of the Social and Political History of the Hindi Language', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1974.

Academy's formation. The perception that scientific vocabulary had to be created was already firmly entrenched in the minds of vernacular language supporters and reformers, and efforts were already underway to advance these same goals. The suggestion that some kind of middle "vernacular" such as Hindustani could encompass the requisite modern, scientific, and emphatically "created" terminology being developed in both Hindi and Urdu was one that was not only dismissed by Saifi, but was also accepted, albeit implicitly, by other participants in the debate. Thus, this government-sponsored institution has to be viewed against the backdrop of already existing institutional efforts to expand the scientific vocabularies of Indian vernaculars, as well as broader issues pertaining to the role of the "vernacular" in modern society and its advancement.

Correspondingly, while the Hindustani Academy published several introductory scientific works during its pre-independence history,²³ it never developed the substantial, let alone comprehensive, scientific publishing strategy envisaged by its founders and supporters in the Legislative Assembly. Upadhyaya, for example, considered expenditure on the translation of "useful books", and particularly of scientific works, a key component of the ascendancy of European civilisation.²⁴ He lamented what he perceived as the dearth

²³ Of its 79 publications between 1927 and 1939, for instance, only 6 were on scientific subjects: of these 6, two were Urdu versions of Hindi originals, bringing the number of discrete scientific works down to four. See Tara Chand, *Report*, 19, 30-1.

²⁴ "If we imagine for a moment what European countries have done in this direction, we shall at once conclude that one of the chief causes of their greatness today is the fact that they have not grudged expenditure on the translation of useful books." Yajna Narain Upadhyaya, in *Proceedings*, 26.9 (December 1925) 709.

of such translation activities in the United Provinces as compared to other regions of India, particularly Bengal.²⁵

Another participant in the original Assembly debate, Dr Ganesh Prasad, made the educational imperative even more explicit; noting the low level of English literacy in the provinces, he remarked,

Now, the question is how are we going to make these people understand the various developments in science? Are they to wait until the impossible happens, namely, when these persons become literate in English or, are we going to place before them those very results, those discoveries which are at present among the mental possessions of all in England or France or Germany?²⁶

Despite these perorations, and despite the fact that the recommendation had been reinforced in the linguistic survey reports commissioned soon after its inauguration, the Academy never engaged in the large-scale production of translations of western or European scientific works, and instead focussed on the production of literary translations and publications.²⁷

Precisely why this was so is difficult to determine. It was certainly the case that other institutions were already engaged in the production and translation of scientific treatises and textbooks in the various Indian vernaculars.²⁸ Moreover, as discussed further

²⁵ “If we compare the work of other provinces in this connexion with that of these provinces, we shall surely feel ashamed. You may imagine for a moment what Bengal has done, what Gujarat has done, and what Maharashtra has done in this direction. They have tried their utmost to translate all the useful books on science simply with a view to improve their literature. But unfortunately we have done very little.” Id.

²⁶ Dr Ganesh Prasad, in *Proceedings*, 26.9 (December 1925) 711.

²⁷ The Academy’s translation activities are examined in more detail in §1.III below; for a discussion of the survey committees, see §1.IV.

²⁸ For example, in Hindi: the Jnanmandal (est. 1917), publishing concern of the Congress millionaire and philanthropist Babu Shivprasad Gupta (Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 76-7), and the Bharat Vijnan Parishad, Allahabad. For Urdu, Osmania was the most prominent.

below, there was a general lack of scientific expertise among the leadership of the Academy, and a correspondingly greater interest in literature and literary matters. What is clear, however, is that in the course of the qualitative expansion of the Academy's conceptualisation – from translation bureau to language academy – something had changed. The reorientation and broadening of focus, away from the mechanical process of translation and toward the conceptual and all-encompassing question of the advancement of the vernacular(s), had created a situation in which the officers of the Academy were freed to conceive their own programme and activities. As I show below, this programme involved a troubled engagement with literary history, demotic aspirations very similar to the ones articulated by those who had advocated for a programme of scientific translation, and the attempt to establish institutional authority, or perhaps even primacy, over and across the fields of Hindi and Urdu literary production. All of this necessitated, however, an engagement with the thorny issue of the “vernacular”, in all its ambiguity.

1.II AMBIGUOUS STRATEGIES: PUBLISHING ACROSS THE DIVIDE

While the Academy claimed a remit over cultural production in the broadest sense in both Hindi and Urdu, its primary activities were in the realm of publishing – not only of books but also, from 1931 onwards, of its two journals. Almost half of the books published by the Academy in its first thirteen years were literary or linguistic in nature. These included literary translations and poetic anthologies, as well as literary editions and biographies, and several significant interventions in the Hindi/Urdu question. The picture that emerges

from these publications is of a complex situation in which no clear strategy is immediately discernible. As I show below, some of the Academy publications contributed to the ongoing bifurcation of Hindi and Urdu as both distinct languages and historical canons, and even affirmed their distinct communal affiliations, while in other cases the same processes and discourses were either subtly subverted or directly and overtly challenged. As I have already suggested, the conciliatory, subtle approach to the question of Hindustani as a common literary register was best put into practice in the Academy's literary translations, which were evidently and avowedly conceived as a model for production in literary Hindustani, and which revolved around themes of communal harmony and social justice (see §1.III). Arguably these tendencies were significant in and for their mutually conflicting nature, as it is precisely this plurality of voices, opinions, trends and approaches that demonstrates the Academy's indeterminacy towards the central issues of language, register, and duality. In fact, I suggest that this lack of a clear, coherent and consistent position regarding the Hindi-Urdu question was symptomatic of the Academy's perhaps only discernible strategy – that of strategic indeterminacy – and it is with this in mind that I examine the variety of approaches evidenced in the publications that it produced.

First of all, let us consider the production of literary editions, such as Shyam Sundar Das' edition of *Satsāi Saptak* (1931, Hindi), Lala Sita Ram's edition of Mahatma Akshar Ananya's *Prem Dīpikā* (1936, Hindi), or Jalil Ahmad Qidwai's *Dīvān-e Bedār* (1937, Urdu). Such publications did nothing to challenge the binaries of language, script and canon that, as discussed in the Introduction, had come to define the literary inheritances of Hindi and

Urdu as dual and distinct. Avadhi writers such as Tulsidas and Biharilal were slotted into the Hindi canon and their works published in Devanagari, while Bedar's Urdu verse remained confined to the Urdu script and tradition.²⁹ Extending this simple paradigm – in which the subject of a work and its language/script exhibit what was by then a rather typical correlation – we see immediately that the literary biographies published by the Academy in its early period fit well within it: Hindi biographies took figures such as Tulsidas, Bhartendu Harishchandra, and Sant Tukaram as their subject,³⁰ while the sole literary biography in Urdu was on the famous iconoclast, and contested icon, Kabir.³¹ These observations are not intended to discount the quality of such works – evidence exists of serious scholarly appreciation for the Academy's publications, particularly the critical editions.³² Rather, I am drawing attention to the fact that, on a formal level and with regard to book-length publications, a substantial portion of the Academy's output served only to reinforce distinctions in the canon that lay at the heart of the communalisation of Hindi and Urdu. This general trend was also evident in the Hindi and Urdu versions of the journal, *Hindustānī*, wherein the vast majority of the articles in both versions were on somewhat predictable figures and themes, especially with regard to literary content. Thus, literature-related articles in the Urdu *Hindustānī* tended to focus on figures such as Sauda,

²⁹ Another contemporary edition of Bedar's poetry made this kind of 'ghettoisation' even more explicit – Mohammed Hussain Mahvi Siddiqui ed. *Dīvān-e Bedār* was published in the "Islamic Series" of the University of Madras in 1935.

³⁰ Shyamsundar Das and Pitambar Datt Barthwal, *Gosvāmī Tulsīdās* (1931, Hindi); Braj Ratan Das, *Bhāratendu Hariścandra* (1935, Hindi); Hari Ramchandra Divekar, *Sant Tukārām* (1937, Hindi).

³¹ Manohar Lal Zushti, *Kabīr Sāhab* (1930, Urdu).

³² See, for instance, T. Grahame Bailey's glowing review of the edition of Prithviraj Rathore's *Veli Krisan Rukmaṇī Rī* by Thakur Ram Singh and Surya Karan Pareek (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1931) in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London* 7.1 (1933) 238-9.

Mir, Hali, Ruswa, and Ghalib, and on subjects such as modern Urdu poetry, Urdu literary histories, other Urdu journals, and so forth. There were only occasionally articles on elements of the Hindi canon,³³ and even what we could term “Hindu themes” were most often considered from the point of view of their relation to Urdu.³⁴ The opposite situation applied, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the case of the Hindi journal.³⁵

Furthermore, several of the Academy’s linguistic publications explicitly reinforced the division between Hindi and Urdu, stressing their differences, exclusivity, communal ownership, and divergent histories. Most prominent among these were two works by Dharendra Varma, the head of the Hindi department at Allahabad University: a substantial (at 375 pages) history of Hindi, *Hindī Bhāṣā kā Itihās* (1933), and a shorter work (58 pages) entitled *Hindī Bhāṣā aur Lipī* (1938). Both of these have proven enduringly popular, and have remained in print constantly – the twelfth edition of the *Itihās* was published in 1995, while *Hindī Bhāṣā aur Lipī* was in its nineteenth edition in 2005. Neither, however, projected an accommodating or broad concept of ‘Hindi’. Varma was a prominent member of the Academy – he sat on both the editorial board of the Hindi journal and the Council of the Academy – and was one of the most respected scholars in the field. Furthermore, he noted in the introduction to his *History* that he was specifically commissioned by the executive

³³ See, for example, Muhammad Abdul Latif Khan, ‘Mat Rām ek Hindī Ratan’, *Hindustānī* (U) 2.1 (January 1932) 56-94.

³⁴ See, for example, Shah Mu‘in ud-Din Ahmad Nadvi, ‘Urdū Śā‘irī meṅ Hindū Kalcar aur Hindustān ke Ṭab‘ī aur Jughrāfi Aṣrāt’, *Hindustānī* (U), 9.3 (July 1939).

³⁵ So, beyond a significant percentage of articles dealing with Sanskrit literature, the *bhakti* tradition, and issues such as modern Hindi lexicography, the few articles that dealt with the “other” tradition did so from a “Hindi” perspective: see, for example, Bhagvatdayal Varma, ‘Fārsī lipī meṅ hindī pustaken’, *Hindustānī* (H) 3.4 (October 1933) 378-86 (important exceptions exist: see the discussion of Upendranath Ashk’s articles in this chapter and §2.IV).

board of the Academy to produce this work.³⁶ Varma took what has been described as a “pragmatic approach” to the question of Hindi as the national language, advocating its status as *rājbhāṣā* (official language) rather than *rāṣṭrabhāṣā* (national language).³⁷ His moderate stance was, however, both relative and internal to an exclusively defined Hindi sphere, rather than a more broadly conceived Hindustani sphere. Varma considered modern Hindi to have evolved directly from Sanskrit – through Pali, the various Prakrits, and *Apabhramśa* forms – and to be of the same linguistic family as Gujarati, Rajasthani and several languages of the Himalayan foothills.³⁸ So, while he allowed that Hindi and Urdu may be “sisters” (not an uncommon trope at this time), he considered the former to be Hindu, the latter Muslim, and that a world of difference existed between their literary styles (literally, “atmospheres”), vocabulary, and script.³⁹ Hindustani in his view was a term invented by Europeans and applied at first to formal Urdu and later to conversational Urdu; for him Hindustani remained an intrinsically vacuous term, and in practice hopelessly predisposed towards Persian vocabulary, forms and aesthetics.⁴⁰ Viewed alongside his recommendation, discussed below, that Muslims should look to preserving Urdu themselves if they wished to do so (see §1.V), this rhetoric can hardly be considered one of reconciliation. Indeed, Varma’s vehemently partisan publications seem almost incongruous in the context of an Academy devoted, at least in theory, to the breaking down of distinctions between Hindi and Urdu and their practitioners. His approaches to literary

³⁶ Dhirendra Varma, *Hindī Bhāṣā kā Itihās* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1995 [1933]) 7.

³⁷ Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 135.

³⁸ Dhirendra Varma, *Hindī Bhāṣā aur Lipi* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 2005 [1938]) 22-30.

³⁹ “*Sāhityik vātāvaraṇ, śabd-samūh tathā lipi meṁ donom meṁ ākās-pātāl kā bhed hai.*” *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

and linguistic history did little to advance such an agenda – in fact, they mandated quite clearly against it.

This trend towards the reification of distinction and the reinforcement of difference was, however, far from pervasive in the Hindustani Academy publications. Symptomatic of the ‘broad tent’ policies which the Academy proactively pursued, such publications appeared alongside other works that were more inclusive in their approach or paradigm shifting in their presentation. Foremost among these was Pandit Padma Singh Sharma’s *Hindī, Urdū yā Hindustānī* (*Hindī, Urdu or Hindustani*, 1932), and Upendranath Ashk’s *Urdū Kāvya kī ek Nāī Dhārā* (*A New Trend in Urdu Poetry*, 1941; 1949). They stand as exemplars of the strategy that William Marris had urged the Academy to adopt, to “set its face firmly against any attempts to give either branch of the vernacular a distinctly sectarian and therefore a non-popular form.”⁴¹

Ashk’s work was particularly interesting in several respects. It was an expanded version of a two-part article on ‘Songs in Modern Urdu Poetry’ that had been published in *Hindustānī* (H) three years previously,⁴² and contained an anthology of examples of the trend Ashk was discussing. This was, namely, what Ashk considered to be a significant positive shift in the oeuvre and outlook of some Urdu poets – a simultaneous move away from the traditional concerns and structures of classical Urdu poetics and an increasing acceptance of and openness to the influence of Hindi and other poetic traditions, exemplified in the pioneering works of ‘Hafiz’ Jalandhari, ‘Josh’ Malihabadi, and Miraji. The

⁴¹ Marris, quoted in Tara Chand, *Report*, 88.

⁴² Upendranath Ashk, ‘Ādhunik Urdū Kavītā meṁ Gīt’, *Hindustānī* (H) 8.2 (April 1938) 133-57; 8.3 (July 1938) 263-84.

significance of these developments and Ashk's attitude towards them are discussed at some length in chapter 2. What is important to consider here is the act of presentation itself – the conscious effort on the part of Ashk, aided and encouraged by the Hindustani Academy member and editor of the Hindi version of *Hindustānī*, Ramchandra Tandon, to describe these developments in Urdu poetry in two *Hindi* publications.⁴³ Commenting towards the end of his long introduction to the anthology, Ashk explicitly states his intention “to make Hindi-speakers aware of the Urdu poems of this age.”⁴⁴

If Ashk's is perhaps the single clearest example in the whole catalogue of Hindustani Academy publications of a writer attempting to keep readers of one language abreast of current developments in another, Tara Chand's remarks on Hindi and Urdu in the introduction to the volume are the clearest articulation of Hindi and Urdu as both *shared* languages and literary traditions, the patrimony of both Hindus and Muslims:

Hindī aur urdū donoṁ ek des hindustān kī bhāṣāeṁ haiṁ. Donoṁ ek sī hālatoṁ meṁ paidā huīṁ, phalī-phūlī aur baṛhī hai. Donoṁ kā adab hindū aur musalmān likhnevāloṁ kī kośīsoṁ se banā hai...Hindī zabān meṁ islāmī rīti-rivājōṁ, falsafe aur mazhab se sambandh rakhne vālī bahuterī kitābeṁ haiṁ, aur urdū meṁ isī tarah hinduoṁ ke darśan aur śāst, dharm, aur jñān, itihās aur kahāniyoṁ kā acchā bhaṇḍar hai.

Hindi and Urdu are both languages of one country, India. Both were born in the same conditions, blossomed and grew. *The literature of both is made from the efforts of Hindu and Muslim writers...* There are excellent books concerning Islamic customs, philosophy and religion in the Hindi language; and in this same manner there is a treasure trove of Hindu philosophy and scripture, religion and science, history and stories in Urdu.⁴⁵

Tara Chand goes on to stress the naturalness of a process of mutual influence and interaction between the literatures of Hindi and Urdu which, as he describes in a (probably

⁴³ For an account of Tandon's endorsement of the project, see Upendranath Ashk, *Urdū Kāvya kī ek Nāī Dhārā* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1949 [1941]) 1-4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁵ Tara Chand, 'Introduction', in *ibid.*, 5, emphasis added.

consciously, and certainly beautifully) mixed register, has resulted in a middle river flowing between the two extremes:

Lekin in do dhārāom̄ ke bīc mer̄ ek dar-miyānī nadī bahtī hai jo donom̄ ke pāniyom̄ se mil kar banī hai aur jis kā jal alahdā bahnevālī dhārāom̄ mer̄ ristā rahtā hai.

However, between these two currents flows an intermediary river, made of the mingling of the waters of each, and whose water preserves the relationship between the two separate currents.⁴⁶

Tara Chand's Hindustani, then, is that literary register that connects the separate currents in a single flow. Moreover, we can see that Tara Chand posited this realm of mutuality as already in existence. This collection was, according to him, one in which both Hindu and Muslim writers were present, and whose works were without any discernible markers of religious identity.⁴⁷

Ashk himself was careful to treat the poetic traditions of both Hindi and Urdu in equal terms – influence, in his schema, was emphatically mutual and positive, rather than one-way or subversive. *Both* traditions had now “escaped” from their former prisons – Urdu had been drowning in overused metaphors of nightingales and roses, lovers and beloveds, but equally Hindi had been mired in the flirtations and sensuousness of kings and the objects of their affections.⁴⁸ Using the familiar image of poetic language as the “clothing” of ideas and emotions,⁴⁹ Ashk asserted that language is irrelevant to the

⁴⁶ Id.

⁴⁷ “*In kaviyom̄ mer̄ hindū bhī haiṁ aur musalmān bhī, lekin in ke gītom̄ ko parh kar koī bhī yah nahīṁ kah saktā ki in mer̄ mat yā dharm kā bhed hai.*” Ibid., 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁹ Thus the “New” Persian poets of Mughal India talked of “new clothes”, and so did those who wrote about Hindu ideas in Persian garb; see Stefano Pellò, ‘Between Gaya and Karbala: The Textual Identification of Persian Hindu Poets from Lucknow in Bhagwan Das Hindi’s Tazkira’, forthcoming in Vasudha Dalmia and Mehr Farooqui eds. *Religious Interactions in Mughal India* (Berkeley: University of California Press)/ ‘Tra Gayā e Karbalā: le identità dei poeti hindu di Lucknow nella tazkira persiana di

expression and realisation of emotions – “whichever language-blouse an emotion should be clothed in, it will remain the same.”⁵⁰ Thus Ashk posited the equivalence and interrelatedness of not only Hindi and Urdu, but of Hindu and Muslim writers also. Well aware of the increased estrangement of the readers of the two languages, his work was intended as an effort to bridge that divide.

Padma Singh Sharma’s *Hindī, Urdū yā Hindustānī* was of a decidedly different, and perhaps more typical, order. In this book, Sharma certainly issued a plea for unity, and his assertions with regard to language were clearly sincere, but this was a rhetorical rather than literary work – similar in both these regards to the articles by Tara Chand, Ramnaresh Tripathi and Tej Bahadur Sapru discussed below (see §1.VI) – which did not demonstrate a literary possibility, but simply argued for it. The book was a compilation of a series of lectures that Sharma delivered under the aegis of the Academy in 1932, in which he espoused the fundamental and original unity of Hindi and Urdu, and made suggestions on how such unity *might be re-established*, particularly through the work of “farsighted scholars”.⁵¹ His concluding remarks were a both a validation of the Academy’s work and mission, and a rallying cry for the cause of Hindi-Urdu unity. The Hindustani Academy had been founded, as was obvious from its name, to make the case for Hindustani as a paradigm

Bhagwān Dās ‘Hindī’ in D. Bredi, L. Capezone, W. Dahmash, C. Rostagno eds. *Scritti in onore di Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti* (Rome: Edizioni Q, 2008) 931-50.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵¹ He mentions Dhirendra Varma in this connexion, praising in particular his stance regarding Hindi as *rājbhāṣā* as opposed to *raṣṭrabhāṣā*. See Padma Singh Sharma, *Hindī, Urdū yā Hindustānī* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1932) 34-35.

in which the enmity and disharmony between Hindi and Urdu could be erased as from members of the same family, and this was a worthy effort:

Yadi ekeḍamī in donom̄ ko ek krne mem̄ Samarth ho sakī, to hindustān par uskā baṛā upkār aur ahsān hogā. Kuṭumb ke baṭvāre kī tarah bhāṣā kā yah baṭvārā bhī kuṭumb-kalah aur sampatti-vinās kā kāraṇ hai... rāj-parivār bhikhārī ban gaye...Hindustānī ekeḍamī kā aisem̄blī bhī hindī-urdū-parivār ke lie koī aisā hī qanūn yā niyam banā sakī, jisse yah donom̄, vibhakt na ho sakeṁ, to bhāṣā kā is kuṭumb par baṛā anugraha hogā. Yadi hindī urdū donom̄ saṁyukt parivār kī daśā mem̄ ā jāem̄ to phir iskī sāhitya-sampatti kā koī bhāṣā muqābilā na kar sake.

If the Academy proves capable of making these two into one, it will be a great kindness and favour for India. *Like a schism in a family*, this schism is the cause of family strife...*the national family has become divided*...If the assembly of the Hindustani Academy could make such a law or rule according to which these two could not be separated, this would be a great support to this language family. If Hindi and Urdu should come together as one joint family then no language in the world would be their literary equal.⁵²

For Sharma, then, the role of the Academy was clear: its mission was to preserve a pre-existing language and mode and prevent a new and decidedly unfortunate process of differentiation.

To conclude this discussion on the major literary efforts in the direction of unity, I turn to the anthology of Hindi poetry, *Hindī ke Kavi aur Kāvya*, compiled at the behest of the Hindustani Academy by Ganesh Prasad Dvivedi.⁵³ It contains a striking example of an inclusive approach to literary traditions and canon formation in its third volume, which Tara Chand described as “an anthology of Hindi Sufi poetry”, and in its later edition was titled *Hindī Premgathākāvya-saṅgrah*.⁵⁴ Dvivedi’s volume is a pioneering selection of sections from the major works of five poets – Malik Muhammad Jayasi and his most famous work

⁵² Ibid., 151-152, emphases added. Sharma’s use of the motif of a divided family would have had a strong resonance among members of his audience.

⁵³ Ganesh Prasad Dvivedi ed. *Hindī ke Kavi aur Kāvya* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, Part I: 1937, Part II: 1938, Part III 1939)

⁵⁴ See Tara Chand, *Report*, 21, and Ganesh Prasad Dvivedi ed. *Hindī Premgathākāvya-saṅgrah* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1953 [1939]).

Padmāvati, the *Citrāvalī* of Usman, the *Mādhavānal-kāmakandalā* of Alam, Nur Muhammad's *Indrāvati*, and Sheikh Nisar's *Yūsuf-Zulekhā* – along with brief biographies and passages of literary criticism.⁵⁵

It was not uncommon practice at this time to assert the place of Braj Bhasha and Avadhi literature as belonging in an exclusive (and rather artificial) historical canon, literary tradition and genealogy of Hindi. Dvivedi's collection could easily be seen as part of just such a process. To do so, however, would be to misinterpret his intentions drastically. The five poets chosen for discussion and inclusion in this collection were all Muslim Sufis, all of whom had written in Avadhi – itself a highly fluid language and, as literary scholars were well aware, one that was fundamentally divorced from the issue of script, written as it often had been in Nagari, Kaithi or Nastaliq with equal facility.⁵⁶ Here, long extracts from the various works were presented in Nagari, taking up by themselves almost 80% of the volume. Yet it was in the remaining 20% that Dvivedi made his distinctive contribution, with Muhammad Jayasi figuring most prominently in his discussion. Jayasi was perhaps the most well known Avadhi poet after Tulsi Das, and so his position in the collection is unsurprising. Moreover, the potentially inflammatory central theme of his *Padmāvat* – the war on the Hindu Raja of Chittor by Ala ud-Din Khalji – is rendered harmless by its expressly allegorical nature.⁵⁷ Indeed, Dvivedi has effusive praise for Jayasi and his

⁵⁵ For a treatment in English of these works and their authors, see Ronald Stuart McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1984), respectively: 67-71; 151-2; 62-3/194; 153; 153-4.

⁵⁶ The works included had been transmitted in Nastaliq and Kaithi manuscripts.

⁵⁷ This allegorical tale profoundly impressed British readers: "throughout the work of the Musalmān ascetic there run veins of the broadest charity and of sympathy with those higher spirits among his

contemporaries, seeing in them the first efforts towards peaceful coexistence and indeed mutual understanding between India's Hindu and Muslim communities. Even if the Muslim rulers were uninterested in the cultural heritage and practices of their Hindu subjects, he wrote, "a kind of fraternal feeling began to grow between Hindu and Muslim subjects."⁵⁸ As such, members of both communities began to take an interest in the faith, culture, and literature of the other. "These people understood perfectly that there could be no better way to establish intimacy and affection than by spreading and popularising the literature of each community among the members of the other."⁵⁹ It was in this vein and with this intention, he asserted, that poets such as Jaysi, Khusrao and Kabir had been working and, moreover, had been so successful, creating a model of literary syncretism worthy of admiration and emulation.

Of course, Dvivedi's attribution of an *intention* to espouse Hindu-Muslim unity to these historical poets was a rhetorical strategy that, knowingly or otherwise, was predicated upon contemporary understandings of the aims and purposes of literature, and which was therefore deeply flawed.⁶⁰ Yet Dvivedi clearly intended his observations as an allegorical reference to the work of the Hindustani Academy, and his focus on Jayasi was no accident. Jayasi had become quite a popular symbol of not only Hindu-Muslim unity (and of

fellow countrymen who were searching in God's twilight for that truth of which some of them achieved a clearer vision." *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, volume 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909) 431.

For a recent reinterpretation of the work, see Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in India c.1500-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), chapter 2.

⁵⁸ Dvivedi, *Hindī*, 17.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ Such tendencies have been thoroughly critiqued – see, for example, Thomas de Bruijn, 'Dialogism in a Medieval Genre: The Case of the Avadhi Epics' in Orsini ed., *Before the Divide*, 121-41, wherein de Bruijn makes the exceptionally useful distinction between composite *genres* and the ideal of composite *culture*.

the “liberal” Islam of Sufis), but also of a syncretic approach to both religion and language. A.G. Shirreff, for instance, in the introduction to his translation of the *Padmāvati* (published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal) went so far as to describe Jayasi as “The Prophet of Unity”.⁶¹ Dvivedi avoids such hyperbole, but nevertheless makes his appreciation of Jayasi and other Sufi Avadhi poets quite clear. He compares the language of Jayasi not unfavourably to that of Tulsi, and although he leaves open the question of whether Jayasi’s less Sanskritised style was a *kamī* (shortcoming) or *khūbī* (virtue), by asking it in the first place one might suspect he favoured the latter answer. It is abundantly clear that Dvivedi’s intention, through compiling this collection, was neither to dismiss the Sufi poets as less-able writers of Avadhi, nor to claim them, and all Avadhi writers, for the Hindi canon alone. Rather, Dvivedi was attempting, in what he evidently considered to have been the manner of Jayasi *et al.*, to present the literature of one community to the other, to popularise it, and to increase bonds of affection by increasing awareness and understanding. Furthermore, this volume stood alongside the others in the anthology to demonstrate and emphasise that the pre-modern history of “Hindi” was a shared one, in which *bhakta*, *sant* and Sufi participated together.

Interestingly, most other writers published by the Academy seem to have accepted the designation of “Hindi poet” for anyone who had written in Braj or Avadhi as largely unproblematic. Jayasi finds no mention in the Academy’s Urdu poetry anthology –

⁶¹ He went on to speculate, somewhat colourfully: “If we could meet him now in the Elysian fields, and could ask him whether he had approached his theme from the Muslim or the Hindu standpoint, he would, I imagine, answer with a smile that he did not know, and that he had never seen any difference between them.” A.G. Shirreff tr. *Padmāvati* (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1944) ix-x.

Muhammad Mohbin Kaifi's *Javāhir-e Sukhan*⁶² – and Nisar has less than a page devoted to him. Where these some of these Muslim “Hindi” writers do find mention, however, is in an Urdu publication on “Hindi” poetry by Azam Kurevi.⁶³ This was a noteworthy work for several reasons, not least for its challenge to the paradigm that posited a general correlation between author, subject matter, language and implied audience. Kurevi's *Hindī Śā'irī* was a work by a Muslim author on Hindi poetry in Urdu and so aimed at an Urdu-reading audience. As such, it stood in sharp contradistinction to the literary editions and biographies discussed at the outset of this section, and to the trend towards differentiation of canons and communities that prevailed at the time. Kurevi seems at first glance to have accepted the genealogy of Hindi as descended from Sanskrit through Prakrits and into its Braj and Avadhi forms. However, he clearly uses “Hindi” to refer to “Bhāṣā/Bhākā”, i.e. Braj and Avadhi, and not simply to Khari Boli Hindi (which he occasionally refers to as “*bhāṣā*”), and asserts that *this* language was the language of poetry for both Hindus and Muslims, a shared vehicle of religiosity, and rightly remained the common heritage of both.⁶⁴ In his commentary on the relationship between Hindi and Urdu, Kurevi characterises them as sisters and dismisses those who are “engaged in trying to make Urdu into an amalgamation of Persian and Arabic”, as well as their Sanskritising counterparts.⁶⁵ He then presents what

⁶² Muhammad Mobin Kaifi ed. *Javāhir-e Sukhan* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, Part I: 1933, Part II: 1935, Part III: 1937, Part IV: 1939).

⁶³ Azam Kurevi, *Hindī Śā'irī* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1931).

⁶⁴ “*Śirf hindū'ōñ ne hī bhāṣā ko apñī zabān nahīñ samjhā balkih musalmānoñ ne bhī is zabān ko śikhā aur is meñ vah qābilyat pedā kī ki inheñ se ba'z to hindī śā'irī keli'e sarmāya nāz ban ga'e.*” “It wasn't only Hindus who considered this language theirs, but Muslims too learnt this language and acquired such proficiency in it that several of them have become resources of pride/grace for Hindi poetry.” *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

he considered the treasures of Hindi/Bhāṣā literature, supplementing his Nastaliq quotations with Nagari transliterations and Urdu translations of key vocabulary.

The significance here was thus the claiming of Braj and Avadhi as part of a shared canon and literary culture: neither unproblematically a constituent part of the direct and exclusive genealogy of modern standard Hindi, nor the sole preserve of one religious community or the other, but as something that could and perhaps even should be appreciated and perpetuated by aficionados and litterateurs of any and all persuasions. We should be cautious in being overly celebratory, however: this was still a project of presentation (similar to Ashk's work in this regard) that presumed a lack of familiarity with the subject matter in the target audience, and worked to remedy this. It is thus a somewhat limited project: it conceded, to some degree, the idea that language and script had a direct correlation with religious community, even as it sought to challenge this same paradigm.

1.III DRAMATIC TRANSLATIONS

As I have already suggested, the Academy's most perceptible contribution towards evolving a paradigm of Hindustani as a middle ground between Hindi and Urdu came in its programme of literary translations. The Academy had always been envisioned as an organisation devoted to publishing, and was initially intended to focus on bringing out appropriate translations in Hindi and Urdu, as the original Legislative Assembly proposal of Yajna Narain Upadhyaya expressed it. Indeed, as we have seen, the major motivation behind the creation of the Hindustani Academy was that it should enrich the literatures of

both Hindi and Urdu through the translation of appropriate materials, particularly scientific works, from European languages (see §1.I above). The project of translation was therefore central to the Academy's aims and its attitude towards issues of literary enrichment, linguistic progress, and the national language question.

However, a theoretical and qualitative assessment of the Academy's translation activities in its early years reveals a remarkable degree of boldness on the part of the institution. The focus on scientific translations of its proponents was apparently given little mind, and the Academy focussed instead on literary translations, producing a series of these in the years up to 1939. Furthermore, the selection of pieces translated demonstrates a measure of disregard for both the advice and opinion of the Imperial government. William Marris had himself cautioned against allowing translations too much prominence within the context of the Academy, conceding that, while they may be a "utilitarian necessity", they fell short of creativity, and describing the act as a "relatively ignoble office" in his inaugural speech.⁶⁶ Yet a sizeable section of the western-educated Indian élite looked both to the major European powers (England, France, and Germany) and also to Japan as examples of advanced, modern countries and regarded the languages of each of these countries as repositories of useful knowledge that could be tapped. The Academy's innovation in this regard, as I argue below, was to turn from the mechanical transcription of scientific knowledge from the European vernaculars into the Indian, to instead a selection of texts that advanced socialist, progressive principles, significant as literary

⁶⁶ Marris, in Tara Chand, *Report*, 86.

interventions into issues of communal relations on one hand, and into questions of capitalism and the coercive power of the state on the other.

Simultaneously, the fraught question of a national language for India was under constant consideration by the 1930s, and the advocates of both Hindi and Urdu had become increasingly strident in asserting the candidacy of their chosen language (and script) for this position. The creation of the Hindustani Academy constituted, as we have seen, a governmental ascription of legitimacy to *both* Hindi and Urdu, at least in the context of the United Provinces. However, the literary translations produced in this period were explicitly intended to provide a creative and linguistic model for *literary Hindustani*, and presumably to strengthen the case for this overarching language as a compromise national language. The translations thus need to be examined carefully from both thematic and linguistic perspectives, in order to understand fully the significance of this project.

The number of literary translations produced was not large: by 1939, after twelve years of operation, the Academy had published only nine translations, of which three were of two plays by the eighteenth-century German writer Gotthold Ephraim Lessing,⁶⁷ and six were of four plays by the contemporary English dramatist and novelist John Galsworthy.⁶⁸ In what follows, I focus on three of those: Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* (*Nathan the Wise*), already long-

⁶⁷ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan der Weise* (1779): Muhammad Naimur Rehman tr. *Nātan* (Urdu; 1930), Mirza Abul Fazl tr. *Nātan* (Hindi; 1932); *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767): Mangal Deo Shastri tr. *Mina* (Hindi; 1937).

⁶⁸ John Galsworthy, *Justice* (1910): Premchand tr. *Nyāya* (Hindi; 1930), Daya Narain Nigam tr. *Insāf* (Urdu; 1939); *Skin Game* (1920): Jagat Mohan Lal Rawan tr. *Fareb-e Amal* (Urdu; 1930), Lalit Prasad Shukla tr. *Dhokā Dhārī* (Hindi; 1931); *Strife* (1909): Premchand tr. *Hartāl* (Hindi; 1930); *The Silver Box* (1906): Premchand tr. *Chāndī kī Dibiyā* (Hindi; 1930).

considered, in the words of Aamir Mufti, “the exemplar of the Enlightenment attitude towards religious co-existence and tolerance”; and Galsworthy’s *Strife* – on relations between low-paid factory workers and their managers – and *Justice* – a pointed critique of the Edwardian penal system, and particularly of the practice of solitary confinement.⁶⁹ Such works would have had an obvious appeal to reform-minded writers such as Premchand, who produced several of the Hindi translations, and to the secularly oriented editor in Daya Narain Nigam and historian in Tara Chand, both of whom were involved in the project, and their themes emphatically demonstrate the progressive inclinations of those involved at the heart of the Academy’s operations.

Lessing’s *Nathan* is perhaps best known for the structurally and narratively central parable of the ring, through which the “wise” Jew Nathan demonstrates the equality of Islam, Judaism and Christianity to the questioning Sultan Saladin. Saladin asks Nathan which of the three religions is the true one, to which Nathan responds with the story of a man who, possessing a ring which made him beloved by God and men, determined that he would give the ring to his favourite son. Unable to choose between them, he had two copies made, and gave each of his three sons a ring, telling each that his was the true one. On his death, the three approached a judge to settle the argument as to which ring was genuine, and thus which of them was their father’s favoured son.

This central scene culminates in the poetic denouement of the parable: “*Umsonst; der rechte Ring war nicht / Erweislich – Fast so unerweislich als / Uns jetzt – der rechte Glaube.*”

⁶⁹ *The Silver Box*, not discussed here, has similar themes of class relations, in the context of the legal system and its disparate impact on those from privileged and underprivileged backgrounds.

(“And so, the true ring could not be determined – almost as indeterminable as is, for us, the true faith.”) As Aamir Mufti has shown, citing Ernst Cassirer’s work as an example of the trend, this parable has been the basis on which the play has been consistently read as a model of and appeal for religious harmony and, crucially, tolerance.⁷⁰ Mufti has carefully argued for the limits of this model of liberal tolerance, as it applies not only to Jews in Europe, but moreover to minorities generally, and particularly to Muslims in the Indian nation-state.⁷¹ Nevertheless, those involved in the Academy’s translation project clearly saw in *Nathan* a profound and relevant literary appeal for religious harmony, as the remarks of Muhammad Naimur Rahman in his translator’s preface indicate;

Ājkal hamāre deś meṁ jo updrav upsthit hai uske kāraṇoṁ meṁ se ek baṛā kāraṇ yah hai ki paraspar laṛnevāle ek dūstre ke dharmik matoṁ se aṅṅān haiṁ...Durbhāgyavaś sāhitya bhī aisā nikal rahā hai jo ek ko dūstre se laṛāne meṁ sahāytā de rahā hai.

What turbulence exists in our country today is largely due to the fact that members of each community are wholly ignorant of the religious ideas and ideals of the other...Unfortunately, some literature is lending support to the fight.⁷²

Clearly setting himself against such trends, he expressed his hope that *Nātan* would “do in India what it had already done in Europe”;⁷³ i.e., contribute to the evolution of ideas of religious tolerance in ways only literature could.

Indeed, the broader thrust of Lessing’s Enlightenment attitude concerning the desirability of “natural religion”,⁷⁴ and his stated preference for any positive religion which

⁷⁰ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), cited in Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 45.

⁷¹ See Mufti, *Enlightenment*, passim, and on *Nathan* in particular, 41-56.

⁷² Muhammad Naimur Rahman, ‘Bhūmikā’, in Abul Fazl tr. *Nātan*, 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁴ “The best revealed or positive religion is that which...least hinders the good effects of natural religion.” Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ‘On the Origin of Revealed Religion’, in *Lessing’s Theological*

least hindered the former's "good effects" – which I suggest can be read in the concluding portion of Nathan's parable – might have had even more appeal to the Academy's members.

In the words of the judge, to whom the three brothers had gone for a decision as to whose was the true ring:

Es strebe von Euch jeder um die Wette, Die Kraft des Steins in seinem Ring an Tag Zu legen! komme dieser Kraft mit Sanftmuth, Mit herzlicher Verträglichkeit, mit Wohltun, Mit innigster Ergebenheit in Gott, Zu Hülff! Und wenn sich dann der Steine Kräfte Bei Euern Kindes-Kindeskindern äuszern: So lad' ich über tausend tausend Jahre Sie wiederum vor diesen Stuhl. Da wird Ein weis'rer Mann auf diesem Stuhle sitzen, Als ich, und sprechen. Geht! – So sagte der Bescheidne Richter.

Let each of you strive to outdo the other in showing the power of the stone in your ring; come to its power with meekness, benevolence, charity, and heartfelt devotion in the help of God. And if the power of the stones continues to be shown by your children's children, then I invite you to appear before this chair again after a thousand thousand years. Then will a wiser man than I sit upon this chair, and speak. Go! – so spoke the modest judge.

With the rings signifying the three Abrahamic faiths, the judge had somewhat tersely suggested prior to this passage that perhaps all three were mere copies of the original, which the sons' father had kept from all of them. Combined with this appeal to the essential qualities of "good" religion – meekness, charity, benevolence, etc. – the invocation of Enlightenment deism is clear. If there is a "true" religion, it is either unknowable (as there are no obvious distinctions in the form of the three), or it is transcendent, being a precursor to the three, or it is knowable only from the fruit of its believers' good deeds. The chance to posit this literary argument for secular tolerance and co-existence, while rhetorically minimising distinctions of faith and community, was clearly too good for the Academy's members to miss.⁷⁵

Writings, ed. Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956) 105, quoted in Mufti, *Enlightenment*, 47.

⁷⁵ I return to this theme of deistic toleration at greater length in Chapter 3.

In a rather different vein, many of Galsworthy's plays demonstrated a profound concern with issues of social justice, and two of the translated plays were among his most famous. *Strife* dramatises a conflict between striking workers and the directors of a tin plate factory, in which the workers are attempting to secure better pay while the board, and especially its chairman, trenchantly refuses to concede their demands. The chairman of the national union is a pivotal figure, attempting to mediate between the two groups, yet ultimately losing his credibility with both. Galsworthy's sympathies are clearly with the workers, however. Early on in the play, the union chairman Harness attends a meeting of the board:

SCANTLEBURY: Can't you persuade the men that their interests are the same as ours?

HARNESS: [Turning, ironically.] I could persuade them of that, sir, if they were.

WILDER: Come, Harness, you're a clever man, you don't believe all the Socialistic claptrap that's talked nowadays. There's no real difference between their interests and ours.

...

HARNESS: [Icily.] The men have no use for your pity, sir. What they want is justice.

SKENTALBARĪ: *Āp majdūrom ko yah nahīm samjhā sakte ki hamārā aur unkā ek hī svārth hai?*

HĀRNIS: [Ghūmkar vyañg se] *Agar yah bāt thīk hotī to maim unhem samjhā saktā thā.*

VĀILDAR: *Dekho hārnīs, tum buddhīmān ho aur sāmyavādiyom ke un gorakh-dhandhom ko nahīm mānte jinkī ājkal dhūm macī huī hai. Unke aur hamāre dil mein zarā bhī antar nahīm hai.*

...

HARNESS: [Beparvāhī se] *Mazdūrom ko āpkī dayā kī zarūrat nahīm hai sahib, vah keval nyāy cāhte hairī.*⁷⁶

The play ends with a bittersweet victory for the workers, as the majority of the board accedes to their modified, moderate demands, and the chairman steps down, a broken man. Yet combined with the personal losses suffered by the strikers, *Strife* functions largely as a frustrated commentary on the intransigence of capitalist managers and men of privilege in the face of basic demands from their employees, and as a strong suggestion that such should be met.

⁷⁶ Premchand tr. *Hartāl*, 23-4.

This kind of progressive critique of industrial relations would have had a general applicability, especially in the rapidly industrialised context of the United Provinces.⁷⁷ The question of imprisonment, however, was more overtly political. Galsworthy's *Justice*, premiered in London in 1910, was a direct and sympathetic intervention in late Edwardian debates on penal reform.⁷⁸ Given the history of arrests especially of Congress personnel, and the rise of the Civil Disobedience movement, it seems remarkable that Premchand's translation of the play – *Nyāya* – was not censored when it was published in 1930 (Nigam's Urdu version – *Insāf* – was not published until 1939, for reasons that remain unknown). It contained Galsworthy's most passionate critique of the uncaring nature of the legal system ("Justice is a machine that, when someone has given it the starting push, rolls on of itself.") Given the political context, *Justice* was an expressly political choice on the part of the fledgling Academy, making a progressive and subversive intervention in contemporary debates and extending Galsworthy's socially committed critique to the Hindustani context.

Tara Chand daringly, albeit somewhat obliquely, invoked the resonance of such plays in the contemporary Indian context in his introduction to *Hartāl*. He noted that there was no shortage of plays in Hindi and Urdu at the time, but he looked to Europe and especially to the political turmoil of the 19th century as a fertile period for dramatic creativity, when "the pride of man...newly self aware, trod new paths of freedom and

⁷⁷ See Pandey, *Ascendancy*, 11-24 on post-war industrialization and economic conditions in the region; also Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983) 261-74, on labour relations in the period 1928-9, immediately preceding Premchand's 1930 translation of *Strife*.

⁷⁸ On the prominence of Galsworthy and his play in these debates, including his interactions with then Home Secretary Winston Churchill on the issue, see Mike Nellis, 'John Galsworthy's *Justice*' *British Journal of Criminology* 36,1 (1996) 61-84.

equality.”⁷⁹ These translations, he asserted, transposed such feelings of pride and self-respect into the Indian context, and this at a time of more than a little political turmoil in India. It seems obvious that the choice of materials for translation was no accident: the Academy was clearly advancing a reformist and progressive mode of literature and literary expression, advocating principles of secular tolerance (however problematic, after Mufti, such a position may be), communal harmony, and social and political justice, with an eye towards independence, in the context of a governmental institution.

But apart from representing models of socially committed and secular or at least religiously neutral works, the translations into Hindi and Urdu, with their almost identical and overlapping register, were also intended as *linguistic* models for literary works – exemplars of the idiomatic and mixed register in which Hindi or Urdu works could and should be composed. Tara Chand made this point explicitly in his introduction to Premchand’s translation of *Strife*, when he asked rhetorically:

Yadi yorup ke ḍrāme hindustānī bhāṣā meṃ upsthit kiye jaym [sic] to kyā yah sambhav nahīm ki inko dekhkar hamāre deś meṃ barnārd śā, gālsvardī, mezfild sarikhe nāṭak paidā ho!

If European dramas should be presented *in Hindustani*, then is it not possible that plays like those of Bernhard Shaw, Galsworthy, or Masfield should arise!⁸⁰

This “*Hindustānī bhāṣā*” was intended as an overlapping and inclusive register, with distinctions and artificially “pure” vocabulary rigorously avoided. Indeed, a brief example drawn from the translations of Lessing’s *Nathan* shows how limited the differences need be.

The passage quoted in German above was rendered as follows: in Hindi, it became:

⁷⁹ Tara Chand, ‘Nivedan’, in Premchand tr. *Hartal*, 4-5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6, emphasis added.

Kyōnkī yah kisi prakar mālūm hī nahīn ho saktā thā ki asal aṅgūṭhī kaun sī hai...bilkul usī tarah ham bhī is samay yah nirṇay nahīn kar sakte ki saccā dharm kaun sā hai. [152]

This was a minor reworking of the Urdu:

Kyōnkī yah kisi tarah ma'lūm bhī nahīn ho saktā thā ki aṣlī aṅgūṭhī kaun sī hai...bilkul usī tarah ham bhī is vaqt yah faīṣlah nahīn kar sakte ki saccā dīn kaun sā hai. [221]

Beyond being an eloquent advocacy of religious equivalence (*sarva dharma samabhāva*, perhaps?), the fundamental linguistic similarity of the two passages is clear; if we ignore the slippage between *asal* in the Hindi and *aṣlī* in the Urdu, there are only 4 variations: *prakar/tarah* for way or method (though it should be noted that *tarah* is used later on in the Hindi passage); *samay/vaqt* for time; *nirṇay/faīṣlah* for determination; and *dharm/dīn* for faith. These slight changes are significant precisely because they are so slight. Even more significant are the moments of continuity: the Persianate *mālūm honā* remains consistent in both iterations, as does the Indic *aṅgūṭhī*, and of course the broader syntactical and grammatical framework is identical. Fundamentally, the high poetic style of Lessing's work was rendered here in easily understood prose, with a minimum of lexical and syntactical variation.

This drive towards an easily understood, mutually intelligible and inclusive register of Hindustani that could operate in both scripts in many ways emphasises the understanding of Chand, Sapru and others in the Academy of Hindustani as a linguistic embodiment of both secular tolerance and demotic accessibility. Upadhyaya had made these demotic aspirations explicit during the debates in the Legislative Assembly – “So I say that the publication of these translations will be very helpful to those who live in villages

and who are interested in the welfare of the villages”⁸¹ – demotic, then, in the dual sense of being in everyday language and for the common people. Furthermore, as Tara Chand put it:

It has been the policy of the Academy to encourage original authorship on critical and scientific lines and by means of translations of creative literary works to provide for the Hindi and Urdu authors reliable models which could be followed by them.⁸²

The inception of such a model demonstrates an allegiance to the demotic drive evinced by Upadhyaya and others, and reinforced the establishment of a claim of authority for the Academy to determine and direct linguistic standards and literary tastes.

Navigating between the increasingly rigid poles of the mutually exclusive *registers* of Hindi and Urdu, and their decidedly distinct *canons*, the Academy tried to interpolate ideal translations of appropriate literature, thereby suggesting models of both language and content. The act of translation was thus of twofold significance in the context of the Hindustani Academy. First, it was intended to add to the canon of both Hindi and Urdu literature, adding further elements of secular tolerance and social justice and enhancing the prestige of both. Second, it provided a set of linguistic models – idiomatic and demotic – in a further attempt to guide and set standards of literary taste and appreciation. The pieces chosen for translation were not accidental – the choice, in particular, of the social dramas of Galsworthy was a profoundly political one, extending the tradition of socially concerned literature begun with Premchand and developed further under the aegis of the Progressive Writers Association, and a fairly direct challenge to the authority of the colonial state at the time of the Civil Disobedience movement.

⁸¹ Upadhyaya, in *ibid.*, 710.

⁸² Chand, *Report*, 18.

Furthermore, the relatively small number of translations in comparison to the Academy's other publishing activities stood for what I suggest was a fundamentally different understanding of the role and function of both the Academy and the act of translation itself. Initially presented in the debates prior to the founding of the Academy as an essential undertaking, necessary to facilitate the growth and progress of these would-be national languages, the act of translation was subtly reconfigured within the confines of the Academy from an urgent imperative focussed on scientific and educational materials to an important and constituent part of its literary and linguistic programme focussed on literary materials and broader ideals of societal improvement.⁸³ The subsuming of translation as a normal, indeed unremarkable, undertaking within a broader programme of writing and publishing posited an implicit equality between Hindi and Urdu, and was intimately linked with the issue of a national language for India. In the context of the Hindustani Academy, this took the form of an effort to create a model of literary Hindustani, however limited in scope, with the expectation that the role of national language might be filled by some form of Hindustani, broadly conceived.

1.IV AUTHORITY & CONSECRATION

The position and actions of the Hindustani Academy are perhaps best understood by considering three largely distinct (yet distinctly overlapping) fields – literary, educational

⁸³ I have found evidence of only two 'scientific' translations from the early period – W. McGougall, *Abnormal Psychology*, tr. M.W. Rehman, *Nafsiat-e Fasida* (1937), and including five translated lectures of Sigmund Freud, and R.R. Marett, *Anthropology* (1912), tr. Ganesh Prasad Dvivedi, *Manava Vijnana* (published after 1939). Other translations recorded in Chand's report as being "in the press" as of 1939 are of dramas, namely George Bernhard Shaw's *St. Joan*, and John Masefield's *The Faithful*.

and political – in which the institution and its individual members participated. Following Pierre Bourdieu’s elaboration of the concept of the field of cultural production as but one field situated within and in relation to the fields of power and class relations,⁸⁴ to consider how the Academy as an institution existed, and how its associated individuals operated, within multiple homologous yet ideally autonomous fields allows us to apprehend the activities of the Academy in their full scope while simultaneously paying attention to the subtleties and nuances of the actions of the key players involved.

Such a mode of analysis is facilitated by the fact that concerns over language were common to all three fields at the time. Moreover, language functioned in a broadly analogous instrumental role in each area, as concerns focussed on what was to be the language of literature, the language of instruction, and the language of the anticipated independent nation. These concerns were broader than the relatively limited (albeit fraught) determination regarding the characters, roles and definitions of Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani, since they necessarily encompassed consideration both of other regional Indian languages and also of English.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the issue of Hindi/Urdu/Hindustani provides a focal point around which to conduct a final analysis and assessment of the Hindustani Academy, even if its own policy towards the issue remained vague.

⁸⁴ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993).

⁸⁵ Such considerations, regrettably, can feature only peripherally in this analysis. Other works, however, can be consulted on specific regional languages: see for Marathi, Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001); for Konkani, Pinto, *Between Empires*; for Gujarati, Riho Isaka, ‘The Gujarati Literati and the Construction of a Regional Identity in the Late 19th Century’ in Crispin Bates ed. *Beyond Representation: Colonial and Postcolonial Constructions of Indian Identity* (Oxford: OUP, 2006).

It is also crucial to appreciate that the Academy was perforce situated in dramatically different positions in these three fields. In addition to the political nature of the language question with which the Academy was chiefly concerned, it was, by virtue of its foundation, constitution, control and funding, inescapably governmental in nature, and therefore fundamentally different from other linguistic or literary institutions of the period, such as the Nagari Pracharini Sabha or the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, which were voluntary associations that received little or no funding from the colonial government and relied on Indian donors. Yet, it was not primarily a political institution, and while it had a mandate from the Government of the United Provinces, it had no powers or functions that would typically be considered political or governmental. By virtue of its inclusion of a large number of provincial university faculty members on its Council,⁸⁶ it was bound to be involved in educational debates and to involve itself in some educational undertakings.⁸⁷ Yet, despite its sustained publication and promotion of academic work, it lacked the symbolic capital that derived from functions reserved to the universities proper – degree awarding powers, formal educational processes – and the potential cachet generated by factors such as high student numbers or good pass rates. And, while it was a thoroughly literary institution, it had also, I suggest, to fight constantly for endorsement and

⁸⁶ The constitution of the Academy included the vice-chancellors of the Universities of Allahabad, Lucknow, Benares and Aligarh as ex-officio members of the Council (the vice-chancellor of the University of Agra was added in 1930), and many more members of the Council were drawn from the university departments. See Chand, *Report*, 89-111.

⁸⁷ Beyond the demotic aspirations I have already referenced, the Academy instituted prizes for student literary productions in 1930, though these were short-lived, and Chand reiterated their concern for students several times in his *Report*. On a formal level, however, the Academy seems to have played only a minor, indeed rhetorical, role in the issue of education. The overlap of personnel remains significant, and this is admittedly an under-explored area in this argument.

acceptance, and had at every turn to counter the negative attention brought about both by its association with the contested term ‘Hindustani’ (see §1.V below) and, coming full circle, the dubious privilege of its government origins and support. These important distinctions constituted the fluid and competitive context in which the management of the Academy sought to establish the pre-eminence of their institution, and in doing so increase their own standing relative to other competitors and groups within the various fields.⁸⁸

This situation had been in place in the (north) Indian context since the end of the nineteenth century. In particular, political concerns linked to the nationalist movement had to a large extent influenced and subverted the autonomy of – “colonised”, in Crossley’s term – the fields of both educational and literary (and, more generally, cultural) production, radically altering, for instance, the presiding norms of taste and production. Similarly, constantly shifting economic demands and imperatives acted unevenly upon various actors and institutions across these fields, simultaneously opening up and closing down various routes to the acquisition of economic capital and generating new processes of consecration and approbation – for instance, through new private presses, the prizes awarded by institutions, and the counter-processes of infamy (through proscription) and mass popularity. These processes of colonisation – of mutual influence and subversion – constitute a long history that had, through the on-going effects of such distortions on the

⁸⁸ Finally, we must question to what extent these three fields were in fact autonomous. Without making a generalised or timeless argument, I follow Nick Crossley in acknowledging that, when the autonomy of fields is reduced through a process of ‘colonisation’, there results an increased tendency towards “systematically distorted communication” on the part of participants in that field. This same systematic distortion can account, in some part, for the normative attitudes that prevailed in the context of partisan literary institutions. See Crossley, ‘On systematically distorted communication’ 96 and *passim*.

habitus of actors across these fields, created a public sphere in which systematically distorted communicative practices had become instituted and ingrained.⁸⁹ Such a conceptualisation allows us to understand the subordinate position of logicity, and of normal markers of symbolic and cultural capital, as a result of which positions of authority were able to be claimed and secured through appeals to *illogic*, and at that often more easily than through more traditional achievements and modes of consecration. It was in this situation, to take the most significant example, that members of the Hindustani Academy sought to change the norms of the literary field through a transformation of the rules of the game, a realignment of the relative positions within the field, and an exploitation of the conditions created by its already colonised nature in the pursuit of establishing their own institution as the preeminent authority on matters of language and literature in the Hindi-Urdu context.

One of the first projects of the Hindustani Academy was one that Tara Chand omitted from his later report, but which provides interesting insights regarding what I consider the critical motivation that informed most if not all of the activities of the Academy – namely, the drive to establish claims of authority, tempered with impartiality, over the Hindi and Urdu literary fields. Thus, on the occasion of its first meeting in Lucknow on 30 March 1927, the Academy’s Executive Committee determined to set up two language survey committees, one each for Hindi and Urdu, to assess the state of each language’s literature, and to provide recommendations to the Academy on what actions were appropriate and expedient. These reports were to be completed and submitted to the

⁸⁹ See Crossley, 97, 108-109.

executive within two months, and both were subsequently published.⁹⁰ The Urdu committee, chaired by Maulvi Syed Zamin Ali, and additionally made up of Syed Masud al-Hasan, Rashid Ahmad Siddiqi, Ram Babu Saksena and Syed Shahinshah Husain Rizvi, submitted its 154-page report on 7 July 1927, which was divided into three broad sections. It began with a succinct 38-page account of the history of Urdu (“*Zabān (Urdū) kī ibtidā*”), a historical, linguistic and literary narrative that which moved from the earliest available records of Muslim contact with India, through the advent of Muslim rule, the “progress of Urdu” under the Mughals, and concludes with an overview of the language’s continued progress, amid setbacks, under British rule. The issues concerning Hindi and Urdu are dealt with summarily and forcefully in the section *Hindī Urdū kī nizā* [‘dispute’], in which the committee denies the exclusivity of Hindi and Urdu, and asserts, perhaps rather idealistically, that literature can rise above political strife:

Nizā’ ke li’e urdū maḥẓ musalmānoḥ kī zabān batā’ī ga’ī, aur hindī hindu’oḥ kī. Mulk meḥ aise zī fahm aur munṣif mizāj bhī maujūd the jo pālīṭiks aur liṭrecar ko judā judā jānte the aur samajhte the ki ‘ilmī dā’ire siyāsī kaśmakaś se hameśā pāk rahe haiṅ.

In order [to start a] dispute, Urdu was said to be the solely the language of Muslims, and Hindi of Hindus. [But] there were also discerning and equitable people in the country who knew that politics and literature were linked and understood that intellectual circles have always remained unsullied by political struggles.⁹¹

This formulation of the competing imperatives of political concerns and what might be termed creative or intellectual integrity demonstrates an appreciation on the part of the

⁹⁰ Syed Zamin Ali ed. *Urdū Zabān aur Adab* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1927), from the introduction to which the above information is drawn, and Lala Sita Ram ed. *Hindī Sarve Kamitī kī Ripart* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1930). I have thus far been unable to trace a copy of the Hindi Committee’s report, and so the following analysis is regrettably lopsided. We can only speculate, at this stage, as to why the Hindi report was published three years after its Urdu counterpart.

⁹¹ Ali, *Urdū Zabān*, 30. In a conciliatory manner, Ali refuses to attribute agency for starting this dispute to any one individual or group.

report's authors of precisely those historical processes that, as outlined above, had effected a thorough transformation of the literary field. At the same time, the assertion of both an awareness of and a certain immunity to such subverting influences, and the endorsement of this assertion by the Academy, posits that same institution as the embodiment of a former unsullied (and, one might add, entirely imagined) mode of cultural production that was situated above the baser concerns of politics. This was, of course, far from the case, but this appeal to authenticity and logicity frames later claims, such as those of Tara Chand in 'Hindistānī ke', to historical rigour and literary, linguistic and communal impartiality.

In the second section of the report, the committee made 15-pages of recommendations regarding what the Academy should do with regard to Urdu literature. Many of these are formulaic reinforcements of undertakings with which the Academy had already been tasked, but several of them merit closer attention. Perhaps the most striking of these is the very first proposal that the authors made. They conceived of the Academy's central role as that of facilitating "writing and reconciliation"; indeed, the most urgent requirement was for the Academy to take steps to create what they describe as a "*dāru'l-tālīf*" – literally, an 'abode of reconciliation'.⁹² It is perhaps superfluous to point out that this statement does not refer to creating a congenial environment within the workplace of the Academy, but rather to promoting a more general atmosphere of cooperation and coexistence within the wider academe. Read in the light of the reference to intellectual circles quoted above, this marks a clear articulation of an even wider project for the fledgling institution – the bringing together of Hindi and Urdu, the (implicitly re-)

⁹² Ibid., 39.

amalgamation of their foremost writers and thinkers, and the restitution to their proper place of intellectual circles in their idealised, “unsullied” condition. Such a project, articulated here in a dry and institutional report, is otherwise seen and hinted at in the penumbras of the Academy’s stated objectives, and remains an implicit, albeit integral, component right through to Partition.

It is worth briefly highlighting at this point two other recommendations contained in the Urdu Survey Committee’s report, which are important due to both their apparent originality and their eventual enactment. These are, firstly, that the Hindustani Academy should establish a journal because, given the short lifespan of many journals and the varied quality of others, it required “a medium...through which to put its findings before the country.”⁹³ As I discussed at the outset of this chapter, the Academy did indeed act on this proposal, setting up the synonymous Hindi and Urdu journals *Hindustānī* less than four years later. They now constitute one of the richest sources through which to examine the publishing and other activities of the institution. Their existence also demonstrates the importance that the Academy gave to disseminating its work, and also, I suggest, were perceived by the management of the Academy as important not merely as tools of dissemination, but as essential accoutrements of a literary institution, and a component part of the establishment of the serious, authentic and authoritative nature of the same. The second recommendation of particular interest concerns the setting up of two subcommittees of the Council that would, in effect, function as permanent versions of the temporary committees that had conducted these surveys, and present recommendations

⁹³ Ibid., 52.

tailored to the specific needs of Hindi and Urdu to the Council for their consideration. This recommendation was surely the seed of the later established Urdu and Hindi committees, which were set up to select works for translation into Hindi and Urdu, and were to become a somewhat prominent item of contention (see §1.VI below).

The broader point that can be extrapolated from these surveys concerns the attempted accretion, through institutional structures and institutionally sanctioned products, of cultural capital and authority. The establishment of the linguistic survey committees echoes Grierson's monumental *Linguistic Survey of India*, although the reports were much more limited in scope. But the project begun by these early reports – themselves having been formally received and then published for general, public consumption – was furthered and augmented by the production of authoritative poetic anthologies, encompassing the full range of Hindi and Urdu poetry in large, multi-volume works. Tara Chand characterised this undertaking as one motivated by a concern for preservation:

In the way of conservation of old literature in Hindi and Urdu, it was decided, at an early date after the establishment of the Academy to take into survey the whole field of poetical works in the two languages and to bring out comprehensive anthologies containing extracts from the works of poets together with biographical and critical appreciations of them.⁹⁴

The significance of the content of these anthologies has already been examined in some detail (see §1.II); at this point, however, it is not so much the content as the concept that is

⁹⁴ Tara Chand, *Report*, 18. These anthologies were compiled under the aegis and by the staff of the Hindustani Academy, “under the guidance of scholars of repute” (Id.). They were: Dvivedi ed. *Hindī ke Kavi*, and Kaifi ed. *Javāhir-e Sukhan*. The four volumes of the latter Urdu anthology ran to over 2,000 pages. I have as yet been unable to find original imprints of the Hindi anthology, but its three volumes were reprinted in the 1950s – Part I as *Hindī Vīrkāvya-Saṅgrah*, Part II as *Hindī Santkāvya-Saṅgrah*. and Part III, on “Hindi Sufi Poetry”, as *Hindī Premgāthākāvya-Saṅgrah* (1953).

of particular significance. The compilation of such anthologies was inextricably bound up with not only the project begun in the literary surveys, but also with the establishment of the Hindustani Academy as an authoritative institution. The Academy imagined itself as an authority on matters literary and linguistic, and therefore conceived its projects on the model of earlier noteworthy undertakings, while simultaneously attempting to secure any and all available markers of genuineness and legitimising endorsements. The evidence for this quest exists in many of the Academy's activities and projects.

The most compelling and explicit example came in an apparently minor activity, but one given much weight by Tara Chand – the organisation of a series of lectures by eminent scholars, in Hindi or Urdu, under the auspices of the Academy. Lacking specific dates for these lectures, we know there were 12 delivered between 1928-33. Tara Chand wrote:

It was considered that such association of reputed scholars with the work of the Academy will not only give it a right start and invest it with a prestige and position among literary bodies of the province, but will also help to create sound standards of literary appreciation and study of subjects and guide literary effort in the two languages generally.⁹⁵

There was a clear attempt to maintain a balance between Hindi and Urdu in this series, to the extent that the lectures sometimes came as closely related, balancing pairs: in 1929, for instance, Maulvi Mohammad Amin Abbasi delivered his lecture in Urdu on '*Islāmī Tamaddāom par Hindūom ka Aṣar*', while Tara Chand himself delivered in Hindi '*Hindu Sabhyatā par Musalmānom ka Prabhāv*'.⁹⁶ Aside from this strictly maintained balance, itself

⁹⁵ Tara Chand, *Report*, 10.

⁹⁶ Interestingly, Tara Chand translates both these titles as "Contributions of the Hindus/Muslims to Muslim/Hindu Culture", although both '*aṣar*' and '*prabhāv*' would be more accurately translated as 'influence' or 'effect'. Of course, 'contributions' sounds unambiguously sunnier. Many of these

indicative of the Academy's attempt to maintain neutrality, the most significant aspects of this lecture series were those aims mentioned by Tara Chand himself – the first being to enhance the prestige of the Academy, and the second being to “create sound standards of literary appreciation”. He at least evidently felt that the Hindustani Academy was in some way a breed apart from the other literary associations in the provinces and the country, and that it both required and merited recognition as such (whether from these other bodies, or from society at large, is unclear). Indeed, an important idiosyncrasy in the genesis of the Academy, which marks it out from other literary institutions was that it was not, in the mould of the Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā or the Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdū, an independently constituted literary organisation, but one with official origins. And, while it had substantial political backing and government-derived financial capital (the adequacy or otherwise of which remained a point of contention), the Academy was engaged, as I have suggested, in attempting to secure *cultural* capital, prestige and legitimation in the form of endorsement-through-participation from major literary (in the broadest sense of the word) figures.⁹⁷ It is helpful to view these efforts as bids for institutional *consecration* in what qualifies, in Bourdieu's terminology, as a field of restricted production.⁹⁸ While the Hindustani Academy imagined itself as producing knowledge, literature and other cultural

lectures were presumably parts of larger works that were later published by the Academy. For example: Mahamahopadhyā Ganganath Jha, *Kavi Rahasya* (1929), Abdulla Yusuf Ali, *Azmane Vasta men Maashrati aur Iqtisadi Halat* (1929), and Gauri Shankar Hira Chand Ojha, *Madhyakalin Bharatiya Sanskriti* (1928). The latter two works were both published in Hindi and Urdu, that of Ojha translated into Hindi by Premchand.

⁹⁷ Some of the more prominent people invited to deliver lectures included Ganganath Jha (vice-chancellor of Allahabad University; 1929), Zakir Hussain (vice-chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia; 1931) and the well-known educationalist and Urdu advocate Abdul Haq (1930).

⁹⁸ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ch.3 ‘The Market of Symbolic Goods’, 112-41.

products for consumption by, and for the benefit of, the public at large, its audience was in fact much more limited. The deeply engaged, sophisticated and occasionally esoteric nature of its various products (publications, lectures, journals, conferences, etc.) made these products suitable for, and of interest to, only a particularly select and decidedly élite consumer group. As such, and despite its proletarian aspirations and one might say pretensions, the Academy was operating in a rarefied and exclusive environment; a field of production in which consecration – approbation, legitimation – through the agency of appropriately qualified and generally respected peers mattered a great deal. Therefore, in addition to the inclusion on the Council of the Academy of the chancellors of the various universities in the provinces on an *ex-officio* basis, we see further legitimation and inclusion strategies at play: on one hand, the co-option of additional prominent individuals on to the Council by the Executive board, in addition to those nominated by the Government of the United Provinces, and on the other, the extension of invitations to deliver lectures to select and celebrated audiences under the auspices of an institution that was laying claim to hegemonic authority.

This drive for consecration was both twinned with and intrinsic to the second, broader aim identified by Tara Chand: namely, the creation of “sound standards” of literary appreciation. Tara Chand and others had disavowed the brand of authority, indeed authoritarianism, which was seen as characteristic of institutions such as *L’Académie Française*. In his inaugural address, William Marris had cautioned strongly against the possibility of the Academy as a “pedantic dictator”:

To English ears the name [Academy] savours a little too much of Richelieu or Napoleon. The purpose which the founders of the French Academy set formally before themselves was this: “to labour with all diligence to give exact rules to our language and to render it pure, eloquent and capable of treating the arts and science.” There are those, especially in France, who believe that the Academy has succeeded in its aim...On the other hand, some democratically minded French authorities have denounced it roundly. They have condemned it as the child of a despotic age...⁹⁹

Marris’ caricature of the French Academy reads as the articulation of an implicit and almost gentlemanly understanding – not only would this be an inappropriate course of action, he seems to say, but of course it is not even being considered. Yet it seems clear that from an early stage the officers of the Hindustani Academy attempted to establish their institution as an arbiter of taste, style, form and content, to mould not merely literature (and language), but literary opinion in the broadest and most compelling sense.

Of course, the Academy was not unique in embarking on such an endeavour – as Francesca Orsini has demonstrated, a range of institutions and individuals had long been engaged in staking similar claims to linguistic and creative authority in the Hindi sphere – and the methods used by the Academy did not differ significantly from those of other institutions. In this vein, the Academy also instituted prizes for literary works – the sum of Rs500 was awarded to authors for works in various and often specified categories from 1928, and in 1930 the Academy instituted student prizes of Rs100 to encourage works either creative or critical. These prizes constituted both a mode of influence and an avenue of patronage, and as Orsini has observed, the giving of such prizes “reinforced the authority of the awarding institution”.¹⁰⁰ It should be noted, however, that the sums involved were much lower than those administered by the likes of the Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā, which had

⁹⁹ Sir William Marris, ‘Address’, in Tara Chand, *Report*, 79-88, 80-81.

¹⁰⁰ Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 161.

been awarding sums of Rs1,200 and Rs2,000 since the early 1920s.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, what is most significant is the attempt through such methods to establish the authority of the Hindustani Academy in *both* the Hindi and Urdu literary fields, something far beyond the scope of its contemporary, partisan literary institutions.

1.V HINDUSTANI? THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMY

At the inauguration of the Hindustani Academy, the governor of the United Provinces, William Marris had remarked with optimism (if not naïveté):

The Government resolution which created the Academy recognises Urdu and Hindi as twin vernaculars of the province, and *embraces them both in the possibly unscientific but admirably innocuous title of 'Hindustani'*. Now if I believed that one untoward consequence of the Academy's creation would be to blow up the embers of linguistic controversy I might have left my hon'ble colleague's scheme severely alone. I do not believe that any such consequence ought to ensue.¹⁰²

As it turned out, the Academy's very name was to prove a burden as it attempted to negotiate the political and linguistic minefield of the Hindi/Urdu language controversy. Indeed, the question of "Hindi, Urdu, Hindustani" was addressed by several writers in the Academy's publications – either in book form, or in the journals. The wide divergence of opinion in these various pieces reflects the ambiguity of the institutional policy. It was, however, precisely this ambiguity that allowed the Hindustani Academy to function as such a "big tent", incorporating and involving key players from across the linguistic and ideological spectrum in a broader project of literary and societal enrichment of which the question of language was but one aspect.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 160.

¹⁰² Marris, 'Address', 86-7, emphasis added.

Tara Chand addressed the issue of the Academy's policy with regard to the language question in his *Report*. This short section is both an account of, and an attempt to reinforce, the Academy's refutation of allegations that it existed to propagate "Hindustani" at the expense of both Hindi and Urdu. Tara Chand suggests that these misapprehensions arose in part due to the Academy's name, and in part due to remarks made by Sir Shah Muhammad Sulaiman at the Academy's annual conference in 1931, over which he presided:

The settled policy of the Academy is to evolve a common language which should adopt the common words which are in use and discard obsolete and difficult words, whether they be Sanscrit, Arabic or Persian in their origin.¹⁰³

The Executive Committee moved swiftly to clarify their position. This clarification, however, amounts to a decidedly nominal and minimal distinction between institutional policy and desired outcome, rather than an indictment or even refutation of the Hindustani project. The Academy did not, according to their statement, intend to create a new language to supplant Hindi and Urdu, but rather considered it;

highly desirable that the tendencies which their development exhibit should be examined and the possibilities of simplifying Urdu and Hindi should be explored, for...it is regrettable to find that the use of difficult words is widening the gulf between them.¹⁰⁴

Tara Chand emphasised the adherence of the Academy to a principle of encouragement, instead of 'creation'; rather than forcing writers to adopt a particular style, the Academy had merely noted, with some satisfaction, that its "moral weight" had been an important factor contributing to "a definite tendency...of avoidance of highly Sanscritised vocabulary

¹⁰³ Quoted in Tara Chand, *Report*, 55.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

on the one hand and of similarly highly Arabicised and Persianised vocabulary on the other hand.”¹⁰⁵

While it is tempting to dismiss this as an unimportant semantic distinction, this decided vagueness as regards the language question enabled the Academy to not only include and incorporate Hindi and Urdu writers, whether moderate or partisan, but also advance a conciliatory agenda while avoiding allegations of favouritism or subterfuge, prevalent at the time. This accommodating approach extended to the publishing strategy of the journals, and so a selection of articles on the question of Hindi and Urdu demonstrate a revealingly wide variety of positions and attitudes. A brief selection by some of the most prominent members of the Academy demonstrates this variety – moreover, the diversity of competing, and I stress mutually exclusive positions, make clear the inclusive potential of the Academy’s strategic ambivalence towards the language question: an ambivalence that, however, was to leave it fundamentally impotent.

In a first example, Ramnaresh Tripathi makes the case in eloquent Hindustani for the essential unity of Hindi and Urdu, for the superiority of Hindustani as an umbrella or all-encompassing term due to its flexibility, diversity and ability to absorb vocabulary from diverse sources, and for both the undesirability and infeasibility of separating out “pure” registers due to the long historical process that has produced Hindustani and that continues even today.¹⁰⁶ His premise is essentially that with which Gilchrist proceeded over 100 years previously – that there are three easily distinguishable “forms” [“*sūrat*”] of the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 57. He obviously felt that the translations produced by the Academy met this objective, though he was less careful with his terminology: see §1.III above.

¹⁰⁶ Ramnaresh Tripathi, ‘Hindī yā Hindustānī?’, *Hindustānī* (H) 2.2 (April 1932) 123-140.

modern north Indian vernacular, one called Hindi stuffed with Sanskrit loanwords and neologisms [*“tatsam aur tadbhav shabd”*], one called Urdu similarly filled with words from Arabic, Persian and Turkish, and a third which exists in between these poles. In this, he asserts, there are only the words found in the conversation of ordinary people, irrespective of their origin, which is the *“khiçri”* of Hindi and Urdu, and is called Hindustani.¹⁰⁷ He traces the origins of Hindi to the “first poet”, Amir Khusrao, and argues against Hindi purists using an interesting analogy: “Just how many words have come from abroad and are working as servants in our houses?”¹⁰⁸ He lists many such words, describing their Persian, Arabic, Portuguese or English origins, and completes his analogy: “as many words as have been given above, they are all foreign, and are giving service in the kitchens and living rooms of the houses of even the most hard-line Hindus.”¹⁰⁹ He bemoans the lie that Hindi and Urdu are two languages, which has been “spread to make Hindus and Muslims fight or provoke one another.”¹¹⁰ He does not, however, attribute the diffusion of this idea to the colonial authorities, as later critics were fond of doing.

Tripathi’s argument is directed at Hindu advocates of Sanskritised Hindi, and makes little reference to those who were promoting a similarly obscurantist Urdu, which while making the piece somewhat one-sided only serves to heighten its importance as appearing in a Hindi publication. A diametrically opposed piece, however, came two years later from

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 123.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 126.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 129.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 134.

Dhirendra Varma.¹¹¹ The uncompromising position he articulated – comprising the superiority of Hindi, the inevitability of its adoption, the exclusively Muslim nature of Urdu, and the unviable nature of Hindustani – demonstrates the exceedingly (perhaps excessively) wide variety of opinion that was given expression under the auspices of the Hindustani Academy. Varma couches his opinions in conciliatory language, making frequent references to “our Muslim brothers”, but is fundamentally uncompromising in his linking of Urdu with Muslim culture, Muslim rule, and those few Hindus who learned it in order to gain administrative posts.¹¹² He is dismissive of the idea of Hindustani as a compromise, as a neutral register at the midpoint between Hindi and Urdu, saying that, after a long period of deep thought, he had arrived at the conclusion that “Hindi and Urdu, as literary languages, cannot now be made into one language.”¹¹³ For him, Hindustani could only ever be a simple, straightforward language – limited by its ‘everyday’ vocabulary and intrinsically incapable of expressing deep thoughts or discussing complex topics, a point of view at odds with the alternative perspective, expressed by Tripathi, that saw Hindustani’s greatest advantage as being its ability to draw on multiple linguistic sources. Having suggested that Muslims across the country were abandoning their own, regional languages in favour of Urdu, rallying around the language as a pan-Indian symbol of association and solidarity, he finishes with an almost prescient suggestion for his “Muslim brother”:

My own view is...that everyone who lives here, whether Hindu or Muslim, English or Jewish, Persian or Madrasī, should consider Hindi their national language, Devanagari their national script, and learn them. If [our] Muslim brothers so wish, then in order to protect their culture

¹¹¹ Dhirendra Varma, ‘Hindī, Urdū, Hindustānī’, *Hindustānī* (H) 4.3 (July 1934) 195-200.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 198.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 199.

and religion they can teach their children the Persian script and language. They should be free to do this [*“Is kī unhen pūrṇ svatantratā honī cāhie”*].¹¹⁴

Such perspectives demonstrate most clearly the disconnect between conciliatory political attitudes and yet vehemently partisan linguistic positions! Varma’s article is made all the more incongruous, or perhaps the Academy’s heterogeneity is made all the more apparent, by its inclusion immediately after an article by the President of the Hindustani Academy, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, on the same topic.¹¹⁵ It appeared in both editions of *Hindustānī*, the Hindi version being a translation of the Urdu original.¹¹⁶ This is a somewhat autobiographical piece, in which a prominent Hindu is explaining, and even defending, his affection for and use of Urdu. Yet Sapru situates his own personal experiences and perspectives in the broader context not only of debates on the language issue, but also that of literary endeavour and, of particular note, education.

Sapru displays little patience regarding the apparently incessant debates regarding the precise historical origins of Urdu. Instead, he focuses and believes others should also focus on more recent, verifiable history, and the contemporary situation. His concern is with the situation of Urdu, its relationship with Hindi and with religion, and its fitness to

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 200.

¹¹⁵ A Kashmiri Hindu born in Aligarh in 1875, Sapru was a prominent lawyer and politician. The conciliatory approach he advocated throughout his political career made him perhaps the natural choice to be President of the Academy. By the time of writing, he was at his most prominent: leader of the moderate Indian Liberal Party, newly appointed (along with the Aga Khan) member of the Privy Council, and well placed as an intermediary between the Government and the Congress. It has, however, been suggested that Sapru was less ‘moderate’ than has been believed, and that his efforts at this time were focussed on achieving independence, rather than merely self-governance or dominion status. See Andrew Muldoon, *Empire, Politics and the Creation of the 1935 India Act: Last Act of the Raj* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

¹¹⁶ Tej Bahadur Sapru, ‘Urdū, Hindī, Hindustānī’, *Hindustānī* (U) 4.3 (July 1934) 451-459, tr. Ramchandra Tandon, ‘Urdū, Hindī, Hindustānī’, *Hindustānī* (H) 4.3 (July 1934) 187-194. The following references are to the Urdu original.

serve as a language of instruction. Education cannot, in his opinion, be given in a foreign language, and English is just that. However, the language chosen must be sufficiently “developed”. So it is that he quotes Ghalib in support of broadening the horizons of Urdu:

*Baqadr-e shauq nahīn z̄arf-e tangnā-e ghazal
kuch aur cāhī'e vus'at marī zabān ke li'e.*¹¹⁷

The narrow straits of the ghazal are not enough for ingenuity
More latitude is required for my language.

This aim has already been pursued, Sapru believed, and with another 25 or so years of its consistent application, “there will be enough treasure accumulated in Urdu literature that, from the beginning to the end, it will become possible to provide education in this very language.”¹¹⁸ He means, of course, a modern/western education, for he himself writes of his own education and upbringing in Urdu and Persian. As a result, he both thinks and feels in Urdu, and has concern for its progress. However, he claims an equal concern for the development of Hindi; and implies that people should show a shared concern for both Hindi and Urdu, regardless of their religion:

I am not unaware that when Urdu is discussed then the question is asked ‘why should Hindi not progress?’ I am neither a bad-wisher nor an enemy of Hindi, although many Hindus are of the opinion that I have been covered in the colours of Urdu and Persian to such an extent that I am practically half-Muslim...¹¹⁹

Indeed, he suggests that no-one should have the right to call themselves Indian until and unless they had at least a basic understanding of both Muslim and Hindu culture and

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 452. Sapru in fact slightly misquotes the *śer*, putting “*marī zabān*” (my language, tongue, speech) in place of “*mire bayān*” (my speech, discourse). It is tempting to see this as a conscious substitution; while the two words have a certain semantic overlap, *zabān* makes the point more explicitly about language as language, lending support to his argument.

¹¹⁸ Id.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 455.

literature.¹²⁰ As national languages, and particularly as languages of instruction, both Hindi and Urdu were in need of development, but together, rather than in isolation. As they developed, an awareness and understanding of both should be fostered among all citizens of this imagined India, that the categories of language and religion might be de-linked. The need for an artificially engineered middle language, for Hindustani, could thereby vanish, so long as the tendencies to pack Hindi and Urdu with obscure vocabulary could be arrested. Thus Sapru rather cleverly links the ideals of national progress, particularly through education, with an accommodating and non-prescriptive approach to the question of Hindi and Urdu – an approach that might be said to mirror rather well the stated policy of the Academy, as discussed above.

Tara Chand's own views on the question of Hindustani were, however, firmly established and, in theory at least, of the broadest and most accommodating kind. In practice, of course, this same attempt at inclusivity was unavoidably *exclusive* of those opinions that held Hindi and Urdu in a relation of superiority/inferiority, saw them as the exclusive property of different religious communities, or denied their mutual history. Fully aware of the contentious nature of his position, Tara Chand set out his arguments most forcefully in an article in the Hindi version of *Hindustānī* in 1937.¹²¹ This was nothing less than a scathing critique of the partisans of both Hindi and Urdu, a strident refutation of the

¹²⁰ Ibid., 456.

¹²¹ Tara Chand, 'Hindustānī ke sambandh men kuch g̥halatfahmiyān', *Hindustānī* (H) 7.3 (April 1937) 279-297. This was translated and included, in a slightly modified form, in Tara Chand, *The Problem of Hindustani* (Allahabad: Indian Periodicals, 1944), 'Some Misconceptions about Hindustani', 73-105. Page references are to the original Hindi version, while quotations are faithful to Tara Chand's own later translation.

continuing and increasing processes of linguistic differentiation, and a positive assertion of the essential unity and commonality of Hindi and Urdu.

Tara Chand begins by considering the confused terminological and linguistic history of Hindi, Urdu, Hindustani, Hindavi etc., and after an assured and largely competent assessment of the perspectives offered by major Indian and European philologists (his description of G.A. Grierson as “the universally acknowledged master of Indian philology”¹²² is perhaps contested nowadays) makes several propositions, the most germane of which follows in full:

Khari Boli or Hindustani has two literary forms. The earlier form called Hindi by its users, and now known as Urdu, has a continuous history from the 14th century to the present day. The second form, known as Modern Hindi, came into literary use at the beginning of the 19th century and has made rapid progress since the Mutiny.¹²³

He is dismissive of arguments made by some modern Hindi writers challenging this date for the origin of Hindi, but this is merely a distraction. The key equation that he posits is that of Khari Boli and Hindustani – more precisely, he conceives of Hindustani as an overarching term encompassing a broad range of the Hindi-Urdu spectrum (omitting only the excessively Sanskritised or Persianised/Arabicised extremes), rather than as a restricted and restricting space of simple words and common speech existing between Hindi and Urdu. This is Hindustani as something enabling and liminal, rather than something limited in scope, subversive in intent, or simply imaginary.

In common with Tej Bahadur Sapru, Tara Chand shared a concern with language as an instrument of national unity and, more importantly perhaps, as a medium of education.

¹²² Tara Chand, ‘Hindustānī ke’, 279.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 288.

As such, he warns against the coining of neologisms through excessive reliance on Sanskrit, Persian or Arabic, especially with regard to scientific terms. Hindustani, by this process, risked being decimated into mutually incomprehensible registers – “jargon[s] of the learned” – that divided communities and limited both the potential for understanding and their own popularity.¹²⁴ It is therefore a threefold concern – of language and literature, language and the nation, and language and education – that animates Tara Chand’s discussion, permeates the other pieces discussed above, and, critically, delineates the areas of concern and action of the Hindustani Academy.

Yet the issue of mutual intelligibility was a thorny one, which cropped up in even the seemingly most innocuous of situations. Consider, for instance, the covers of the Academy’s journals. In terms of presentation, both the Hindi and Urdu editions were rather plain affairs, with little in the way of visual or artistic relief from what were rather drab, but perhaps appropriately serious, almost entirely textual publications.¹²⁵ The prime differential between the two was therefore script, and a single word’s difference in their self-description. The Hindi version was titled “*Hindustānī: Hindustānī ekeḍemī kī timāhī patrikā*”, and the Urdu “*Hindustānī: Hindustānī akeḍemī kā timāhī risāla*”; both meant “Hindustani: The Quarterly Journal of the Hindustani Academy”. Each of the versions used the term prevalent in its respective language for “journal”: the Hindi *patrikā*, and the Urdu

¹²⁴ Ibid., 293.

¹²⁵ They stand in sharp contrast then to other journals, particularly Hindi-language publications which, by the 1920s, frequently featured artwork both on their covers and throughout. The cost of production was probably a significant concern, given Tara Chand’s frequent references to underfunding in his *Report*.

risāla. Yet some concern was evidently expressed over the dual use of the word *timāhī*, for quarterly. Premchand provided both a brief account, and a caustic assessment:

Gat ravivār ko hindustānī akeḍemī ke jalse merī timāhī śabd par baṛī manorañjak bahas huī. Bābū Śyāmsundardās kā pakṣ thā ‘timāhī patrikā’ gaṅgā aur madār kā joṛ hai. Ek musalmān sahib ‘timāhī’ śabd ko hī ṭaksāl bāhar batlā rahe the aur iski jagah ‘sehmāhī’ rakhnā cāhte the. In mahānubhāvom ko abhī tak yah nahīm mālūm ki hindustānī ekeḍemī hindī yā urdū ekeḍemī nahīm hai. Uskā nām hī batlā rahā hai ki use sanskr̥t yā fārsī se viśeṣ prem nahīm hai. Uskā ek uddeśya raṣṭra-bhāṣā kā nirmāṇ hai aur yah tabhī ho saktā hai, jab ham hindī aur fārsī kā moh choṛkar khule man se harek bhāṣā ke pracalit śabdom ko apnāveṁ. Hindī ke lie nāgarī-pracāriṇī sabhā aur urdū ke lie añjuman-taraqqīe urdū hai. ‘Taṛit samācār’ aur ‘vāṣpayān’ paṇḍitor̥m ko mubārak ho, jantā ko to apnā ‘tār’ aur relgārī hī pasand hai.¹²⁶

There was a very entertaining discussion at the Hindustani Academy session last Sunday. Babu Shyamsundar Das was of the opinion that [a phrase such as] ‘*timāhī* [‘quarterly’] *patrikā* [‘journal’] is like joining together the Ganges and an elephant. One Muslim gentleman was labeling the word ‘*timāhī*’ [‘quarterly’] as inauthentic, and wanted to replace it with ‘*sihmāhī*’ [‘quarterly’]. These dignitaries still haven’t realised that the Hindustani Academy is not a Hindi or Urdu academy. Its very name indicates that it has no special love for either Sanskrit or Persian. Its sole purpose is the development of a national language, and this can only happen when we give up our infatuation with Hindi and Persian, and accept the commonly used words of every language with an open mind. Hindi has its Society for the Promulgation of Nagari, and Urdu its Society for the Progress of Urdu. ‘Lightning news’ and ‘steam driven vehicle’ may please the Pandits, but the people like their telegrams and trains.

The point may need some explication. The Persian-derived *māh*, meaning month, combined with the unmarked prefix *ti* to produce the common word for quarterly (literally, three-monthly). Das obviously felt that a purer, Sanskritic alternative, *traimāsik*, would be more appropriate in combination with the Sanskrit-derived *patrikā*. Our nameless Muslim gentleman, on the other hand, considered the prefix *ti* objectionable, and wanted instead the authentically Persian equivalent *sih*. Remember also that, at this point, the journals had been being published for almost two years.

This distinction is precisely as minor and superficial as it appears, and I for one share Premchand’s evident frustration! His sarcasm is palpable, as he dismisses the

¹²⁶ Premchand, ‘*Timāhī yā traimāsik*’, in *Jāgaraṇ* (13 November 1933); reproduced in Ramvilas Sharma ed. *Premchand Racnāvalī*, v.8, 469.

ludicrous neologisms created and proposed to replace words already in common usage in the hope of creating a “purer” language. The fact that he posits recent, modern, and pervasive phenomena – the telegraph system, and the train line – as already within the linguistic competence of “the people” only highlights the pedantry of this intellectual, ideological, and profoundly irrelevant linguistic tussle, regarding a word of little consequence in a publication of limited circulation. Yet, this trifling spat points to a fundamental dichotomy, or an irreconcilable disagreement, that lay at the heart of the Academy: there remained no settled position on what could, should or did constitute Hindustani.

1.VI THE LIMITS OF INCLUSIVITY: SOME CONCLUSIONS

The question as to whether or not the Hindustani Academy was “fit for purpose”, whether or not it was “up to the task”, requires a cogent and coherent definition of what this purpose or task was meant to have been. As I have attempted to show through the course of this chapter, this fundamental question was open to debate throughout the course of the institution’s pre-independence existence. Certainly, and at its most basic level, the Academy was intended to promote the growth and development of Hindi and Urdu, as twin vernaculars of the United Provinces. This much it did with aplomb, though it was far from being the only literary institution active in this regard and at this time. However, this basic programme was extensively subdivided into various fields of activity on which opinions evidently differed, and in which achievement and activity were themselves varied.

Translation was perhaps the most obvious example – while the Governor, William Marris, had cautioned against excessive involvement in what he considered the lowest form of literary endeavour, the Academy gave the project of literary translation quite significant attention, and to the detriment of the more science oriented focus suggested in the Legislative Assembly debates. A similar tension existed, as noted above, with regard to science. While the scientific content in the Academy’s journals was not insignificant, and the demotic intent and aspirations evidenced in the commissioning, production and publication of introductory scientific works were in keeping with the aims of the Academy’s original proponents, there was neither the concentrated effort, nor the institutional expertise, that one suspects these same proponents would have preferred. Its output was substantial across disciplinary fields and across the divide of language and script, but one suspects its success or failure in promoting any one aspect of Hindi or Urdu literature would have been measured against different criteria by different observers.

However, in addition to this multi-faceted task of “promotion”, the Academy took up the challenge, or perhaps arrogated to itself the imagined right, to restrain and retard the development of Hindi and Urdu as mutually exclusive and unintelligible languages or registers. This was a project that was not ‘merely’ literary or linguistic in nature, but was inescapably political and educational as well. It was also an undertaking that was compromised by several of the Academy’s own attitudes and approaches. While the question of the perceived and desired audience of the Academy has remained an intermittent and occasionally peripheral concern throughout the course of this discussion, it was a central concern to the agents of the Academy and is a critical component in any

final analysis of their endeavours. Both the proponents and protagonists of the Academy evinced on several occasions what I have described as demotic aspirations: an ostensible desire, through the publication of its journals, to put its various findings “before the public”, and a key motivation to make particularly the scientific knowledge abundant in European languages available in the vernacular. Nevertheless, the Academy’s preoccupation with the establishment of authority in the Hindi and Urdu literary fields ensured that the major concern of the Academy was to appeal to a relatively narrowly defined élite – academic and literary.

This being said, the question of the success or failure of the Academy is both unnecessarily binary and overly simplistic. What is most significant is the existence of such a broadly albeit loosely defined institutional effort to bring Hindus and Muslims, Hindi and Urdu, together under one roof. This undertaking, as I have suggested, necessitated a “broad tent” approach in which a variety of opinions and positions, some of them sharply divergent, found a place. This is not to say, however, that some positions were not beyond the pale. Premchand, in one noted example, launched a fierce attack on Niyaz Fatehpuri, who had complained of the role Daya Narain Nigam played in selecting texts for translation into Urdu. Condemning what he considered arrogance and narrowmindedness, Premchand declared:

I will offer Mr. Niyaz some sincere advice: he should have the members of the Academy selected on the basis of religion, instead of language. He would then be free to swing his stick at any Hindu who dared to trespass. But so long as the basis for selection is language alone, and so long as

Hindus continue to write in Urdu, Mr. Niyaz cannot push them beyond the reach of any material token of appreciation.¹²⁷

A broad tent, to be sure, but only to an extent. Fatehpuri's sin seems to have been to take the concept of a clear and exclusive link between language and religion and apply it to not only a living and prominent figure, but to the Hindustani Academy's activities, thus articulating a direct challenge to the conciliatory and cooperative agenda being pursued.

It will be interesting, perhaps, to close with a consideration of the perspective of a contemporary litterateur who was not directly involved with the Hindustani Academy, but who came into contact with both the institution and many of its leading figures. Writing in his history of the Progressive Writers Association, *Rośnā'ī*, Sajjad Zaheer summarised both what he perceived the primary aims of the Academy to have been, and his understanding of the reasons for its failure:

The aims of the Indian Academy were well meaning. They were: to bring Urdu and Hindi closer to one another, to translate into these two languages important works from other languages, to institute and promote scholarly and literary research, and to encourage the writing and publication of literary works of high quality by assisting Urdu and Hindi writers...However, like all those educational and cultural institutions that had even the remotest connection with the machinery of the imperialist government, the academy suffered ceaselessly from the ambiguous, rather wrong aims of culture, its aloofness from national life, lack of funds, and the ignorance and infighting of most of its members and consequently, remained in a perpetual state of death throes.¹²⁸

Whether or not association with the "imperialist government" was at the root of the Academy's ultimate failure to reunite Hindi and Urdu with one another remains a moot

¹²⁷ Premchand, 'Urdu men Fir'auniyat', *Zamāna* (December 1930), translated by C.M. Naim, 'The Pharaohs of Urdu' in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, 18 (2003) 487-491, 491.

¹²⁸ Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light*, Amina Azfar tr. (Oxford: OUP, 2006) 7. As should be evident from my usage throughout this chapter, I do not agree with Azfar's rendering of the institution's name as "Indian Academy", for what should be obvious reasons.

point. Zaheer points us, more pertinently, towards another question: could such an undertaking ever hope to succeed under the aegis of a literary institution? The answer, most conclusively, is apparently not – the institution itself abandoned the production of Urdu materials not long after Independence and Partition. Ultimately, in attempting to promote the *formal* unity of Hindi and Urdu, the Hindustani Academy could only build on foundational attitudes present in society at large. While such attitudes were in evidence among many members of the Academy, they were clearly not sufficiently widespread. Nevertheless, this bold intervention certainly created a paradigm in which Hindustani was neither a Trojan Horse for either Hindi or Urdu, nor a vapid compromise devoid of literary merit or linguistic flair, but a semantic space in which speakers, readers and writers of both its variants could potentially come together and coexist.

DENYING DIFFERENCE: POETIC TASTES AND PRACTICES ACROSS THE DIVIDE

‘Arabī, fārsī, urdū meñ nazm likhnā āsān, magar bhāśā meñ muškil. Musalmān to bhāśā ke ahl hī nahīn (kyonki yah unkī zabān nahīn). Magar yah ‘uzr lang hai. ‘Arabī, fārsī, angrezī bhī to musalmānoñ kī zabān nahīn, magar tīnoñ zabānoñ meñ nazm o naṣr likhte haiñ aur gaur se dekhie to urdū bhī musalmānoñ kī khālīṣ zabān nahīn. Us kī jhūlī meñ bhī dar dar ke ṭukre haiñ. Khūd hindū ne bhāśā ko choṛ rakhā hai...Musalmānoñ ko bhī bhāśā meñ śā’irgo’ī par zor denā cāhī’e.

Writing poetry in Arabic, Persian, or Urdu is easy, but difficult in *Bhāśā*. Muslims are not “the people of *Bhāśā*” (because this is not their language). But this excuse is lame. Arabic, Persian, and English are also not the languages of Muslims, but [they/we] write poetry and prose in all three and, if we should look closely, then Urdu too is not purely the language of Muslims, but its cloth is woven from many and various pieces. Hindus have themselves cast *Bhāśā* aside... Muslims too should put an emphasis on *Bhāśā* poetry.¹

This exhortation to the Muslims of India, enjoining them to collaborate in a collective rediscovery and revival of a neglected and, as this author would have us believe, unwanted poetic tradition, takes us to the heart of the linguistic, literary, social, religious and historical tussle that surrounded poetry, poetic tastes, its identification with specific religious communities, and the pruning of certain aspects through the process of canon formation throughout the early 20th century. Indeed, the nature, content and purpose of poetry was contested from the late 19th century onwards, and to a certain extent its very right to exist, to be practiced and to be enjoyed had been challenged. Whether in the form of the apparently internal-to-Urdu critiques by the quickly-venerated Altaf Husain Hali and

¹ Saiyid Ahmad Hasan Shaukat, ‘*Bhāśā meñ Ḥamd o Na’t*’, in *Maḥzan* 28.5 (August 1914) 50-52, 50-1. The ambiguity between “we/they” in the translation is the direct result of the absence of pronouns in the original Urdu – quite possibly an intentional strategy.

Muhammad Husain Azad, the disparagement of poets such as Aatish by crossover figures such as Premchand, the quest to reform poetry by Hindi-*vālās* through the purging of *śṛṅgāra* (erotic) aspects, or a colonial critique that led to the (in)famous ‘heterosexualisation’ of the *ghazal*, the number and range of debates and their intensity clearly demonstrate the centrality of poetry to both contemporaneous literary life and retrospective understandings of South Asian literary production. Poetry played a critical historical role in terms of contemporary constructions of literary traditions – both Urdu on one hand, and Braj or Avadhi devotional and courtly genres on the other – and was popularised not only in traditional *muṣā‘īras* and, increasingly in the early part of the century, new large-scale or mass poetic gatherings or *kavi sammelan*,² but also through publication in journals, adaptation into film songs, and independent publication.

While the Hindi and Urdu poetry of the period has been reasonably well studied in terms of ‘movements’ on one hand, and prominent individual masters of the genre on the other, questions remain regarding the fluidity and hybridity of poetic taste and practice during the period.³ These centre on how, precisely, individuals – both poets and connoisseurs – reacted to the variety of new imperatives and stimuli that the nationalist

² Francesca Orsini has noted the ways in which the institution of the *kavi sammelan* changed in the early 20th century, and its prominence from the 1920s on in north Indian cultural programming. See Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 81-9.

³ For instance, some of the best studies on new poetry and poets in this period include: in Hindi, on Chayavad – Karine Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma and the Chayavad Age of Modern Hindi Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), George Koynacki, ‘Suryakant Tripathi ‘Nirala’ and the Chayavad School of Indian Literature (1920-1935)’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 1980; in Urdu, on Iqbal – Javed Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2008) – and Manto and the *Halqa-e Arbāb-e Zauq* – Geeta Patel, *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings: On Gender, Colonialism and Desire in Miraji’s Urdu Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

and colonial context provided: to what extent they accepted the strict delineation of exclusivist historical poetic canons; how pervasive the reformist rhetoric that mandated an abandonment of old forms now held to be debased truly was; and in what ways poetry was used to bridge these increasingly rigid divides. These questions can only be answered by pulling down the iron curtain that divides the poetry of the two languages from one another and considering a broad and overlapping field of contemporary poetic practices and historical tastes.

This is a crucial epistemological and methodological turn for, as I hope to show, such a viewpoint brings us closer to an historical reality that has been largely overlooked in the scholarship: namely, that the production and consumption of Hindi and Urdu poetry did not take place in isolation from one another, but happened instead in a shared space of literary and linguistic exchange and perhaps even continuity. A significant number of litterateurs, and here particularly poets, who we might now conveniently label as either “Hindi” or “Urdu”, existed in, were aware of, and participated in a field of poetic production that encompassed a broad and overlapping Hindi-Urdu ecumene, and it was in this context that debates over poetic tradition and the evolution of new forms of taste and practice took place.⁴

⁴ Some studies stand as important exceptions to this general rule. Nirala’s poetic diversity and experiments with Urdu are well known. As Hoynacki tells us, Nirala composed *ghazals* as well as bhajans and *gīt*, was comfortable with Urdu vocabulary and used it extensively in some of his compositions (see Hoynacki, ‘Suryakant Tripathi ‘Nirala’’, 25-31). David Rubin also stresses his linguistic expansiveness: David Rubin, ‘Nirala and the Renaissance of Hindi Poetry’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 31,1 (November 1971) 111-26. Another particularly noteworthy example is Sagaree Sengupta’s study of Bharatendu Harishchandra’s Urdu verse, in which she demonstrates this Hindi advocate’s “continued and profound involvement with the language [Urdu] at the creative level”.

Significant evidence of the variety of such inter-linguistic exchanges exists in the form of not only poetry itself, but in published literary histories, criticisms, anthologies and, particularly, in the dialogic practices embodied in literary journals of the period.⁵ Moreover, several of the journals (and indeed newspapers) in which poetry and discussion of the same appeared demonstrate the existence of a complex interrelationship between producers, consumers, content, and form that quite clearly revolved around fluid linguistic axes – including language, register and script – and these same publications constitute a critical archive through which we can access this multi-faceted literary milieu. The substantial amount of inter-linguistic dialogue and practice in the field of poetry strongly suggests the possibility of advantages to studying Hindi and Urdu poetry of this period if not as constituent parts of a unitary field of cultural production, then at least simultaneously, with perhaps less deference to formal distinctions of language and genre than has hitherto been paid, and as a counterbalance to other, divisive, discourses and tendencies.

This chapter explores the Hindi-Urdu poetic milieu of the early 20th century from a variety of angles. It examines debates on the issues of canon and canon formation, questioning the extent to which traditions were formed on the basis of exclusivity or

Sagaree Sengupta, 'Krishna the Cruel Beloved: Harischandra and Urdu', *Annual of Urdu Studies* 9 (1994) 82-102, 87.

⁵ See Dalmia, *Nationalization*, ch.5 on the Hindi literary periodicals of the nineteenth century as the site for the discursive formation of new tastes and practices. See Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, for an extension of this analysis to Hindi journals of the 1920s and 30s. On the role of Urdu-language journals of the nineteenth century as discursive forums in the advocacy of "progress", see Javed Majeed, 'Narratives of Progress and Idioms of Community: Two Urdu Periodicals of the 1870s', in *Negotiating India in the Nineteenth-Century media*, David Finkelstein and Douglas M. Peers eds (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 135-163. For a discussion of an Urdu daily newspaper and its literary interests, see Stark, *Empire*, ch.6.

particular communal and linguistic affiliations. I posit the dominant paradigm of English poetry, to which Indian litterateurs were increasingly exposed and against which they frequently measured their own traditions, as a shared concern of writers across linguistic divides in order to explore how responses to this concern similarly transcended these same divides, and to suggest the viability of considering shared rather than exclusive Hindi or Urdu responses. Experiments by various writers with register and style, and the often simultaneous use of multiple poetic forms and registers to tackle social issues such as widow remarriage are examined in order to interrogate the pervasive but limiting paradigm of “service” to “literature”, which too easily became conflated with service to “language”, yet which, in the context of nationalist discourses on service to the fledgling nation, became a guiding measure of how writers contributed to their language literature in this period.⁶ These experiments are situated in a context of including contemporary poetic products from the ‘other’ repertoire or tradition in journals that might not have been expected to carry them for reasons of style, form or content, whereby the idea of discrete poetic worlds is further complicated, and where the trope of service as a critique of social and communal ills transcends the boundaries of individual language literatures. The chapter concludes with an examination of the exceptionally proactive attempts by two writers in particular – Miraji and Upendranath Ashk – to bridge the increasingly rigid

⁶ Premchand made frequent references to *sevā* (service) and *sāhityasevī* (servants of literature): see Premchand, editorial, *Hamṣ* (February 1934) 64, quoted in Francesca Orsini, ‘National literature and translation: Metaphors, understandings and translation practices before and after Independence’, unpublished paper. See also Tara Chand, ‘Adarīya’ and ‘Sampadakīya’, quoted in chapter 1, where he speaks of service to literature in both Hindi and Urdu.

divide between Hindi and Urdu poetics, both practically and rhetorically, and in some ways to deny the differences altogether.

2.I ON HISTORY, TRADITION AND OWNERSHIP

The question of literary canon, as other scholars have already ably demonstrated, was of critical and central concern to intellectuals and writers in the early 20th century.⁷ As has also been shown, such questions intersected with debates over the current and future direction of literature. Francesca Orsini has noted the prominence of poetry within these debates in the Hindi sphere:

Debates centred on poetry, partly because it was here that the most radical changes were taking place and partly because this was the literary form with the highest pedigree, where the heritage from the past was the most significant and challenging.⁸

Orsini uses the idea of literary *saṃskāra* to tease out and explain the differences between what she identifies as the three positions that Hindi literary figures took with regard to debates on literature, i.e. what she calls “rationalist reformers”, “defenders of tradition”, and modernists. She shows how the structural and institutional changes that had taken place in the public sphere facilitated an ongoing encounter between these reformers, traditionalists and modernists in the early 20th century in a way and on a scale that would have been unimaginable just decades before.⁹ Meanwhile, Frances Pritchett has ably demonstrated how poetry, and particularly the *ghazal*, was central to the literary reform

⁷ For canon formation in Hindi, see Dalmia, *Nationalization*, and Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*; for Urdu, see Pritchett, *Nets*.

⁸ Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 144.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 144-57.

movement in Urdu instigated in the late 19th century by, most prominently, Altaf Husain Hali and Muhammad Husain Azad.¹⁰

Yet for some reason, the issue of literary reform as it applied *across* the divide of language and script has only really been studied with regard to the rather later Progressive Writers Association, which was formally inaugurated in 1936. This was an important movement in the history of Indian (and later Pakistani) literature, but it is important to consider the long prehistory of the movement and its ideas in an inter-linguistic context. The reformist zeal of litterateurs including Hali, Azad, and Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi did not exist in discrete, isolated spheres: rather, both their critiques of tradition and also the consumption and discussion of these critiques bear striking similarities. The oppressive and insidious sense of the inadequacy or deficiency of *Indian* literature transcended linguistic divides. And, while it is beyond doubt that poetry, its critiques and its critics were largely appropriated by either the ‘Hindi’ or ‘Urdu’ canons and fields, evidence from the literary journals of the period demonstrates a significant amount of crossover, exchange and interaction.

The insistence of Hali and Azad that poetry should be both natural and moral (creating, in the words of Pritchett, an “impossible dilemma”¹¹) is hard to distinguish from the viewpoint of Dvivedi, who believed that poetry should focus on history, and “didactic or

¹⁰ See Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*. Unfortunately, I am unaware of any study that has addressed the debates in the 20th century Urdu public sphere in a similarly comprehensive fashion to Orsini’s study of the Hindi.

¹¹ Pritchett, *Nets*, 182.

descriptive compositions on nature and on moral values”¹², that it should be simultaneously “entertaining” (“*manorañjak*”) and able to “impart spiritual instruction” (“*upadeś-janak*”).¹³ It was this similarity of attitude that saw Dvivedi reject the Braj poetic tradition on both linguistic grounds (as poetry should be in language close to that of every day speech) and also moral ones (the erotic content of *rīti* poetry made it unsuitable), while Hali and Azad denounced a large part of historical Urdu poetry on the basis of its linguistic conventionalism and for its depiction of illicit love of various types, whether adulterous or pederastic¹⁴ – Hali, for instance, remarked on the “filthy archive of poetry and odes, more foul than a cesspool in its putridity” that in his view constituted Urdu literature.¹⁵ The critical point here is that, by the start of the 20th century, almost the entire historical north Indian literary (and here, chiefly poetic) tradition across a broad linguistic continuum was under attack from one quarter or another. Simultaneously, litterateurs were conscious of the need to fashion both a literature and a language that could function as a vehicle for both social reform and eventually national redemption. This required two important, parallel operations: firstly, the construction of a canon, and the writing of literary histories, that would be appropriately “national”; secondly, the reform of current literary taste and practice. In this context, the potential existed not only for the delineation of exclusive

¹² Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 145.

¹³ Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, ‘Kavi kartavya’, (1921) in *Rasajñā-rañjan* (Agra: Sahitya Press, 1949) 23.

¹⁴ Interestingly, while Azad praised Braj or “Bhasha” poetry for its simplicity and lack of metaphors, for being, in essence, closer to the ideal of natural poetry than anything in the Persianate tradition, Dvivedi attacked the same tradition for its elaborate structural rules and poetic devices, such as *samasyā pūrti* (completing poetic ‘problems’) and *ālaṃkāra* (poetic ornamentation and artifice), suggesting two very different understandings of and approaches to the Braj canon. Compare Pritchett, *Nets*, 157, and Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 145.

¹⁵ Shackle and Javed Majeed, *Hali’s Musaddas*, 193.

literary canons associated with specific linguistic, religious, and regional identities,¹⁶ but also – conversely and potentially – for a reorientation of the literary field towards inclusivity, broad tastes, and experimentation. It is precisely such attempts at this kind of reorientation that concern us here.

The poetic tradition of Braj Bhasha was, in this context, ripe for contestation or appropriation. Of course, Shaukat’s assertion quoted at the start of this chapter is palpably false in at least one regard – “*bhāṣā*” or *bhāṣā* poetry had certainly not been “cast aside” by Hindus, at least not entirely. While reformers such as Dvivedi may have had an admittedly strong impact, other figures were less ready to abandon their tastes and traditions. Indeed, the great poetic traditions of Braj Bhasha and Avadhi, along with poetry in other languages, were constantly being ‘rediscovered’ and represented in an ongoing debate over linguistic origins and literary heritage or habitus.¹⁷ What is significant about Shaukat’s perspective is rather the positive de-linking of language from identity, of literature from a concept of ‘ownership’. This was in direct opposition to what has been understood as the dominant trend of the period, in which language identity became a constituent part of an individual’s makeup, and inextricably linked to religious and regional identities.¹⁸ Shaukat’s example was not an isolated one, as we shall see. The de-linking of (poetic) language from a specific community took various forms: Shaukat, for instance, was here not only denying the

¹⁶ See, for example, Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*; Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature*.

¹⁷ For an illuminating account of the position of Braj Bhasha *viv-à-vis* Hindi and Urdu, and its endurance in the face of sharp critiques, see Valerie Ritter, ‘Networks, Patrons, and Genres for Late Braj Bhasha Poets: Ratnakar and Hariaudh’ in Orsini ed. *Before the Divide*, 249-76.

¹⁸ See Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics*, for a discussion of how language functioned in a process of “multi-symbol congruence” to produce and strengthen competing nationalisms. For a description of one prominent litterateur’s attempt to “convert” Hindus to Hindi, see Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 127-8.

exclusive identification of Hindi and Bhasha with Hindus, and similarly of Urdu, Persian and Arabic with Muslims, but was positively encouraging the forging or *re*-forging of a link between Bhasha poetry and the Muslim community. Furthermore, Shaukat moved from rhetoric to praxis, and ended his article with a selection of his own Bhasha compositions, replete with expository and explanatory marginalia, footnotes and translations.

This perceived need to explain the more particular aspects of Bhasha poetry is something that Shaukat shared with other writers in Urdu periodicals. A series of pieces in other Urdu journals exhibited a similar tendency, and the various presentation strategies that the authors and publications adopted further demonstrate the ambiguous relationship that existed between these publications, the authors and their imagined readership. A noteworthy example is the nine-part '*Bhāśā aur uske nauratan*' ('Bhasha and its Nine Jewels'), a series of articles on major Hindi poets including Surdas, Tulsidas, Keshavdas, Biharilal and Bhartendu Harischandra that ran from 1924-7 in Daya Narain Nigam's Urdu journal *Zamāna*. This series was authored by Manzur ul-Haq Azamgarhi, though it seems clear that he drew his schema, at least partially, from elsewhere – probably Ganeshbihari Mishra's book *Hindī Navaratn*,¹⁹ a standard canonising work – which fact itself further demonstrates the interlinked nature of the Hindi and Urdu poetic worlds. These articles were full of praise

¹⁹ Ganeshbihari Mishra *et al.*, *Hindī Navaratn* (4th ed.: Lucknow: Shri Dularelal Bhargava, 1991VS (1934-35AD)) [1st ed.: 1967VS (1910-11AD)]. Although the order in which he covers the poets is slightly different, it seems possible that Azamgarhi drew from and modified the Mishra brothers' schema. While seven of the poets correspond, there are two parts to the Mishra collection (the Tripathi brothers and Kabir) that were replaced by Azamgarhi (with Bhushan and Mati Ram). The absence of Kabir is perhaps the most striking aspect of this difference, but one can only speculate as to why this might have been done.

for the Bhasha poets: Surdas' corpus was described as a jewel of Bhasha poetry,²⁰ while Keshavdas was said to rank close behind Sur;²¹ Bhartendu Harischandra was described as the “*badśāh*” of both poetry and prose (“*naẓm-o naṣr ke*”),²² and Biharilal was said to be comparable to Ghalib in his expressiveness.²³

Let us consider the aspects of the presentation of this poetry. All the pieces in the *Zamāna* series contain quotations of the various poets' couplets in Devanagari along with Nastaliq transliterations and Urdu glosses. Azamgarhi's consistency in this regard is not matched in other articles that appeared in the same journal on Braj, Hindi or Sanskrit themes: some pieces provide Devanagari originals, at times with Nastaliq transliterations and/or Urdu translations, sometimes with both, and sometimes with neither.²⁴ The presence of transliterations and/or translations suggests that some authors expected their readers to need aid, though their differing approaches are evidence of differing expectations. By contrast, quotations *without* translation and/or transliteration demonstrate that other authors expected at least a working knowledge of the Devanagari script and/or the Braj (or Avadhi) language. This all points to a multilingual competency among a variety of people – editors, authors, engravers and subscribers – while at the same

²⁰ Manzur ul-Haq Azamgarhi, 'Bhāśā aur uske nauratan: 2 – Sūrdās' in *Zamāna* 42.2 (February 1924) 97-105, 105.

²¹ Azamgarhi, 'Bhāśā aur uske nauratan: 4 – Keshavdās' in *Zamāna* 42.5 (May 1924) 278-286.

²² Azamgarhi, 'Bhāśā aur uske nauratan: 9 – Hariścandra' in *Zamāna* 49.4 (October 1927) 169-178, 169.

²³ Azamgarhi, 'Bhāśā aur uske nauratan: 5 – Bihārīlāl' in *Zamāna* 43.5 (November 1924) 209-218, 209.

²⁴ See, for example, Munshi Harikishan, 'Rahīm ke Dohe', 24-27; Sayyid Maqbul Husain Ahmad Yuri, 'Rahīm ke Dohe', 28-36; Pandit Harve Narayan Pandey, 'Surdās', 37-42; Iqbal Varma Sahar Mahatgami, 'Bharateṇḍu Hariścandra', 51-57 in *Dayā Narā' in Niḡam ke Risāla 'Zamāna' Kānpur (1903-1942) se Intikhāb 21: Hindī Adabiyat* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1994).

time indicating a degree of uncertainty as to precisely what level of competency could be reasonably assumed in the readership.

Besides this interesting ambiguity regarding presentation and expectations, another fact stands out: namely, Azamgarhi's pieces are all rather introductory in terms of their style and content. These articles seem intended to introduce the unfamiliar *texts* of the work of already familiar *authors*. This is indicative of the transformation wrought on these oral texts and their consumption by the advent of the printed word, and it seems highly likely that selections of these poets' compositions would almost certainly have been *heard* before by many of the readers of these articles, at least in the United Provinces, in *bhajan* gatherings or as part of oral poetic culture more generally.²⁵ However, one implication of the spread of print journalism, and of print more generally, was the transformation of what were previously predominantly oral genres into texts for reproduction, transmission and, crucially, study. This shift heralded not only the codification and standardisation of texts (the quest for 'authoritative' versions) but moreover their incorporation into processes of canon formation, whereby they became objects of 'high' literature – open for study and consumption outside of their ceremonial, religious and liturgical contexts. Given this newly acquired canonical status of such texts, the question became one of *which* canon. As such, the titling of this series as *Bhāṣā...nauratan* as distinct from the *Hindī navaratn* of the Mishra brothers is significant: 'Bhasha' was being used here not to refer to Braj Bhasha, but to the complex and layered literary tradition, incorporating Braj, Avadhi and other variants, which was being claimed,

²⁵ See Ritter, 'Networks'.

at least in part, by certain Hindi partisans as part of a single, exclusive and narrow canon.²⁶ Certainly, articles on Braj or Avadhi poets in Hindi journals tended, on the whole, to assume a greater familiarity on the part of the reader, and correspondingly focussed on a particular aspect of a poet's corpus and its implications, rather than giving general introductions along with samplings of verse.²⁷ Nevertheless, the fact that articles on the Hindi/Braj Bhasha poetic tradition appeared in Hindi and Urdu publications throughout the early decades of the century demonstrates a spread of interest in and taste for pre-modern Hindi poetry that transcended boundaries of script, language and religion.²⁸ Furthermore, as I discuss at further length below with particular regard to Miraji and Upendranath Ashk (see §2.IV), this kind of inclusive approach to literary history and canon was to find other, passionate advocates.

²⁶ Francesca Orsini has shown the ambiguity that existed among Hindi-*vālās* towards Braj Bhasha. On the one hand, reformers such as Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi “believed that traditional poetry in Braj Bhasha...was outdated and immoral”, while other “poets and connoisseurs defended a tradition polished over centuries.” Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 147-8. See also a review of Jagannathdas Ratnakar’s book *Bihārī Ratnākār* in which the author was praised for being a devotee of Braj Bhasha “who has, brushing aside the various obstacles and hindrances of *khaṛī bolī* Hindi in these times, defended the prestige and paramountcy of Braj Bhasha.” Chandni Prasad, ‘Sāhitya Saṃsār’ in *Cāṃd* (April 1927) 629-30. In many ways, though not entirely, the distinction between *rīti* and *bhakti* lies at the heart of this issue. See Busch, *Poetry of Kings*.

²⁷ See, for example, Rajnikant Shastri, ‘Gosvāmī Tulsīdās aur strī-jāti’ in *Cāṃd* (January 1929) 468-72; Ramnaresh Tripathi, ‘Tulsīdāsī kā vāñī-vilās’ in *Haṃs* 6.1 (October 1935) 51-53; Hariprasad Gupta, ‘Tulsī kā bāl-varṇan’ in *Haṃs* 6.4 (January 1936) 36-41; Vyauhar Rajendrasingh, ‘Gosvāmī Tulsīdās tathā Kālidās ke rājñītik vicār’ in *Haṃs* 6.5 (February 1936) 24-8.

²⁸ Other Urdu journals carried articles on similar themes: see, for example, Gopi Nath ‘Aman’ Lakhnavi, ‘Tulsīdās aur unkī Rāmā’ in *Adīb* 2.3 (January 1942) 6-11; Mazhar Ramzanpuri, ‘Sant Kabīrdās’ in *Nadīm* (August 1940) and Kashfi Gopalpuri, ‘Adabivāt-e Bhāśā’ in *Nadīm* (April-October 1937) (articles from *Nadīm* reprinted in *Risāla Nadīm Gayā (1931-49) se Intikhāb - 13: Adabiyāt* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1999)).

If pre-modern Hindi or Bhasha was one tradition that was open for debate and appropriation, the other major poetic tradition to undergo similar processes was that of Urdu. It was against the backdrop of critiques by the likes of Hali, Azad and Dvivedi that Premchand, perhaps the paradigmatic Hindi-Urdu 'crossover' figure, chastised his friend and patron Daya Narain Nigam for his indulgence in the debased traditions of romantic Urdu poetry. Premchand himself had little time for or interest in old literature of any stripe – he was firmly rooted in the modern era, and convinced that the poetry and literature of the past had little relevance when measured against pressing contemporary social concerns. So he wrote to Nigam sometime in 1911-2:

Is zamāne mein jab ki gunāgunī akhlāqī, siyāsī, muāsratī aur iqtasādī masāil hamārī tamāmtar tavajjo ke mustahaq haiṁ, mujhe yah dekhkar afsos huā ki risālā Zamānā kā qarīb qarīb ek pūrā mahaz Ātis ke kalām ke tabsare kī nazar ho gayā...Liṭarecar kā mauzū hai tahzīb, akhlāq, muśāhidāe jazbāt, inkaśāfe haqāyaq aur vārdāt o kaifiyāt-e qalb kā izhār. Jo śāyriṁ husn va isq...se mulavvas kartī ho, vah hargiz is qābil nahīm ki āj ham uskā vird karen.

In this age when we need to devote all of our attention to a wide range of moral, social and economic problems, I was deeply saddened to see this issue of *Zamāna* being devoted to Aatish...The proper subject of literature is the elaboration of human emotions, the revelation of truth...But poetry that concentrates on love...should certainly not concern us at this time.²⁹

As a Kayasth, a caste group that had traditionally served in literate capacities within the Mughal Empire, Premchand's early schooling from a maulvi, suffused with Persian and Arabic, was unexceptional. It is similarly unsurprising then that, when he began to write, he wrote in Urdu. His beginnings in Urdu publishing are perhaps the major omission from a decidedly selective historical anamnesis in the Hindi literary world, yet had it not been for the patronage he received from Nigam, he might never have achieved the pre-eminent

²⁹ Premchand, letter to Daya Narain Nigam, in Amrit Rai ed. *Ciṭṭhī Patrī*, vol.1 (Allahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1978) 9-10, referenced in Geetanjali Pandey, *Between Two Worlds: An Intellectual Biography of Premchand* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 5-6. This is transliterated from the Nagari of the collection; however, it was almost certainly originally written in Nastaliq.

position he now holds in the north Indian literary canon and popular imagination.³⁰ Premchand began his association with *Zamāna*, and his life-long friendship with Nigam, when he moved to Kanpur in 1905. However, his relationship with Nigam and, by extension, the Persianate literary tradition, was clearly not entirely harmonious. Unfortunately, we have no record of Nigam's response to the letter, but the contents of his journal over the following years certainly suggest that Nigam did not take Premchand's rebuke too seriously. As an editor, Nigam clearly held an enduring personal interest in the Urdu literary tradition, and he gave over a large amount of space in his journal to both scholarly studies on and reprints of selections from the works of major poets from this tradition – not only Aatish, but a vast selection of great Urdu poets, alive and dead, as we shall see.³¹

Indeed, *Zamāna* is itself a particularly noteworthy example of the importance of literary journals as spaces for the negotiation of the issues raised by the tension between movements to reform literature and the deeply ingrained tastes and practices of the

³⁰ Many of Premchand's most celebrated short stories appeared first in *Zamāna*, including such 'classics' as *Bare Ghar kī Beṭī* (December 1910) and *Pañchāyat* (May/June 1916). He was also the occasional author of the editorial column *Raftār-e Zamāna* ('March of the Times'). Additionally, he published articles on a wide range of topics ranging from literary criticism to current affairs from the founding of the journal through to his death in 1936. A special Premchand memorial edition of *Zamāna* was issued in 1938. A selection of his writings from *Zamāna* have been extracted and published together. See *Dayā Narā'in Nigam ke Risāla 'Zamāna' Kānpur (1903-1942) se Intikhāb 8-11* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1993).

³¹ The prevalence of such articles is perhaps most succinctly demonstrated by the four volumes from the Khuda Bakhsh reprint series devoted to "Eminents of Urdu Literature" (*Dayā Narā'in Nigam ke Risāla 'Zamāna' Kānpur (1903-1942) se Intikhāb 12-15: Maśāhīr-e Adab-e Urdū vv.1-4* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1994). Running to almost 1,800 pages, these volumes contain articles on a wide range of past and contemporary poets, including the reformers Hali and Azad, but emphatically not excluding poetry of the 'old' style (pieces on Ghalib, and those on or by Premchand, are included in separate volumes).

literati. Furthermore, the central role that Nigam and Premchand played in the journal gives rise to some interesting questions. For instance, to what extent was such accommodation possible, given the apparently irreconcilable contradiction between, in Premchand's view, a taste for old and now unacceptable forms and styles on one hand, and an insistence that the production, discussion and, implicitly, consumption of literature should be exclusively of types that met the standards of reformists and the requirements of the modern age on the other? If such accommodations could be reached, how common were they? And was it only in *Zamāna*, an admittedly somewhat exceptional publication, that reformist attitudes could coexist peaceably with old tastes and styles, or were similar accommodations present in other publications? Fundamentally, a broader question emerges with regard to the essentialism of such position taking: were such positions as uncompromising as they appear, or did certain literary journals in particular constitute a forum in which taste and appreciation for the old sat alongside experimental developments and trends? Ultimately, did such journals reflect widespread attitudes and tastes in the reading public?

The call for reform of both society and literature was a powerful one, and it was reflected and enthusiastically supported in Nigam's *Zamāna*. Balmukund Gupta profiled Azad in an article in 1906,³² and a significant number of pages were devoted to his work and to marking his passing in both the February and April 1910 issues of the journal.³³ Similarly,

³² Balmukund Gupta, 'Maulvī Muhammad Husain Āzād', in *Zamāna* (July 1906), reprinted in *Dayā Narā'in Nigam ke Risāla...se Intikhāb* 12, 8-19.

³³ See, in particular, the elegiac poem by Munshi Durga Sahai 'Surur' Jahanabadi, in which he praised Azad as having established the glory of literature ("Tū vah divāna thā qā'im tujh se thī śān-e adab"/"You

Hali's life, work and calls for literary reform received close attention throughout the period, including a special issue in December 1935.³⁴ Beyond such studies, reprints, memorials and eulogies, there was of course the towering presence of Premchand and his own work, chiefly in the form of his short stories, but also in occasional pieces of literary criticism and commentary on current affairs. A mere four months after the special edition on Hali, *Zamāna* first printed the full text of Premchand's speech with which he inaugurated the Progressive Writers Association conference, in terms that were reminiscent of Hali, Azad and Dvivedi, yet in a style that was his alone.³⁵ His trenchant criticism of poetry in particular suggests that little had changed for him, or in terms of his attitude, since his letter to Nigam some 25 years previously.³⁶

were the devotee by whom the glory of literature was established"), and bemoans the desolate state of the poetic gathering without his presence ("Ho ga'i marne se tere bazm-e dihli beciraḡh"/"The gathering of Delhi has been left without a lamp by your passing"). *Zamāna* (April 1910) 305.

³⁴ This issue included an article by Shaikh Abdul Qadir, editor of *Makhzan*, in which he was keen to stress the relevance of Hali to the *ghazal* tradition despite his apparent rejection of it, including in his piece selections of Hali's early work which he described as having come "before he abstained from writing love *ghazals*" ("jab vah 'āsiqāna *ghazal* likhne se parhez na karte the"); Qadir, 'Ḥālī aur *ghazal*' in *Zamāna* (December 1935), reprinted in *Dayā Narā'in Nigam ke Risāla...se Intikhāb* 13, 60-3.

³⁵ Premchand, 'Adab kī *gharaz-o ghāyat*', in *Zamāna* (April 1936), reprinted in *Dayā Narā'in Nigam ke Risāla...se Intikhāb* 10: *Premchand: Adabiyāt*, 138-50. For a Hindi version of the speech, see Premchand, 'Sāhitya kā uddeśya' in *Kuch Vicār* (Allahabad: Sarasvati Press, 1982) 5-25; for an English translation of the same see Francesca Orsini tr. 'The Aim of Literature' in *The Oxford India Premchand* (New Delhi: OUP, 2004) Appendix. For an account of the speech in the context of the conference, and some provocative speculations on its provenance, see Carlo Coppola, 'Premchand's Address to the First Meeting of the All-India Progressive Writers Association: Some Speculations', *Journal of South Asian Literature* 21; 2 (Summer, Fall 1986) 21-39. As Coppola notes, this Hindi version was originally published in Premchand's journal *Hams* in July 1936; while it is unclear precisely what language or register the speech was delivered in (Sajjad Zaheer described it as "easy to understand Urdu" (Zaheer, *The Light*, 62)), an Urdu version was published in the April 1936 edition of *Zamāna* (i.e. before the Hindi version and not, as Coppola suggests, in a 1941 edition of *Nayā Adab* – see Coppola, 37 fn.20).

³⁶ For instance: "To me, poetic ideas have no meaning if they make the impermanence of the world have a stronger hold over our hearts (*our monthly journals are filled with these ideas*) and if they do not arouse within us dynamism and zeal." From Premchand, Orsini tr., 'The Aim' (emphasis added).

Yet the prominence of this reformist attitude threatens to obscure the sustained interest in, and, I suggest, much wider taste for, the rich traditions of Urdu and indeed Persian poetry that was evinced in the pages of *Zamāna*. Premchand himself published, admittedly very early on in his association with the journal (in 1909), two expository pieces on figures who functioned as idealised lover tropes in classical Persian poetry, namely Zulaikha and Qais.³⁷ Replete with quotations from Persian poetry, these articles surveyed the various portrayals of the tribulations of their subjects, and explained the centrality of these figures to Persianate love poetry and their use as poetical shorthand for feelings of love in separation.³⁸ Indeed, articles on Persian poetry were a consistent, if not overly common, feature of *Zamāna* over the years. Written by both Hindus and Muslims, they covered a range of poets from old Iranian classics to more recent Indian writers.³⁹ Had discussion of the old styles of poetry, the conventional and – according to the reformers – exhausted metaphors of *gul-o bulbul* and the like, been confined to Persian poetry, then this might have provided a neat resolution to the tension between reform and taste. Such poetry, by the very virtue of its language of composition, could conceivably have been admired as an artefact of an earlier age, but kept rhetorically distinct from the literatures of modern day India. However, such was emphatically not the case. Past masters of Urdu poetry, and their compositions replete with the same expressions and conventions as those

³⁷ Navab Rae (Premchand's previous *nom-de-plume*), 'Zulaikhā' and 'Qais', in *Zamāna*, reprinted in *Dayā Narā'in Nigam ke Risāla...se Intikhāb 10: Premchand: Adabiyāt*, 1-14 and 15-26.

³⁸ Premchand's admiration for the Persian poetry he cites was perhaps most evident when he praised Jami for his "almost realistic depiction" of Zulaikha as a woman in love. Rae, 'Zulaikhā', 14.

³⁹ For a selection of these articles, see *Dayā Narā'in Nigam ke Risāla...se Intikhāb 23: Adabiyāt-e Fārsī* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995).

derided by critics from Azad to Ram Babu Saksena, made regular appearances in the pages of *Zamāna*, from Mir to Ghalib, Sauda to Dagh. More often than not, these poets and their works were presented without any special justification: appreciation of the old was evidently not considered particularly remarkable.

However, a certain recurrent feature in the presentation of these writers and their works deserves brief consideration. Some authors evidently felt the need to pre-emptively defend the old poets from any suggestion that their work did not meet modern standards: Shyam Mohan Lal said of Mir's poems that "forming an opinion of them according to modern tastes is a fundamental mistake, because at that time Urdu poetry was establishing the preliminary way houses on the road of progress."⁴⁰ With this defence out of the way, Lal went on to praise the *ghazal* as the pre-eminent and most pleasing genre of any poetry, and devoted the remainder of his article to demonstrating why Mir deserved recognition as the exponent *par excellence* of the form.⁴¹ Such a strategy was by no means an isolated one. Yet why did Lal and others feel the need to include such a caveat in their articles? I suggest that this was perhaps a performative gesture, a nod in the direction of the reformist agenda, through which the author and his subject were absolved of responsibility for the subsequent content that, unavoidably, contravened the norms of this new literary standard.

⁴⁰ "Un *par mazāq jadīd ke nuqṭa-e nigāh se rā'e zanī karnā uṣūlī ghalṭī hai kyonki us vaqt urdū śā'irī rāh-e taraqqī kī ibtidā'ī manāzil ṭe kar rahī thī."* Babu Shyam Mohan Lal 'Jigar' Bareilvi, 'Kalām-e Mīr' in *Zamāna* 52.6 (June 1929) 1.

⁴¹ Quoting Ghalib's well-known *śer* to support his argument: "*Ghālib apnā to [/yah] 'aqīdah hai baqaul-e Nāsikh / āp be bahrah he jo mu'taqid-e Mīr nahīn*". Id.

If such deference – quickly dispensed with, it should be noted – was indeed the *passé-partout* of the period, it was one that was apparently easily, and perhaps even glibly, employed. It was not, however, the only strategy: one author, for example, overcame any possible objections to the writings of Ghalib by emphatically asserting the latter’s global standing as one who had covered the full range of the possible subjects of world poetry, and whose poetry and philosophy stood comparison with the greatest that Europe had to offer, from Epicurus and Horace to Robert Browning and John Milton.⁴² One way or another, contributors to *Zamāna*, whether Hindu or Muslim, seemed determined to study, appreciate, and remember traditional Urdu poetry and, perhaps most importantly, to allow the readers of the journal to do the same.

Other Urdu journals followed a strikingly similar pattern. The Lahore journal *Makhzan*, edited by Sir Abdul Qadir, was a case in point. It was a tremendously influential literary publication, and well known for publicising new Urdu literature; this was after all the journal in which Iqbal published much of his verse, beginning in the very first edition of the magazine in 1901 and continuing for many years.⁴³ Qadir was deeply committed to the advancement of Urdu literature (he acted as president of the Punjab Literary League for several years), but also to the use of literature to ameliorate or solve the social problems

⁴² Jagishvarnath Varma, ‘Falsafa-e Ghālib’ in *Zamāna* 54.8 (August 1931).

⁴³ Qadir wrote the introduction to Iqbal’s first collection of poetry, *Bāng-e Darā*, in which he explained his role not only in encouraging Iqbal to publish (*Makhzan* carried at least one of his poems every month from 1901 until his departure for England in 1905, and printed many more after his return), but also, along with Thomas Arnold, in discouraging Iqbal from abandoning poetry altogether. See Muhammad Iqbal, *Bāng-e Darā* (Lucknow: Al-Nazir Book Agency, 1926). On the whole, *Makhzan* had relatively few Hindu contributors compared to *Zamāna*: the poet Hari Chand ‘Akhtar’ is a notable exception in this regard, though there were other Hindu poets and contributors involved.

that India faced.⁴⁴ Accordingly, advocacy of reform was rarely absent from the pages of *Makhzan*, whether in the form of studies (or even poems) on the life and work of reformers such as Hali,⁴⁵ or in a wide range of poems that, in one way or another, demonstrated the new directions that Urdu poetry was taking. Yet at the same time, the taste for and interest in the old never went away: Ghalib, Aatish and even Amir Khusrau made regular appearances as the subjects of articles,⁴⁶ and other articles on a wide variety of subjects – literary or otherwise – were regularly interspersed with couplets from these and other great poets.⁴⁷ ‘Classical’ poetry was therefore not just an object of study, but a key component of the affective and rhetorical vocabulary of these writers.

Fundamentally, these two major Urdu literary journals of the period show that a pattern was being established, according to which an interest in and commitment to literary reform as advocated from the late 19th century onwards could and did sit alongside a taste for and interest in the traditions of Urdu poetry. This is significant in itself, as it was a model that other, later publications followed (see, for instance, the journal *Adīb* of Delhi, whose early issues in 1941 included articles on Mir and Ghalib alongside others on the Persian *maṣnavī*, articles on the enduring relevance of Hali’s *Musaddas*, and short stories and poetry by some of the most exciting contemporary authors, among much else besides). It is

⁴⁴ See his introduction to *Bāng-e Darā*.

⁴⁵ See, for example, in *Makhzan*: Saiyid Ahmad Dahlavi, ‘*Khayāja Hālī*’ (May 1915) 13-29; ‘Nazar’, ‘*Marṣiya śams al-‘ulamā maulānā khayāja Alṭāf Ḥusain śāḥab Hālī marhūm*’ (March 1915) 73-5.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the multi-part series by ‘Azarda’ Sitapuri, ‘*Ātis-o Ghālīb*’ in *Makhzan* (April-June 1918), among many others.

⁴⁷ Qadir’s own writing exhibited this tendency: see, for example, Abdul Qadir, ‘*Jab Ātis javān thā*’ in Ahmad Salim ed. *Intikhāb-e Makhzan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2004) 23-6.

also important to consider the implications of this mode of coexistence for contemporary poetic practice for, as I discuss below, not all poets were willing to abandon the old forms.

As important as this creation of space for traditional Urdu poetry alongside reformist critiques in Urdu publications was, the appearance of ‘classic’ Urdu verse in Hindi journals is all the more striking, given the apparent strengthening of distinctions between the two print worlds. Yet this is exactly what happened in at least one Hindi publication, namely *Cānd*. Furthermore, almost every aspect of its presentation of Urdu poetry points towards an aesthetic experience that was emphatically meant to be luxurious and indulgent, quite contrary to the norms of progressive literary values. The selections were titled ‘Kesar kī kyāri’ – meaning a flowerbed, and quite apparently a Hindi rendering of the common Urdu poetic image *gulśan*, a rose bed or garden generally, the home of the poet, poetry and the site in which the drama between lover and beloved often played itself out. This title was rendered, in keeping with the picturesque style of the journal, around an image, in this case of a beautiful young woman, either carrying a platter covered with gathered flowers (as in Figure 2.1) or pictured in a garden picking flowers (though it should be noted that the woman’s depiction corresponds to the imagination of a Hindu/Indian classical ideal of beauty). This created potentially multiple, layered meanings, but the most obvious and straightforward equivalence is between the gathered flowers presented on the platter and the selections of verses that had been carefully chosen for their beauty, and were here presented to the reader for her or his enjoyment. And, in truth, the selections of verse did indeed resemble such a collection; more often than not they were small snippets of poems – often no more than a *śer* or two from any given *ghazal* – that the compiler,

Sukhdeo Prasad ‘Bismil’ Ilahabadi, had picked out as worthy of attention. The poems themselves were, predominantly, by writers in Bismil’s own *ustād-šāgird* (master-disciple) lineage: he frequently included samplings of his own verse, though with proper modesty kept these until the end of the selections. Before his own verse he often included that of his own *ustād* Nuh Narvi; and at or near the top of his compilations he quoted, often at more length than the others, the poetry of Nuh’s own *ustād*, Dagh Dehlavi.⁴⁸ Bismil did include other poets, including Akbar Ilahabadi, though the latter is better remembered for his biting satirical verse than the selections presented here. However, Bismil’s focus on his own poetic lineage was more than merely a gesture of respect: it constituted an artistic and aesthetic statement that reinforced the abstracting, art for art’s sake nature of these collections. Dagh has been both admired and criticised as one of the foremost exponents of a particularly sensuous form of Urdu poetry, in which the beauty of both image and poetic diction were at once the means and ends in themselves.⁴⁹ Furthermore, many of his disciples were at the forefront of opposition to the reformist ideals that gained increasing prominence after their master’s death (in 1905), and attempted a formalist revival in which the former ideals of Urdu poetics could be restored to their proper place.⁵⁰ It was this style

⁴⁸ See a selection of this recurring feature, including: Bismil Ilahabadi ed., ‘Kesar kī kyārī’, in *Cāmd* (November 1931) 187-9; (January 1937) 360-1; (May 1937) 83-4; (January 1938) 347-8.

⁴⁹ Ram Babu Saksena, for instance, described Dagh’s “greatest merit [as] that he refrained from complicated and involved constructions, extreme Persianization...and artificiality”, while conceding that his verses displayed little in the way of originality or depth of thought (Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature*, 208-9). Bailey’s assessment was similar, though he did not defend Dagh’s sensuousness and eroticism, merely noting that his verse was “of inferior moral tone” (Bailey, *A History*, 75).

⁵⁰ Abida Samiuddin identifies a “formalist school, comprising the disciples of Dagh like Nuh Narvi, Simab Akbar-abadi, Josh Malsiani...etc.” as reacting against the rejection of classical styles and subject matter. Abida Samiuddin, *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Urdu Literature* volume 1 (New Delhi: Global Vision, 2007) 374.

of poetry, then, that Bismil presented to the readers of *Cāmd*, and more often than not in a particularly reified form, with individual *śers* pruned from the rest of the *ghazal* on account of their particular beauty, and set aside for individual attention and sensuous enjoyment. All this under the evocative and visual rubric of *kesar kī kyārī* – truly, this was a particularly indulgent way to consume Urdu verse.

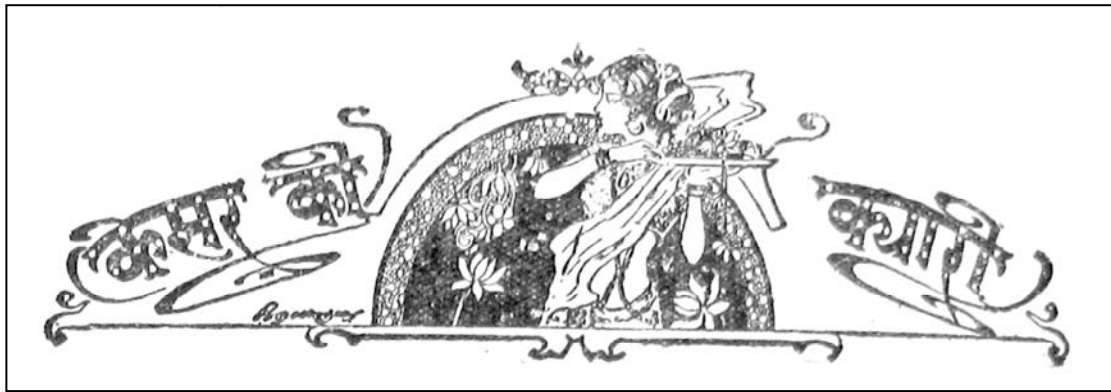


Figure 2.1 The graphic headline for the poetry selections of Bismil Ilahabadi that appeared in *Cāmd*

The danger in over-emphasising isolated examples of crossover is naturally apparent. However, the instances of inter-linguistic discussion of north Indian canonical texts and authors discussed above do seem representative of a significant movement towards inclusivity and crossing over among a section of the Hindi-Urdu literati.⁵¹ The process of canon formation was, as Orsini has demonstrated with regard to Hindi, directly dependent on the formal and institutional arrangements of education, in university syllabi and textbook production; it was in such contexts as these that literary canons were established and entrenched. In contrast, journals such as those discussed provided for a

⁵¹ An excellent example of such crossing over is Harivansh Rai Bachchan's 1935 *Madhushala*, a collection of Hindi *rubaiyat* based on *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, which achieved enormous popularity. This discussion acts to some degree to provide the broader context for such well-known examples. See Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions*, ch.2, for a discussion of Bachchan's work.

contemporaneous imagination of an alternative canon, intimately bound up with issues of the creation of tastes and literary habitus, which transcended the divides of script and the increasing congruence between identifiers based on language and religious affiliation.

Such an imagining took place in what I strongly suggest was a context of literary reform that simply cannot be viewed as distinctly Hindi or Urdu, as the ideas circulating amongst reformers bore striking similarities. Admittedly, there is little evidence of *direct* discussion of the reformist agenda of the likes of Dvivedi in Urdu publications, or of corresponding analyses of the efforts of such Urdu reformers as Hali and Azad in Hindi journals, though of course Hali's *Musaddas* was widely imitated in Hindi.⁵² The relative dearth of such pieces should not be taken to infer that litterateurs working in either language were ignorant of the dominant discourses in the other: indeed, one of the central contentions here has been precisely the opposite. Furthermore, given the similarities between the respective reformist agenda, there is perhaps little reason why there should have been such explicit crossover. However, given this relative lack, such pieces that made explicit connections between the traditions deserve some attention. A somewhat basic example of this awareness is the brief felicitation and biographical sketch of Dvivedi that Iqbal Varma published in *Zamāna* on the occasion of the former's 70th birthday in 1934.⁵³ Varma praised not only Dvivedi's service to Hindi literature, but also his dedicated efforts to reform literature, carrying on the work that Harishchandra had begun at the close of the

⁵² See Shackle and Majeed, *Hali's Musaddas*, 43-8, for an account of its translations and adaptations. For a discussion of Maithilisharan Gupta's *Bhārat Bhārtī* as a Hindi poem modeled on the *Musaddas*, see Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, §3.1.2.

⁵³ Iqbal Varma, 'Paṇḍit Mahābir Praśād Duvedī', reprinted in *Dayā Narā'in Nigam ke Risāla...se Intikhāb 21: Adabiyāt-e Hindī* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995) 68-72.

previous century.⁵⁴ His work at *Sarasvatī* had set new goals for all Hindi journals to aspire to, but none of this was a threat to Urdu, in Varma's understanding, since Dvivedi's work had ultimately been "*Hindī naẓm-o naṣr ko 'khaṛī bolī' y'anī urdū kī raviś par lānā*" / "to bring the fashion/manner of Khari Boli, that is Urdu, to Hindi poetry and prose."⁵⁵ Dvivedi might not have agreed with this characterisation of his efforts, especially given the sublimation of *khaṛī bolī* within "Urdu", but it is the knowledge of and respect for his reformist agenda in an Urdu publication that is significant here.

A more rigorous approach to demonstrating the inter-linguistic traffic of reformist approaches is found in an article by Khvaja Ghulam Saiyidain in *Haṃs* in 1936, in which the author argued for the centrality of the ideas of Hali to the reform of *Indian* literature and the nation. The article opened with a crushing indictment of the resurgent 'art for art's sake' movement, which Saiyidain viewed as having betrayed the urgent calls to reform and national uplift that had dominated the literary sphere only a few decades before:

Hamāre deś meṃ kuch arse se yah vicār phailtā jātā hai ki lalit kalāom kā uddeśya hamāri saundarya vṛtti kī tṛpti mātr hai aur inheṃ kisī dūsre uddeśya kā sādhan banane se inkā lālitya jātā rahtā hai. Cūmki kavītā ek lalit kalā hai; islie ācār ke sudhār se iskā koī sambandh nahīn. In logom ke vicār ke anusār kavi aur sudhārak kā kārya-kṣetra bilkul alag-alag hai.

The opinion has been spreading for some time now in our country, that the sole aim of fine art is the satisfaction of our sense of beauty, and that by making it fit some other purpose removes its artistry. Since poetry is a fine art, so it has no connection with social reform. According to these people, the realms of the poet and the reformer are completely separate.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ Khvaja Ghulam Saiyidain, 'Hālī sudhārak rūp meṃ', in *Haṃs* 6.4 (January 1936) 29-34, 29.

Saiyidain rejected such a worldview out of hand. This kind of dismissive attitude towards these opinions does not come as a surprise in the pages of Premchand's journal,⁵⁷ and this too just a few months before the inaugural meeting of the PWA, at which Premchand was to provide possibly the clearest re-articulation of the necessity of linking literary and societal reform since Dvivedi. Even so, Saiyidain did something unique here: he explicitly transformed Hali's critique, and specifically the *Musaddas*, from one directed at the Muslims of India into something applicable to and relevant for the entire population of India. While he located Hali's experiences squarely within the downfall of Muslim rule and culture,⁵⁸ his implicit and occasionally explicit purpose in the article was to demonstrate what he considered to be the national, religion-neutral essence of Hali's call. Prior to quoting a substantial portion of Hali's poetry, he advised the reader, "The educated, eye-opening picture sketched in these verses of the Muslim community – how relevant it is to the other communities [*jāti*] of India!"⁵⁹ However, as appealing as this idea may have been to the author, the key idea he articulated is one of Hali as an inspiring individual who could and should serve as a model for current reformers. His final passage is worth quoting at length:

⁵⁷ This is not to say that Premchand was *entirely* unsympathetic to the idea of 'art for art's sake', but as Pandey has shown, he strongly believed that the 'purity' of art could only be a secondary concern, given the demands of the times. See Pandey, *Between Two Worlds*, 6-7, where she outlines his clear subordination of aesthetic standards to propagandist and reformist imperatives.

⁵⁸ "Kyā Hālī ke lie yah samay thā ki ve musalmān jāti ke is ujre bāgh kā nazzārā dekhne ke bād gulobulbul kī śāyari meṁ kalpnā kī urān dikhāte?...Hālī kī kavītā ek coṭ khāye hue dil kī fariyād hai; par kiske dil kī? Vah ek vyakti viśeṣ Hālī kā dil nahīm; balki ek qaum aur ek sampradāy, ek sabhyatā aur saṁskṛti ka dil hai." / "Was this the time for Hali, after seeing the desolate garden of the Muslim community, to show flights of fancy in poetry of roses and nightengales?...Hali's poetry is the appeal of a wounded heart; but of whose heart? It is not the heart of some specific individual by the name of Hali, but the heart of a nation, a community, a civilisation and a culture." Saiyidain, 'Hālī', 31.

⁵⁹ Id.

Sac yah hai ki Hālī ne jis tarah karmkṣetr meṁ sārī umr jhūṭh, atirañjnā aur makkārī ke khilāf jehād kiyā - ise larṭe rahe - usī tarah vicārṣetr meṁ bhī in cizom ko jāyaz nahīm mānā. Unkī pratyek racnā meṁ vahī sacāī, saraltā aur sahānubhūti jhalaktī hai, jo unke caritr meṁ prerak rūp meṁ virāj rahī thī, aur isī kī badaulat unke lie na keval vīsva ke kavimaṇḍal kī pratham pañkti meṁ sthān surakṣit hai; kintu nigāh rakhnevālorī ke nazdīk unkī gintī sant puruṣom meṁ hai; kyomki unheṁ paramātmā kī sṣṭi se prem thā aur uskī sevā kī ruci tathā utsāh thā. Āj jo log deś-sevā-path ke pathik hai, Hālī kā caritr aur kavītā pratyek pag par unkā path-pradarśan kartī hai...⁶⁰

The truth is that, the way Hali struggled his whole life against lies, exaggeration and deceitfulness in the realm of action – kept fighting these things – in the same way he didn't accept them as valid in the realm of ideas. The same truth, simplicity and sympathy shine in his various works that shone from his character as inspiration, and thanks to this alone not only is a place reserved for him in the first rank of the gathering of the world's poets, but in the opinion of those of judgement, he is accounted among the most virtuous of men, because he had love for the supreme soul's creation and an interest, that is zeal, for its service. Those that travel the path of service to the nation today, Hali's character and poetry guide them every step of the way.

A graduate of the Aligarh Muslim University, and of Leeds University, and with Hali as his maternal grandfather, there is nothing at all surprising about Saiyidain's reformist attitudes.⁶¹ However, his determined attempt to bring Hali into the Hindi sphere demonstrates just how widely this 'second wave' of reformers – as we can call those writers active in the '30s and afterwards – were prepared to cast their net in order to renew the call to produce useful, and soon "progressive", literature. Specifically, writers such as Saiyidain demonstrate the applicability of reformist critiques across barriers of language and script.

2.II SHARED CONCERNS: DEBATING POETRY

English influence is seen in the increased attention paid to thought and matter as opposed to language and form, in more naturalness and less conventionality, and, generally, in greater breadth and treatment...[a]nother form of poetry which owes its inspiration largely to English sources is that which breathes love of country and true patriotism...Indian opinion has eagerly availed itself of the support given by English literature.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., 33-4.

⁶¹ Samiuddin, *Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, 533.

⁶² Bailey, *A History of Urdu Literature*, 98-9.

But one is no more obliged to choose between them than between a sausage and a rose. Their purposes barely intersect.⁶³

The spectre of English poetry has haunted histories of both Hindi and Urdu literature for a long time. Ralph Russell took three prominent English-language Urdu literary histories to task – those of Grahame Bailey, Ram Babu Saksena and Muhammad Sadiq – not only for their denigration of Urdu literature in general, but specifically for their constant and consistently unfavourable comparisons with English literature that, in his view, were not so much unfair as utterly irrelevant.⁶⁴ However, it is clear that English poetry – and of course other genres in English along with the literature of other languages including French, German and Russian – gradually entered into the consciousness of Indian litterateurs through various processes in the colonial environment, including Anglicist education in government schools; the diffusion of such texts in the original languages as well as in translation; and the exposure of students to such texts in English universities.

While Sudhir Chandra's phrase "crushed by English poetry"⁶⁵ refers less to poetry *per se* than to the gradual inculcation of ideas of western, particularly English, superiority in the native mind, it serves to demonstrate the reality of the late-19th and early-20th century literary milieu. "Faith in colonialism despite an understanding of its exploititiveness"⁶⁶ was a phenomenon that found political and literary expression from both Hindi and Urdu

⁶³ George Orwell, 'Charles Dickens' in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940).

⁶⁴ Ralph Russell, 'How Not to Write the History of Urdu Literature' in *Annual of Urdu Studies* 6 (1987) 1-10, reviewing Sadiq's, Saksena's, and Bailey's *Histories*. Russell himself used Orwell's phrase to suggest the absurdity of comparing Urdu genres with English ones, just as Orwell had himself suggested the irrelevance of being asked to choose between Dickens and Tolstoy.

⁶⁵ See Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*, ch.1.

⁶⁶ Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*, 46.

reformers, epitomised by Bharatendu Harishchandra and Altaf Husain Hali.⁶⁷

Unsurprisingly, then, a situation developed in which the search for the reasons for this 'superiority' quite naturally extended into a consideration of the content and forms of English literature. Thus, while Russell rightly bemoaned the use of English literature as a point of reference for the evaluation of Indian and particularly Urdu genres, it is worth remembering that Indian writers of the colonial period themselves frequently made this very same comparison, as debates surrounding the form, content, efficacy and purpose of literature rocked the literary establishment. The choice becomes, at least with regard to poetry of the early 20th century, somewhat less of an Orwellian "sausage and rose", as it necessitates a recognition of the widespread interest in English literature among the literati and an appreciation of how this literature was brought to bear on Indian forms and styles. At the same time, the word "influence" is best avoided, given its connotations of dominance and subordination.⁶⁸ Certainly, as scholars such as Harish Trivedi and Frances Pritchett have noted, the exaltation of English poetry for both its "naturalness" and "morality" was

⁶⁷ See Shackle and Majeed, *Hali's Musaddas* and Dalmia, *Nationalization*, for a discussion of the positive attitude both these figures shared towards the potential benefits of British rule.

⁶⁸ Such models of world literature are particularly objectionable, as their creators ignore entirely the question of agency on the part of the litterateurs so 'influenced'. That said, the term and its concomitant implications appear frequently. An unfortunate example of this is Urmila Varma, *Influence of English Poetry on Modern Hindi Poetry* (Allahabad: Lokbharti Prakashan, 1980), according to whose schema "the influence of English poetry...was for the good and it added freshness, originality and colourfulness to the images" (62), and Hindi poetry found "liberation from rhyme" (114), among other beneficial effects. While there is undoubtedly a kernel of truth to these and similar statements – experiments with free verse, for instance, were a direct result of contact with English and other language poetry – the implication is of a decidedly lopsided relationship, with Indian litterateurs soaking up English influence like the parched soil gratefully and indiscriminately absorbing the water poured upon it. The reality was much more nuanced.

widespread across the Hindi and Urdu literary spheres.⁶⁹ Critics repeated the refrain that “Eastern poetry” was concerned with little else apart from “beauty and love”, and other journals supported this same critique by, for example, printing an Urdu translation of part of Saksena’s *History*.⁷⁰ As the contents of Hindi and Urdu journals suggest, however, many Indian litterateurs of the period were not prepared to “throw the baby out with the bathwater”,⁷¹ and replace their traditions and aesthetics with imported colonial alternatives, but in fact took a much more discerning approach to questions of reform and poetic practice.

The natural English poetry so often lauded in the early decades of the century was, predominantly, the Romantic poetry typified by William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron. It is Wordsworth who Pritchett has identified as the “invisible presence” behind the reformist agenda of Hali and Azad, and whose poetic and prosaic views and practices became so entrenched in the Urdu literary world that “the demand for natural, realistic poetry was reinforced in the 1930s...and it persists in one form or another right down to the present.”⁷² However, while critics such as Ramchandra Shukla attacked

⁶⁹ Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions*. Trivedi does an admirable job of depicting, in his own words, “the reality of the native reaction to imperial intervention” (viii); see particularly chapter 9 with regard to Hindi and English literature.

⁷⁰ See Khvaja Mahmud al-Hasan Ansari Dahlvi, ‘Kyā akhlāqī-pastī širf magrib meñ hai?’ in *Nadīm* (September 1938); Ram Babu Saksena, ‘Adab-e Urdū kī tārīkh’ (tr. Mirza Muhammad Askari) in *Al-Nāẓar* (March 1928).

⁷¹ Pritchett, *Nets*, 168.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 167-8. Meanwhile, Trivedi has characterised the incorporation of the conventions of English romantic poetry into Hindi under the rubric of *Chāyāvād* (literally, ‘shadow-ism’) as the perhaps natural progression of a gradual inculcation of English literary forms and norms that began with the periodical essay, the novel, and “the mode of individualistic realism”. See Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995 [original Indian edition 1993]) 187.

Chāyāvād poetry as constituting a rupture in the Indian poetic tradition, and for attempting to import and promulgate various illegitimate “European-isms”,⁷³ this was certainly not the first iteration of English-inspired poetry in the Hindi tradition. While the 1930s may have seen the flowering of a particularly mystical brand of Hindi Romanticism, its roots lie in the reforms of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi who, as Orsini has noted, shared his poetic philosophy with “the Romantics and the colonial Education Department.”⁷⁴ This early enthusiasm for English Romanticism was shared between Hindi and Urdu reformers and writers, though the contents of literary journals over the coming decades suggest that the reception and incorporation of such ideas and ideals was not as straightforward or as thoroughgoing as some might think.

The central tenet of the reformist agenda was thus that poetry should be descriptive, rather than allegorical or metaphorical: it was this style that had come to be referred to by the shorthand of “natural poetry”. As discussed at length above, this was the standard against which the poetic traditions of the past had come to be measured, and were often found wanting. The pervasive influence of this perspective was evidenced throughout the period: just as Abdul Qadir lauded Iqbal for “clothing English thinking in the garments of poetry” and writing “in the style of Wordsworth, master of the poets of England” in 1901,⁷⁵ or praised another poet for his transcreation of Hamlet’s famous soliloquy in 1914,⁷⁶ so poets and critics defended the validity of English Romanticism’s

⁷³ Ramchandra Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*, 621, cited in Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions*, 187.

⁷⁴ Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 145.

⁷⁵ See Iqbal, ‘Kohistān-e Himāla’ in *Makhzan* 1.1 (April 1901) 33-5.

⁷⁶ ‘Naz’, ‘Maut achī ki zindagī achī?’ in *Makhzan* (August 1914) 65-7.

“influence” on modern poetry and poets throughout the period. Anis Ahmad ‘Sharqi’ bemoaned the stubborn refusal of some poets to modernise, to keep up with a changing world, and to heed the call of reform that had been echoing for over three decades in his poem ‘Hamārā śā’ir’: “*Duniyā badal cukī hai, śā’ir magar hamārā / aqlī rivāyatoṅkā ab tak nigāhbān hai*”⁷⁷ (“The world has already changed, but our poet / is still the protector [/defender] of old traditions”). Others were even more explicit: Rustam Saitin, then a young Benares Hindu University student, published an article in *Haṃs* in 1936 in which he vigorously defended not only the interaction between Romanticism and Indian literature, but also the composite culture that, in his view, had been and remained the defining feature of the Indian polity:

Kuch vidvānoṃ ka kathan hai ki is prakār videśī bhāvom se prabhāvit hona bhāratīya-sāhitya aur sabhyatā ke lie ghātak hogā; parantu saṃsār ke itihās ke adhyayan se yahī vidit hotā hai ki usī rāṣṭra ne sabse adhik unnati kī hai, jo zyādā-se-zyādā dūsrī sabhyatāom aur rāṣṭrom ke saṃsarg meṃ āyā hai...Hamāri vartmān sabhyatā kisī ek ghaṛī kā camatkār nahīm hai. Vah to paramparā se parivartan-śīl paristhityom kā aur anya sabhyatāom kī muṭh-bheṛ se milī huī anubhūtiyom kā bhaṅḍār hai; jo viśva-bhar kī kalāom, bhāvom aur acāraṅom ko apnāne ki kṣamtā rakhtā hai.

Some experts say that being influenced by foreign sensibilities in this way will be damaging to Indian literature and society, but a study of world history shows that those countries have progressed the most that have come into contact with other societies and countries...Our present society is not the miracle of any one moment. It is a treasure house of a continuous succession of varying circumstances and the experiences of encounters with other societies, and that retains the ability to make the arts, sensibilities and customs of the world its own.⁷⁸

Indeed, this young Parsi took his defence of Romanticism further, pointing out what he felt were direct parallels between Shelley, against the backdrop of the French Revolution, with

⁷⁷ Anis Ahmad ‘Sharqi’, ‘Hamārā śā’ir’ in *Zamāna* (September 1929) 349.

⁷⁸ Rustam Saitin, ‘Ādhunik hindī-kāvya meṃ duḥkhvād’ in *Haṃs* (March 1936) 15-9, 18. He goes on to quote an article by Rabindranath Tagore from the *Calcutta Review* in which Tagore asserted that it was the ability to assimilate cultural influences that gave Bengali literature its “creative vitality”.

the day to day experiences of young Hindi poets, who were themselves engaged in their own search for a “great truth”, that is, freedom.⁷⁹

One aspect of this cultural exchange that Saitin was keen to stress, however, was its mutuality. “It is not possible”, he asserted, “that with such a close encounter between eastern and western societies, they wouldn’t have an effect on each other.”⁸⁰ This mutuality found other passionate advocates: while looking to Shelley for poetic inspiration and examples of verse, one writer chose to focus on the parts of Shelley’s writing that owed their inspiration to India.⁸¹ In what would nowadays be described as an exoticising, if not orientalist, flight of fancy, Shelley invoked imagined images of India in several of his verses – from the Himalayas, to the pervasive scent of jasmine, to the widow on her husband’s funeral pyre – without ever having witnessed any of these. Yet this writer noted such evocations with pride, as another example of how cultural influence or interaction was a two-way process. Such insistences on mutuality, I suggest, helped (or were intended) to assuage the anxiety of influence that was clearly felt by some critics in the face of these imported and self-imposed Romantic aesthetic criteria.

Some writers, however, were not convinced that the imitation of English poetry, or the adoption of English aesthetics, was a particularly worthy pursuit. Such scepticism manifested in a variety of ways: one extreme perspective was offered in a *ghazal* by Chaudhuri Rahm Ali ‘Hashmi’, entitled ‘Na’ī tahzīb aur na’ī śā’irī’, in which he equated the adoption of English cultural norms with, in this case, the abandonment of the duties and

⁷⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁸¹ Shri ‘Gupta’, ‘Mahākavi śailī aur bhāratvarṣ’ in *Cāṁd* 8;1.3 (January 1929) 491-3.

traditions of a Muslim.⁸² These norms were explicitly linked with the influence of the English language, as Hashmi preceded the *radīf* (or final rhyme), “*apnā*” with the recognisably foreign *qāfiyā* (or leading rhyme) “-eśhan”, more recognisable perhaps in its original, English variant forms as the word endings “-ation/-ition/-shion”. Thus, each *śer* contrasted an aspect of indigenous, Islamic culture with an Anglicised obstruction to its practice, finally ending in exasperation: “*Hāśmī ‘izzat-e qaumī nahīn mazhab ke baḡhair / he yih raftār-e zamāna se ḡsaleśān apnā*” (“Hashmi, there is no community honour except for religion / this is your desolation, brought on by the march of the times”). Thus, Hashmi satirized the preoccupation with “*naī śā‘irī*” or new poetry through a rather mediocre poem: English and western forms had, in his estimation, little that was positive to offer either society or literature.

Other writers took slightly less reactionary and somewhat subtler approaches, in several cases suggesting that, while the aims of natural poetry were all well and good, this was in fact nothing terribly new in the Indian context. Sultan Ahmad, in his serialised article ‘*Fan-e śā‘irī*’ (‘The Art of Poetry’), took issue with the critical paradigm that saw “eastern poetry” (but here very much Urdu and Persian) as lacking naturalness, simplicity and purity, while finding these in abundance in western poetry. Rather, he asserted, there was no lack of “*nāzuk khyālī*”, or delicacy and subtlety, in the poets of the east, and it could hardly be said that western poetry was free of “*takalluf*” (formality, gratuitousness or extravagance).⁸³ While his terminology may on occasion reflect a slight misunderstanding

⁸² Chaudhuri Rahm Ali ‘Hashmi’, ‘*Naī tahzīb aur naī śā‘irī*’, in *Makhzan* 26.1 (November 1913) 70-1.

⁸³ Sultan Ahmad, ‘*Fan-e śā‘irī: 5*’, in *Makhzan* 9.5 (August 1905) 30-7, 32-3.

of the idea of natural poetry, his efforts to break down the simple binary of western and eastern poetry is certainly commendable. Saghar Akbarabadi, meanwhile, published two pieces in 1913 in which he traced the long history of what he termed, in a not unusual elision, “*necaral*” (“natural”) or “*ḥaqīqī*” (“realistic”) poetry in Sanskrit and Hindi, beginning with the dramas of Kalidasa, particularly *Śakuntalam*, *Meghadūta*, and *Vikramorvaśīyam*, and admiring in particular the works of Tulsidas.⁸⁴ He was careful to stress that his praise for these features as evinced in Sanskrit and Hindi should not be interpreted as a slight against Persian or Urdu,⁸⁵ and it seems clear that he at least considered such an academic exercise to have importance in the context of Indian literary history, rather than as a divisive exercise. He was obviously aware of, and amenable to, the trend in Urdu towards this “natural” poetry, but in the course of his articles performed an interesting operation. He associated the lack of realism in Urdu poetry (clearly still his main concern) with its general dearth of “local colour” (“*maqāmī rang*”),⁸⁶ while, in a parallel move, locating a brand of naturalism in Sanskrit poetry to rival anything – whether Shakespeare or Homer – that Europe had to offer.⁸⁷ In the search for poetic inspiration, according to Saghar, Urdu poets had only to look at what was already around them.

The critical point that emerges from a survey of the treatment of English poetry and poetics in the journals under discussion is that such considerations took place in what was often a profoundly open and dialogic forum. It was not unusual to see articles on the

⁸⁴ Saghar Akbarabadi, ‘Sanskrit meṅ necaral śā’irī’ in *Makhzan* 14.4 (January 1913) 50-4; ‘Sanskrit aur hindī meṅ ḥaqīqī śā’irī’ in *Makhzan* 14.7 (April 1913) 39-50.

⁸⁵ Akbarabadi, ‘Sanskrit aur hindī’, 39.

⁸⁶ Id.

⁸⁷ Akbarabadi, ‘Sanskrit meṅ necaral śā’irī’, 50.

likes of Shelley, transcreations of the work of Byron, or translated snippets of Shakespeare appearing between articles on Hindi or Urdu literary history on one side, and new poetic compositions, “natural” or otherwise, on the other. *Cāṁd*, *Haṁs*, *Makhzan* and *Zamāna*: all were characterised by their openness to multiple perspectives, on English poetry as on other topics – the very definition of common spaces.

2.III BEYOND ‘SERVICE’: FORM, CONTENT, AND THE USES OF POETRY

The idea of the literary journal as a ‘common space’ refers not only to its dialogic potential for the discussion and indeed negotiation of literary traditions and poetic modernity, but also to a variety of inter-linguistic scenarios that both mandate against simplistic and exclusive binaries of Hindi poetry for or by Hindus and Urdu for or by Muslims, and also suggest the permeability of linguistic divisions to crosscurrents of form, style and taste. As regards practice, we shall see how Hindu authors continued to produce Urdu poetry, indeed to use it as a preferred medium for both ‘pure art’ and for commentary, how Hindi authors continued to write and incorporate elements of Urdu, and that while Muslim writers, though rarely adopting Hindi poetry as a preferred form, produced works that incorporated elements of Hindi style.

The understanding of ‘service’ being rendered by writers to ‘their own’ literature or language is not solely a trope that has been projected retrospectively by literary historians (though it retains an unfortunate currency), but rather one that was in circulation throughout the period under scrutiny. Partisans of either Hindi or Urdu regularly

employed the language of service and duty in furthering their cause.⁸⁸ However, this motif obscures our understanding or mapping of the multiple intersections of practice and taste that characterised a substantial portion of poetic production and consumption throughout the period. I argue that such acts should be viewed not through the predominant lens of 'service' to one literature or the other, but rather as a persistence of taste and habitus, on one hand, and a proactive strategy of experimentation and diversification on the other. Rather than strengthening the hand of either Hindi or Urdu, this persistence and experimentation served instead to break down the distinctions between the two languages. In this way, certain literary journals constituted forums in which eclectic and inclusive tastes could be both satisfied and formed. Moreover, the poetry discussed below demonstrates conclusively the limitations of rigid linguistic taxonomies, or tropes of communal ownership and exclusivity.

The most suggestive corrective to the paradigms of service and ownership is the multiplicity of uses to which writers put their verse. In fact, it becomes hardly credible to characterise Hindus who chose to write in Urdu as necessarily or primarily recognising any kind of obligation to support or serve an objectified 'Urdu' when one examines the variety of styles, forms and purposes that these writers gave their poetry. A particularly telling

⁸⁸ For an example in Urdu, see Said Muhammad Faruq, 'Urdū Zabān aur Hindū Musalmān' in *Makhzan* 12.14 (January 1907) 37-45. Faruq wrote of the importance of "roshan zamīr", or wise, Hindus not neglecting "apnī mulkī zabān kī khidmat" (38-9) – i.e. the service of their own national language, Urdu – adding later that anyone who wanted national unity and progress had a duty ("farz") to serve Urdu (41). Some individuals wrote in general terms of service to "literature" – see the discussion of Tara Chand's editorials in *Hindustānī* in Chapter 1.

example is a poem by Pandit Anand Narain Mulla,⁸⁹ in which this *śer* came near the beginning:

Hindī hone par nāz jise kal tak thā hijāzī ban baiṭhā
Apnī mahfil kā rind purānā āj namāzi ban baiṭhā?

He who until yesterday took pride in being Indian has now turned Islamic
 The former libertine of the gathering has today decided to offer prayers?⁹⁰

This *śer*, dripping with sarcasm and incredulity, typifies the tone of Mulla's extraordinary polemic directed at Muhammad Iqbal, 'Śikvā az Iqbāl', which appeared in *Zamāna* in February 1929. Made up of 24 *śer*, the poem expresses Mulla's disgust at the Islamic turn that Iqbal's poetry had taken. In terms of metre and trope, it is a traditional composition, with classical motifs such as the rose garden, the gardener and the nightingale, the wine and the tavern, the pearl and the treasure house, deployed throughout (e.g. "Ai bulbul! Chūr ke śākh-e gul kyon khār-o khas men baiṭhā he?" / "Oh nightingale! Having abandoned the branch of the rose, why are you sitting in the rubbish?"). Moreover, the Pandit demonstrates his deep immersion in the Persianate tradition, freely invoking such standard figures as Qais and Farhad ("Farhād kī betābī ke 'ivāz parvez kī hīla-sāzī he" / "Instead of the restlessness of Farhad, there is the wiliness of the victorious") without a hint of coyness.

However, despite such recognisable features, this poem is far from ordinary. Mulla uses his verse to lambast Iqbal for having forsaken the pure beauty of his earlier compositions in favour of poetry that was increasingly Islamic and, to this writer's mind at

⁸⁹ Mulla was born in Lucknow in 1901, where he graduated from Canning College with an MA (1923) and LLB (1925). His early experiments in English poetry included a translation of a portion of Iqbal's Persian *Payām-e maśraq* in 1927 (details from the anthology of Urdu poets by Muhammad Hasan Askari, *Merī bahtarīn nazm* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1942) 156).

⁹⁰ From Pandit Anand Narain 'Mulla', 'Śikvā az Iqbāl', in *Zamāna* (February 1929) 118-9.

least, unpalatable. He juxtaposes the garden of Urdu poetry with the garden of Paradise, suggesting that while the tenor of Iqbal's more recent verse ("wine" or *ṣahbā*) may make it more suitable for the latter, he has forsaken his position as a pre-eminent poet and become trapped in a snare of religiosity and bigotry ("*Afsos ki terī fikr-e falak paimā kā yah anjām hu'ā / Tū to firdaus kā ṭā'ir thā, kyon āke asīr-e dām hu'ā?*" / "It is unfortunate that your contemplation of the firmament of heaven came to this conclusion / You were a bird flying in the garden, why have you become ensnared in this trap?"). The insistence on religion leads only to discrimination, and a forced identification as either Hindu or Muslim in all walks of life and spheres of activity, which Mulla scathingly describes as the service ("*khidmat*") that religion has rendered to future generations. Indeed, Mulla claims he would do away with all religion (though whether from the world in general or merely the world of poetry remains a moot point) by quite literally destroying the buildings and "purifying" the land ("*Merā bas ho to har masjid se rave zamīn ko pāk karūn / har mandir ko mismār karūn, har ek kalīsā khāk karūn*" / "For my part, I would purify the land of every mosque / raze every temple and reduce each church to dust"). This *śer* could be a reference to similarly secular sentiments expressed by Iqbal himself in an early poem, 'Nayā Śivāla' ('A New Shiva Altar'), that appeared in *Makhzan* in 1905 and later in his first collection, *Bāng-e Darā*, in 1922:

*Tang āke maiñ ne ākhir dair-o ḥaram ko choṛā
vā'iz kā va'z choṛā, choṛe tire fasāne
pathar kī mūrtoñ meñ samjhā he tū khudā he
khak-e waṭan kā mujhko har zarra devtā he*

Finally I became tired; I abandoned temple and mosque;
I abandoned the sermon of the preacher and abandoned your stories.
You imagined that God resides in stone statues.

For me every atom of the dust of my land is a god.⁹¹

Moving on, Mulla ends his poem with a plea to Iqbal, which perhaps makes the poem something more resonant than simple *haju* (satire or abuse): Iqbal, he suggests, has donned clothes that do not suit him, and should he but put them off and return as master of the poetic gathering, the author's and others' desires would be fulfilled.

More interesting than what it says about Iqbal is what this poem suggests about its author, a Kashmiri pandit, born and raised in the United Provinces, who clearly considered Urdu poetry to be not merely his preferred form of poetic expression, but a medium for social and literary commentary. Inter-textual references abound, and further entrench the poem in relation to Iqbal's various works: the title of the poem points us to Iqbal's own 'Śikva'; while the line "*Ai muṭrib tere tarānon men agli sī ab wah bāt nahīn*" ("Oh minstrel, those former matters are no longer in your anthems") clearly suggests the reader compare Iqbal's two 'anthems' – 'Tarāna-e Hindī' and 'Tarāna-e Millī' – presumably to the latter's detriment. It is worth noting that Mulla makes no concessions in vocabulary towards simplicity, as D.J. Matthews attributes to Iqbal in 'Śivāla',⁹² writing instead in what could perhaps be called rather 'chaste' Urdu. Mulla's mastery of the form, as much as his choice of it for such an attack, clearly demonstrates how deeply ingrained this genre was in the habitus of individuals other than north Indian Muslims (in this case, north Indian Urdu and Persian educated Hindus). Most importantly, the content of Mulla's critique and its focus on Iqbal's

⁹¹ D.J. Matthews, *Iqbal: A Selection of the Urdu Verse* (London: SOAS, 1993) 18-9.

⁹² See D.J. Matthews, *Iqbal*, 151.

Islamic turn demonstrate a key concern: that Urdu poetry could and probably should be a shared medium, proven, according to Mulla, by the superiority of Iqbal's earlier verse.

Apart from this piece of social, literary and political commentary, phrased in verse and directed at probably the most eminent and respected Urdu poet of the period, we must also consider the other uses to which Urdu poetry was put, as a religious idiom, but not just for Islam. The journal *Ārya Musāfir*, the Urdu-language organ of the Punjab *Ārya Pratinidhi Sabhā* (Aryan Representative Society), also used Urdu as an artistic, poetic medium. The journal consistently printed Urdu compositions, indeed they frequently occupied the front page of the journal, and selections from the late 19th century through to the 1930s highlight the diversity of forms and styles that were chosen for publication. Many if not most of these poems were preceded by the catchall title *naẓm* and frequently further classified as *bhajan*. Several *bhajan* by one Keval Kishan Pradhan appeared in 1899, including:

*Ho man meñ agar āśra īśvar kī saran kā
Dhar kā usse kab hove kleśñ ke vighan kā
Har vaqt gan man rahe ðarte raheñ śatrū
Niścah yah hai prabhāv hai vedokt calan kā*

If there should be an abode of the refuge of god in the mind
When the drum of the obstacle of torment should arise
At all times the heart should remain, enemies should fear
The might of the manner taught in the Vedas is established.⁹³

The form of his compositions is hard to distinguish from that of the *ghazal*, with a consistent pattern of *radīf* and *qāfiya*, even if they are instead labelled as *bhajan*. Of course, their Arya Samaji devotional content marks them as something apart from a typical Urdu *ghazal*, but as Harishchandra's Vaishnava Urdu verses show, this was not an unprecedented

⁹³ Keval Kishan Pradhan, 'Bhajan', *Ārya Musāfir* (April 1899) 1-2. Other examples of his *bhajans* include May 1899.

use of the form.⁹⁴ By the 1930s, however, several changes had been made to the journal: it was now a weekly, rather than a monthly, publication; the frontispiece carried the title and place of publication in Nagari as well as Nastaliq; and the front page carried the Samvat date along with the Roman. The Urdu poetry, however, maintained its pride of place but exhibited a thematic shift: emphasising the importance of the Vedas was replaced with a more *nirgun*-inspired philosophy, and the register (perhaps as a result of this thematic reorientation) tended to include fewer Sanskritic words than had been the trend in the early days of the journal.⁹⁵

Of course, the use of Urdu as a medium for Hindu thought, religion and mythology was not a new phenomenon – one need only examine the output of poets such as Durga Sahai Sarur (1873-1910) to find the antecedents of this form of expression.⁹⁶ His mythological scenes differ sharply from the Arya Samaji invocations of the Vedas or of a formless deity, yet the principle endures: despite the pull and push of nationalisms both religious and linguistic, and in particular the close involvement of the Arya Samaj with the propagation of Hindi, Urdu remained the preferred medium of poetic endeavour (and perhaps even proselytism) for at least a segment of these Hindu reformers.

Yet, while the use of Urdu for the expression of Hindu religiosity as late as the 1930s in the Punjab is remarkable, even more so is the full range of Urdu poetic genres embraced

⁹⁴ See Sengupta, 'Krishna'.

⁹⁵ See, for example, in *Aryā Musāfir*, 'Roshan', 'Śīśa-e dil meñ dekh us kā jamāl' (29 July 1934) 1; Tik Chand 'Sukhun', 'Aryā Samāj' (18 November 1934) 1.

⁹⁶ For a brief account of Sarur's life and works, see Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature*, 247-51.

by one Hindu writer in particular: Hari Chand Akhtar (1914-76). K.K Aziz gives us a tantalising description of this respected poet's participation in the literary life of Lahore:

Pandit Hari Chand Akhtar was an important member of the Niázmandan-i-Lahore group. He wrote several *na'ts*; one of them, which he had first recited at the Habibia Hall of Islamia College, became so popular that he was asked to recite it at the beginning of every *musháira* held in the town.⁹⁷

While there is no reason to doubt Aziz's assertion, it must be noted that Hindus have hardly been counted among the best composers of *na't*, a panegyric genre devoted to praising the prophet Muhammad. Still, Akhtar, Abdul Qadir, *Makhzan*, *Ārya Musāfir*, and the likes of Miraji and Upendranath Ashk (discussed in §2.IV below) point to a potentially fruitful line of inquiry regarding the Punjab, and most especially Lahore.

While some Urdu journals were clearly functioning as a space where writers of both faiths and persuasions published their works, several of their Hindi counterparts were doing something quite similar. The Hindi journal *Haṃs* regularly included pieces on poetry in other Indian languages – a selection from a few short months demonstrates this, with both articles and examples of original poetry in Devanagari and Hindi translations or transcreations, on Gujarati, Malayalam, Sindhi, Singhala, Kannada, and Assamese.⁹⁸ Sudhir Chandra has noted how both Hindi and other major languages “placed a strain on the

⁹⁷ K.K. Aziz, *The Coffee House of Lahore: A Memoir 1942-57* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2008) 10.

⁹⁸ See, for example, in *Haṃs*, Hrishikesh Varma, ‘Vīranī Vidāy’ (October 1935) 33-4; Vallachol, ‘Mere Gurudev’ (October 1935) 48-50 (in which the anonymous translator makes an astute observation on the limits of such an activity, noting: “Some specific letters that occur in Tamil, Malayalam, etc., do not occur in Devanagari – Hindi script. Even so, we do what we can.”); Kishanchand Tiraydas Kshatri, ‘Insān’ (October 1935) 67; Bhadant Anand Kaushalyayan, ‘Mahalu Vayas’ (October 1935) 68; A.N. Murtirav, ‘Ādhunik Kannāḍ-sāhitya’ (November 1935) 12-15; Suryavansh Mishra tr. ‘Nivedan’ (November 1935) 17.

cohesive potential of Hindustan”,⁹⁹ and it would be easy to see such pieces as part of a broader strategy to ‘enrich’ the ‘treasure house’ of Hindi language and literature, to endow it with an assimilative potential, in order to better prepare it for its presumptive role as the national language of an independent India¹⁰⁰ – and indeed this is precisely how they were framed and presented. However, it also seems compelling to consider this approach as once again an inclusive one, in which multiple interests could be served and inclusive tastes could be formed, including with regard to the Hindi-Urdu question¹⁰¹: in other words, to consider the audience, the poet, the writer and the social actor; to strive to imagine his or her experience; and to move past the abstracted language as the object of study.

Yet *Haṃs* was not the only Hindi journal in which the poetry and its practitioners suggested a less rigid distinction between the languages and their poetic styles. The following selection of poems from the April 1923 edition of *Cāṃd* demonstrates the plurality of styles and forms of poetry that could be and moreover were both employed to advance a social agenda and included within the same publication. The issue at hand, in this case, was the position and treatment of widows in Indian, and particularly Hindu, society. *Cāṃd* mounted a sustained campaign to increase awareness of this pressing concern, and its

⁹⁹ Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*, 144.

¹⁰⁰ Orsini has noted the frequency with which Hindi litterateurs deployed the metaphor of the treasure house, or *bhāṇḍar* (see *Hindi Public Sphere*, 144).

¹⁰¹ See, for example, the printing of Iqbal’s ‘Mām kā khvāb’ in *Haṃs* 6.1 (October 1935) 11, or a study of the Urdu (and quite Persianised) poetry of Allama Ashiq Husain ‘Simab’: Bandali Fatmi, ‘Sīmāb kī śāyari’ in *Haṃs* 6.6 (March 1936) 87-91.

editorials, articles and news sections consistently advocated for a fundamental change in attitudes towards widows, along with other issues concerning women.¹⁰²

The focus on Hindu society is clearly demonstrated in Mohanlal Mohiyal's *ghazal* 'Faryāde-vidhvā' ('The appeal of the widow').¹⁰³ The *ghazal* is written from the woman's point of view, using feminine forms of verbs and emotively depicting a life of isolation and suffering for both the individual ("Ajab dukh dard sahtī hūm, gamorī se nīmjarī hokar" / "I suffer a strange pain and sadness, sorrow having made me half alive") and a collective ("Maqar ham sitam sahtī haiṁ..." / "But we suffer tyranny..."). Mohiyal presents the widow's various complaints and entreaties in a mixed register, availing of Persianate metaphors (for example, the rose-garden and gardener in the line "Sidhāre prānpāt, ḍerā jamāyā, yās hasrat ne / bisārī sudh gulistān kī, unhoṁne baqbān hokar" / "The husband departed this life, established a dwelling of sorrow / Becoming a gardener, he caused the memory of the rose-garden to fade"), while occasionally employing simple Sanskritic vocabulary where it suits his purpose ("bulāve jo koī hamko, barābar putr yā bhāī..." / "Call whoever to us, whether son or brother..."), or "Pachattar varṣ ke raṇḍve, haiṁ karte śādiyām dekho!" / "Watch the 65 year old widowers remarry!") alongside more recognisably Urdu vocabulary. The most remarkable warning comes in the *maqṭa'*, or final couplet:

*Garaz majbūr ho 'Mohan' dharam se girtī jātī haiṁ
miṭā dengī tujhe e qaum, isāī musalmān hokar.*

Take note of the facts Mohan, we fall because of religion [dharam]
We will obliterate you, our community, becoming Christians and Muslims.

¹⁰² For an account of the paradigm-breaking role of *Cāṁd*, see Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 267-89

¹⁰³ Mohanlal Mohiyal, 'Faryāde-vidhvā' ('The appeal of the widow'), *Cāṁd* (April 1928) 518.

In other words, the (Hindu) author creates a nightmare scenario in which the continued oppression of women would lead to their turning away from Hinduism, and the ultimate destruction of Hindu society!

The *ghazal* by 'Fida', 'Ek Bevā kī Faryād' ('A widow's appeal')¹⁰⁴ in the same journal shares certain features in common with Mohan's: it is written from the widow's perspective, again using feminine verb endings, and is explicit in addressing Hindu society (see its opening line: "Hinduom tumko agar kuch bhī dikhāi detā / carḥ par nāla merā yom na dohāi detā" / "Hindus, if you should perceive anything at all / don't leave my lament to be spun on the potter's wheel"). Yet, while Fida also includes occasional 'Hindi' words (e.g. "bhayānak", "fearsome"), his poem invokes more of the classical Persianate tradition, with much more frequent use of tropes from there, and a general style that is, on the whole, much less explicit and much more metaphorical than that of Mohiyal ("Phūl se milne kī ummīd jo jāti rahti / kaun bulbul ko sare naghme sarāi detā?").

'Vidhvāom kī āh!' ('The widows' sigh')¹⁰⁵ by 'Bahadur' stands in formal contrast to the others included in the journal issue. Written in the composite *chappay* metre,¹⁰⁶ it is very much a product of the Braj tradition. In terms of register, his vocabulary is almost entirely Indic (only one word, *āsmān*, comes from Persian, and only one other word, *pleg*, comes from another source (English: plague)). Once again, the poem is addressed to the Hindu community, though the poetic voice is the author's, rather than an assumed

¹⁰⁴ 'Fida', 'Ek bevā kī faryād' ('A widow's appeal'), *Cāmd* (April 1928) 512.

¹⁰⁵ 'Bahādur', 'Vidhvāom kī āh!' ('The widows' sigh'), *Cāmd* (April 1928) 520.

¹⁰⁶ *Chappay* is a metre in Braj poetics, wherein a quatrain of 11+13 *mātrās* per line is followed by a couplet (*ullāl*) of either 15+13 *mātrās* or, as in this case, 13+13.

(widow's) voice. The scope of the poem, however, is perhaps even wider than that of the preceding *ghazals*: 'Bahadur' links the suffering of widows to the shameful, in his view, practice of child marriage ("*Bāl vivāh karākar, kuch na lajāne vālo*" / "You who feel no shame at the practice of child marriage"); moreover, he considers this an issue that had to be resolved both for the reform of Hindu society (both "*jāti*" and "*vaṃś*"), and for national progress ("*Dhyān idhar bhī deṃ jinheṃ, deśonnati kī cāh hai*" / "Give your attention here, those of you desirous of national progress").

This selection of poems clearly demonstrates the dialogic and inclusive potential of the literary journal, in which poetry of quite significantly different pedigrees and styles appeared comfortably side-by-side. Formal distinctions between 'Hindi' poetry and 'Urdu' poetry broke down in a context where *ghazals* were printed in Devanagari alongside and in thematic continuity with other poems that drew on the linguistic and formal aspects of Braj Bhasha poetics. Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, the very *use* of such different styles and registers – the conscious strategy of these three quite different poets to use their verse to advance a shared social argument – surely suggests that these writers were less interested in 'service' to a language, than to employ those same languages in ways that could potentially benefit or reform the nation, and fulfil the reformist imperatives that were so prevalent at the time. In cases such as this, questions of language, register, and script were sublimated into the cause of social reform, thereby implicitly depicted as issues of, at most, secondary concern.

2.IV MANY IN ONE: THE POET, THE CRITIC, THE ANTHOLOGIST, AND THEIR REGISTERS

*Ham urdū ko 'arabī kyoñ na karen hindī ko vah bhāśā kyoñ na karen
Jhagre ke li'e akhbāroñ meñ mazmūn tarāśā kyoñ na karen
Āpas meñ 'adāvat kucch bhī nahīn lekin ik akhārā qā'im hai
Jab is se falak kā dil bahale ham log tamāśā kyoñ na karen.*

Why shouldn't we turn Urdu into Arabic, and Hindi into Bhasha [Sanskrit]?
Why shouldn't we write divisive articles in newspapers to fuel the fight?
There is no mutual animosity but an arena is prepared:
Why shouldn't we make a scene, when this cheers the heart of the heavens?

- Akbar Allahabadi

Register, that is the choice of poetic vocabulary, had been a fluid and flexible mode that poets could experiment with at will. The use of 'Hindi' words in 'Urdu' poetry, or of 'Urdu' words in 'Hindi' poems, was something that individual writers were free to do, and indeed had been doing for many years, as Christina Oesterheld has remarked with regard to Urdu poetry of the 18th century;

Language choices were not based on the etymological origin of words. There was no religious bias in the choice of words. Words of Indic origin could be freely used in religious texts for Muslims. If such words were put on the index [of words considered inappropriate], it was because they were denounced as uncivilised, plebeian or coarse, but not because they were identified with Hindu culture.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, Alison Busch has convincingly represented the fluidity of practice and lexical choice in pre-modern Hindi poetry as motivated predominantly by aesthetic considerations:

Persianised language was chosen either for aesthetic or largely functional reasons. Regarding the former, the choice to use Perso-Arabic alongside Sanskrit and *tadbhava* registers was an attempt to fashion the most beautiful poem possible with the best ingredients from any language available.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Christina Oesterheld, 'Looking Beyond Gul-o-Bulbul: Observations on Marsiyas by Fazli and Sauda' in Orsini, ed. *Before the Divide*, 205-21, 220.

¹⁰⁸ Allison Busch, 'Riti and Register: Lexical Variation in Courtly Braj Bhasha Texts' in Orsini ed. *Before the Divide*, 83-120, 119.

By the 20th century however, such choices were no longer free from normative pressures and ideologies. The dominant trend of the period has been understood to have been towards increasing mutual exclusivity, especially in terms of vocabulary, by both literary historians and contemporary commentators (see, for instance, Akbar Allahabadi's sarcastic *rubā'ī* at the opening of this section). As Akbar's verse indicates, not everyone was pleased to see Hindi and Urdu registers diverging so sharply. Beyond the critiques, or anxiety, of members of the Hindustani Academy already noted, poet and English literature teacher Krishnadevprasad Gaur took Hindi poets to task for writing in excessively Sanskritised Hindi in an article in *Haṃs*:

Hamārā virodh un kaviyom se hai, jinkī racnāom meṃ saṃskṛt ke baṛe-baṛe samās bhare hue haiṃ aur keval kahīm 'kā' yā 'kī' vibhaktiyom se athvā 'hai' aur 'thā' kriyāom se patā caltā hai ki yah hindī kī racnāem hai. Ham kavītā cāhte haiṃ, śabdāvalī kā bāzār nahīm cāhte.

My objection is to those poets whose works are filled with huge Sanskrit compounds, and only from inflexions such as 'of' or verbs such as 'is' or 'was' can one tell that this is a Hindi work. We want poetry, not a bazaar of vocabulary.¹⁰⁹

However, the characterisation of Hindi and Urdu as not only discrete languages, but as causes, to which the writer rendered service, fuelled this trend towards differentiation. A clear sense emerges of the very idea of showing off one's ability in a particular and implicitly high and exclusive register transforming from a vice into a virtue within a large section of the Hindi and Urdu literary worlds, even if critics such as Gaur deplored it. The focus of this section, however, is on those who chose who to follow a different literary path, in both linguistic and stylistic terms. For, while differentiating trends may well have been

¹⁰⁹ Krishnadevprasad Gaur, 'Hindī kavītā kī bhāṣā' in *Haṃs* 6.2 (November 1935) 66-8, 68.

predominant, a significant number of poets acted, with variable degrees of both success and intensity, to defy those trends.

A thorough survey of the linguistic and stylistic choices and experiments with register of poets in this period would require a separate study. Here I will briefly focus on two pieces by the Bihari Hindi and Maithili poet Arsi Prasad Singh (b.1911) that appeared in the newspaper *Saṅgharṣ* in 1938.¹¹⁰ Singh was welcomed as a promising new voice in Hindi poetry at this time: these poems were published in the same year as Singh's first collection of poetry (*Kalāpī/Peacock*), a collection that was well received by Hindi critics, including Ramchandra Shukla.¹¹¹

What is most striking about the pair is the linguistic eclecticism and versatility that Singh displays; both poems have nationalist, political overtones, but express them in markedly different ways and employ sharply divergent registers. Consider the following verse from the poem 'Ahaṁkār' ('Sense of Self').¹¹²

*Pākhaṇḍ ved brāhmaṇ purāṇ; mithyā injil tripiṭak kurān!
Hote mere hī vacan svayaṁ re mere kathanoṁ ke pramāṇ!!
Bhagvān jhūṭh, mairiṁ satyavān! Uṭh mukt gān se gūnj prāṇ!*

Hypocrisy of the Veda, Brahmana, Purana; fake Bible and thrice-failed Quran!
Only my words are truth, dear, the authority of my stories!!
God is a lie, I am true! Arise free and let life resound in song!

The overwhelmingly *śuddh*/'pure' Hindi vocabulary of this verse is consistent with the rest of the poem: the personal and titular 'sense of self' is not merely an individual one, free

¹¹⁰ This was a publication that was far from literary – rather, it was a weekly publication of the Congress Socialist Party – thus, while the language issue was occasionally discussed from a political point of view, literature did not feature prominently in its pages. Nevertheless, in common with many other vernacular newspapers, it included poetry on a regular basis.

¹¹¹ Amaresh Datta ed. *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, v.1 (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1987) 224.

¹¹² Arsi Prasad Singh, 'Ahaṁkār', in *Saṅgharṣ*, 1 August 1938, 7.

from the dogmas of any religion (the “hypocrisy” of Brahmanical Hinduism, the fake dictates of the Bible or Quran), but is implicitly a national one. The imagined physical geography of the poem, in which the subject wanders and dwells in a wide, untrammelled space stretching from the mountains to the shores of the sea, readily corresponds to an actual Indian geography (“*Parvat pratīr merā vikās; upvan vihār, kānan nivās! / Saritā samudr meṁ merā hī hotā phenil līlā vilās!!*” / “I stretch from the mountain to the shore; wandering the garden, dwelling in the forest! / The foaming of my pleasure play in the river and the ocean!”). As allegorical as the poem certainly is, the verse above shows how direct and uncompromising Singh could be, and the repeated versions of the refrain’s exhortation to “arise free” places it firmly in the nationalist mode.

Geography features prominently in the second of these poems, ‘Alakh’ (‘Invisible’):¹¹³ opening with the “assassination” of Siraj ud-Daulah by Robert Clive in the east in 1757, and the lack of true patriots in contemporary India, the focus shifts to encompass Delhi, and events and spaces far to the west:

Dillī meṁ bhīngī billī se baiṭhe mere bhāi jis din!
Dagī golīyām peśāvar meṁ; kābul meṁ śahnāi jis din!
Topoṅ se kar cūr qilā inṭom se inṭ bajāi jis din!
Qīsmat phūṭī usī vakt kāgaz kī nāv calāi jis din!
Yadyapi hūm behoś naśe meṁ; joś abhī gayā nahīm re!
Yah qīssā hai bahut purānā – bahut purānā; nayā nahīm re!!

That day my brothers sat wretched and timid in Delhi!
 That day bullets raced in Peshawar, the great pipe in Kabul!
 That day the fort was crushed by cannons, laid in ruins!
 That day at the time broken fate set sail on a paper boat!
 Even if we are unconscious in intoxication, still passion hasn’t gone dear!
 This tale is very old – very old, it’s not new dear!!

¹¹³ Arsi Prasad Singh, ‘Alakh’, in *Saṅgharṣ*, 6 June 1938, 6.

Beyond this expansive geographic concern, from the historical events of 1757 in Bengal to the gaze west towards the Imperial misadventures at the Islamic frontiers of British India, the poem has an ironic take on the complacency of contemporary Indians (“*Idhar suno jī, kyā bakte ho? san santāvan, jaliyānvālā! / Tājmahal ke āngan mein yah kisne phūmkī dāruṅ jvālā?*”/ “Listen here sir, what are you babbling about? 1857, Jallianwala / Who has started this terrible blaze in the courtyard of the Taj Mahal?”). In an echo of recent and circulating critiques of the complacency of the artist and the irrelevance of his art, he includes a swipe at the poet (“*Kavijī ke sirhāne botal hai; hālā, pyālā, madhuśālā!* / “Sir poet has a bottle for a pillow; wine, glass, tavern!”), yet this is a general call to wake from complacency and apathy, and nationalist in quite specific terms. As should be obvious from these selections, there is a preponderance of vocabulary derived from Persian and Arabic, which would conventionally be described as Urdu. Yet these occur side by side with Sanskritic vocabulary: in other words, Singh here employs a mixed and varied register for the poem.

This free use of different registers by Singh cannot be explained by something as straightforward as subject matter or style, as the poems discussed here both have significant similarities – a political point advanced through the use of both metaphorical language and fairly blunt assertions. If anything, these poems demonstrate a more fundamental point – perhaps a continuation of what Busch identified as an earlier phenomenon, when poets chose vocabulary based on effect and metrical considerations, rather than religious or linguistic criteria. This inclusive, experimental approach therefore represents both a retrieval of the old, as well as an all-encompassing eclecticism that

perhaps mirrored the linguistic eclecticism of Parsi theatre, but certainly represented a broad horizon in the field of formal poetic practice.

However, in the overlapping world of Hindi and Urdu poetics, two figures from this period stand out as worthy of particularly serious scrutiny, given their forthright advocacy of looking beyond the simplistic taxonomies of script, and for practicing what they preached. The first of these, Miraji (1912-49) would commonly be described as an Urdu poet, but was one who “brought Braj, Awadhi, Hindi, Maithili back to Urdu” through his poetry, particularly his *gīt*.¹¹⁴ The second, Upendranath Ashk (1910-96), is known as having been a ground-breaking Hindi novelist, but was someone who displayed significant interest in Miraji’s work and poetic philosophy and moreover, as his biographer has clearly demonstrated, “[traced his] influences and lineages in very different ways from the “mainstream” Hindi tradition.”¹¹⁵ These two important writers were perhaps the most prominent exemplars and advocates of an approach to Hindi and Urdu poetics that stressed their interrelatedness and mutuality, a fact that explains their own problematic positions in the canons of Hindi and Urdu literature.

Miraji, as Geeta Patel has noted, was and remains a figure who did not fit easily into the increasingly partisan Urdu literary milieu. His experimental approach to poetry, his forthright insistence on broadening the horizons of Urdu poetry to include elements of other traditions, and in particular his linguistic heterogeneity, combined with a confessedly

¹¹⁴ Patel, *Lyrical Movements*, 51.

¹¹⁵ Daisy Rockwell, *Upendranath Ashk* (New Delhi: Katha, 2004) 8.

abrasive and difficult personality to place him outside the canonical mainstream of the Urdu literary world. Yet his role in that same world was both central and pivotal. He was a prolific writer and, as editor of the respected literary journal *Adabī Duniyā* and a founding member of the Lahore-based *Halqa-e Arbāb-e Z̤auq*, commanded a position from which he intervened vocally and persuasively in contemporary literary and linguistic debates. His collected essays, Patel asserts, show moments in which Miraji was clearly determined to extract “a pan-Indian past...that incorporates the kind of Bengali, Maithili, Braj Bhasa, and Sanskrit lyric of desire that was permeated by bhakti”, and his poetry exhibited a similarly fluidic set of allegiances to literary pasts – participating in the dominant forms of mimesis, and engaging with a wide range of foreign poetic styles, but simultaneously “scripting a different kind of seeing.”¹¹⁶

Miraji’s literary endeavours can be broadly defined as encompassing three simultaneous processes: the exposure to the Urdu literary establishment and reading public of a range of non-Urdu poets and poetic traditions; the assessment of contemporary Urdu poetry through his own commentaries; and his own poetic creations. The extent of the first is evident in his collected essays *Maśraq o Maḡhrib kī Naḡhmen* (Songs of the East and West).¹¹⁷ In these, Miraji presented a range of contemporary and historical poets, including Walt Whitman, Pushkin, Thomas Moore, John Mansfield, Charles Baudelaire, and Edgar Allen Poe from the west, alongside articles on the 8th century Chinese poet Li Po, Korean and Japanese poetry, and the medieval Bengali poet Chandi Das. It was in these essays, as

¹¹⁶ Patel, *Lyrical Movements*, 29, 31.

¹¹⁷ Miraji, *Maśraq o Maḡhrib kī Naḡhmen* (Lahore: Punjab Academy, 1958)

Patel observes, that Miraji sought both to reframe questions of poetic influence by turning a critical eye on to the valorised traditions of the west, and also to establish an alternative “self-reflexive construction of new literary affiliations”.¹¹⁸ Miraji displayed an assertiveness with regard to English (language) poetry that suggests a positive attempt to shift the terms of the debate regarding influence and imitation (discussed in §2.II above), and he combined this surveying of literatures and languages with a proactive series of commentaries on contemporary Urdu poetry.¹¹⁹ This then was an interlinked project for him, as he sought to effect the broadening of literary horizons through a rigorous and informed creative process.

And this linkage carried over into his own poetry. His openness to the Indic tropes and Hindu themes of *bhakti*, combined with his free use of ‘Hindi’ vocabulary, laid him open to charges of being a Hindu in disguise, and of “[taking] refuge in a language laden with Hindi words.”¹²⁰ Certainly, some of his *gīt* are very much in a Hindi or even Braj register – consider, for example, the closing lines of ‘Cal-calāv’, a light poem about the apparent separation of two people:

*Ham aisā jhūlā jhūlte haiṁ, jo bīt cuke use jhūlte haiṁ,
Yah jñān yah dhyān hai rakhvālā har bāt yahāṁ kī sapnā hai.*

We swing just such a rope, we swing what has already passed,
This knowledge this attention, protector, everything here is a dream.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 155.

¹¹⁹ His commentaries from *Adabī Duniyā* were later collected into the volume *Is nazm meṁ* (Delhi: Alami Press, 1944).

¹²⁰ Patel, *Lyrical Movements*, 51.

¹²¹ Miraji, ‘Cal-calāv’, quoted in Upendranath Ashk, *Urdū Kāvya kī ek Nāī Dhārā* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 2nd ed. 1949 [1st ed. 1941]) 130-1.

The poem is in a similar register throughout. As with a *ghazal*, or really any poem of love in separation, there are allegorical ways in which the poem can be interpreted. Yet Miraji's poem, or song, achieves simplicity of both register and surface meaning. This decidedly accessible register of chiefly demotic Hindustani with very occasional "Hindi" words is representative of the rest of the poem and indeed many of his other works, especially in this collection.¹²² Yet his other, more formally and recognisably Urdu works put paid to any suggestion that Miraji saw Hindi vocabulary as a "refuge". Rather, it seems more productive to see such acts as proactive, inclusive, and as part of that same project of linguistic, stylistic and thematic broadening already discussed. The poet, in Miraji's understanding, was at liberty to draw on a vast array of styles, words and influences, and this was a valid act so long as it was undertaken with discernment.

Indeed, the all-inclusive potential of *gīt* as a genre, and the almost ineffability of the process of composition, is something that seems to have occurred to Miraji quite distinctly. In the poem from his 1943 collection *Mīrājī ke gīt*, 'Gīt kaise bante haiñ' ('How songs are made'), Miraji posits both the author's (as his own) "helplessness" in the face of "waves of thought" that sweep him up, alongside his own relative lack of agency as author ("I don't understand the melodies/songs I hear"). The sounds are the sounds of nature, of creation itself, and;

The sky spread out above them gathers all these voices into its lap and dissolves them. Its forehead wrinkles with power dripping like this. A half-open lotus then sways and rises. A ray of thunder calls out, "Who's saying that?" Even if anyone could say it they wouldn't be able to. No

¹²² See for example 'Prīy se kaise bāt kare', in Ashk, *Urdū Kāvya*, 133-4.

one says anything...Darkness on all sides, the kind of dark against which rays of light mingling eternally with one another create new shadows. And ears listen. Shimmer, shimmer.¹²³

Gīt, Miraji avers, become, rather than get made. It is this act – of their arising from nature, through a process that is simultaneously organic and inscrutable – that is in dialogue with the linguistic and stylistic eclecticism that he displayed in his own poetic compositions. For, if Miraji was committed to any one agenda, then it was most certainly not one of linguistic or literary purity, nor even one of chauvinistic enrichment, but rather a [P/p]rogressive project of inter-communal harmony, evoked literarily and linguistically, against increasing estrangements.¹²⁴

Miraji's experiments with register and form found one decisive admirer in the Hindi world in Upendranath Ashk. Ashk is of particular interest here due to several aspects of his literary output, his own literary habitus, and his proactive efforts, in the words of one of his biographers, "to foster a dialogue of sorts between Hindi and Urdu".¹²⁵ Ashk started out as a poet, first in Punjabi and then in Urdu – even this first switch, from Punjabi to Urdu, was intimately linked to issues of linguistic status and literary prestige.¹²⁶ However, he soon decided to concentrate on journalism and short story writing, and by the early 1930s, under

¹²³ Miraji, 'Gīt kaise bante hain', *Mīrājī ke gīt* (Lahore: Maktabah-e Urdu, 1943) 7-10, prose translation by Geeta Patel, *Lyrical Movements*, 351-2.

¹²⁴ I follow Patel in recognizing Miraji's liminal position *vis-à-vis* the Progressive movement, yet associating him with their most fundamental attitudes. In her words, "He belonged uneasily to the Progressives, and I have claimed that for him, against many who believe otherwise. I have claimed that for him precisely because he, like them, fought to keep open with both hands the intervals, the gaps, the continuities that coupled Hinduism and Islam and that have been rapidly shutting down...". Patel, *Lyrical Movements*, 316-7; see also chapter 3, 'Miraji's Response to the Progressives'.

¹²⁵ Rockwell, *Upendranath Ashk*, 22. The following overview of Ashk's life and works relies heavily on Rockwell's account.

¹²⁶ Rockwell, 21, citing Ashk.

the encouragement of Premchand, began to publish his stories in Hindi. Daisy Rockwell convincingly characterises this second switch as a practical and patriotic move, rather than “an expression of communal sentiment.”¹²⁷ Yet she notes the enthusiasm that Ashk retained for Urdu literature and particularly poetry, as evidenced most demonstrably by his 1962 Hindi anthology of Urdu poetry, *Saṅket*.

Certainly, the anthologising and representation of Urdu literature in Hindi was a project in which Ashk remained engaged throughout his life. However, the origins of this lie much earlier than might be assumed from *Saṅket* – chiefly, in his 2-part article, ‘*Gīt* in Modern Urdu Poetry’, that was published in *Hindustānī*, the organ of the Hindustani Academy, in 1938,¹²⁸ and which formed the basis of his 1941 book on the same topic.¹²⁹ This article was a joyous celebration of what Ashk saw as a revolution in Urdu poetry – the advent of what he described as ‘*gīt*’ (songs), and for which innovation he gave particular credit to his fellow Jalandhari, Maulana Abul Asar ‘Hafiz’ (1900-82). Ashk lauded this “literary revolution” in terms that explicitly and manifestly associated him with the poetic reform tradition of Azad, Dvivedi and Hali (a critical tradition, as I have argued above, that can and should be seen as transcending the Hindi-Urdu divide) – the obsessions with “*gul-o bulbul*” (in Urdu) and “*vilās-bhāvnāom*” (in Hindi) were finally being replaced with both new poetic aesthetics and new poetic forms. Indeed, he heralded this *gīt* form as the long

¹²⁷ Id.

¹²⁸ Ashk, ‘Ādhunik’. For a discussion of the significance of this article in the context of the Hindustani Academy, see §1.II.

¹²⁹ Ashk, *Urdū Kāvya*.

awaited successor to not only the out-dated *ghazal*, but even the more recent *naẓm*. In short:

*Bare-bare s̄āyar choṭe choṭe s̄idhe aur saral ḡitōm̄ mem̄ hṛday ke komaltam udḡāron̄ ko vyakt kar ke s̄āhitya mem̄ naī gangā bahā rahe haiṁ. Yah ḡit panjāb mem̄ sarvsādhāraṇ kī zabān par caṛhe hue haiṁ aur kuch to itne lokpriya hue haiṁ ki gale mem̄ amṛt rakhne vāle apne m̄ṭhe, mādak svarom̄ se gāte hue in se panjāb kī mahfilom̄ ko gumjā dete haiṁ.*¹³⁰

Famous poets are giving expression to the most delicate of feelings in simple, straightforward songs, and starting a new wave in literature [lit.: causing a new Ganges to flow]. These songs are found on the tongue of the common people in the Punjab, and some are so popular that they are resounding in the gatherings of the Punjab, sung in the sweet, intoxicating tones of singers with voices of nectar.

Ashk develops two important principles here: the first, his praise for straightforward language, not only linked him to the broader project of the Hindustani Academy (see chapter 1) but more importantly here established his support for a style of poetic language that resisted the increasing and alienating trends towards either Sanskritisation on the Hindi side or Persianisation on the Urdu, particularly by linking this to popularity; the second, his emphasis on the Punjab, hints at wider debates on Hindi-Urdu competency that not only found expression through groups such as the *Niyāzmandān-e Lahaur* (a group dedicated, according to one memoir, to proving that Punjabis could write Urdu as well as anybody¹³¹), but also were a constant source of tension for Ashk personally (as an Urdu trained Hindi writer, and later as a Punjabi in Allahabad¹³²). But Ashk's fundamental objective here was to present to readers of this Hindi journal, the intellectual community associated with the Academy, and ultimately a wider Hindi-reading public the Urdu fruits of

¹³⁰ Ibid., 133.

¹³¹ "This group...created a revolution in Urdu letters and art criticism and took on and humbled the might of the Urdu men of letters of Delhi and the United Provinces for looking with contempt at the Urdu writers and poets of the Punjab." K.K. Aziz, *The Coffee House*, 93.

¹³² See Rockwell, 31-41. Ashk resettled in Allahabad in 1948.

this paradigm shift. The majority of the article is taken up with poetic quotations – samplings of verse that Ashk had gleaned from a variety of Urdu journals¹³³ and used to illustrate aesthetic and formal developments in Urdu poetry across an impressively wide range of themes. Several of the themes he identifies deserve close scrutiny, the first of which he titles “*Kṛṣṇa ke gīt*”. These are, unsurprisingly, songs on the life, beauty, and themes from the mythology of Krishna. Ashk cites an example by Maulvi Maqbul Ahmad Husenpuri, originally published in the Urdu journal *Humāyūn*, over whose poetry “the colour of Braj Bhasha prevails”, but which, had it not been published in an Urdu journal by a Muslim Urdu author, would be unlikely to be recognised as ‘Urdu’ at all:

*Rādhā-svāmī / Antaryāmī / Paramānand kī rāh sujhāo / Baṃsīdhar maharāj hamāre / Hṛday meṃ baṃsī bajāo.*¹³⁴

Lord of Radha / supreme being / show the path to ultimate bliss / Our flute-playing king / play the flute in [my] heart.

Other selections in this section are in a similar linguistic vein, as is the original *gīt* by Hafiz Jalandhari, which Ashk considers to have been at the forefront of this literary revolution and which he included in his later *Urdū Kāvya* – ‘Baṃsrī bajāe jā!’¹³⁵

<i>Bansrā bajāe jā!</i>	Play the flute!
<i>Kāhan murlivāle, nand ke lāle,</i>	Krishna the flute player, Nand’s dear son,
<i>Baṃsrī bajāe jā!</i>	Play the flute!
<i>Prīt meṃ basī huī adāom se,</i>	From manners dwelling in love,
<i>Gīt meṃ basī huī sadāom se,</i>	From sounds dwelling in song,
<i>Brajbāsiyom ke jhomṛe basāe jā,</i>	Establish the huts of the inhabitants of Braj,
<i>Sunāe jā, sunāe jā!</i>	Let them hear, let them hear!
<i>Kāhan murlī vale nand ke lāle,</i>	Krishna the flute player, Nand’s dear son,

¹³³ Ashk attests in the introduction to the second edition of *Urdū Kāvya* how he was forced to spend months in 1937 going around offices of various publications in search of the *gīt* he wished to write on.

¹³⁴ Ashk, ‘Ādhunik’, 136.

¹³⁵ Hafiz Jalandhari, in Ashk, *Urdū Kāvya*, 30-1. Ashk glosses *sadā* as *āvāz*, and *śay* as *vastu*. “*Bansrā*” in the first line is likely a misprint.

<i>Baṃsrī bajāe jā!</i>	Play the flute!
<i>Baṃsrī kī lay nahīm haim āg hai,</i>	It's not the tune of the flute, but fire,
<i>Aur koī śay nahīm hai āg hai,</i>	And there is nothing real, only fire,
<i>Prem kī yah āg cār sū lagāe jā!</i>	Set the fire of love in all directions!
<i>Sunāejā, sunāejā!</i>	Let them hear, let them hear!
<i>Kāhan murlī vale nand ke lāle,</i>	Krishna the flute player, Nand's dear son,
<i>Baṃsrī bajāe jā!</i>	Play the flute!

Urdu *gīt* as presented by Ashk, then, were almost thematically indistinguishable from the *bhakti* devotional lyrics of Braj.

Other themes were dealt with in a similar manner: Ashk interspersed poetic quotations with brief commentary or analysis, reinforcing at every opportunity the universal appeal, in his view, of these songs, and in particular their non-communal aspects. This is evidenced not only by his balanced selection of Hindu and Muslim writers throughout, but most especially in his section on “*Ektā ke gīt*” (Songs of Unity). Here, having quoted part of another song by Hafiz (“*Apne man mem prīt*”), Ashk commented:

Pañjāb sāmpradāyiktā ke lie badnām hai aur pañjāb ke musalmān sāmpradāyiktā ke kaṭṭar anuyāyī kahe jāte haim. Usī pañjāb ke musalmān kavi ke munh se sāmpradayiktā ke viruddh aisī bāt nikalnā kyā gaurav kā viṣay nahīm hai, aur kyā yah navyug kī pratinighi hindī bhāṣā ke prabhāv kā spaṣṭ pramāṇ nahīm haim?

The Punjab is infamous for communalism, and Punjabi Muslims are said to be fierce adherents of communalism. Isn't it a great thing for such anti-communal sentiments to come from the mouth of a Muslim poet from that same Punjab, and isn't this clear evidence of the influence of the representative Hindi language of this new age?¹³⁶

This passage, in which Ashk once again defends the Punjab and its writers against the perceived hostility of those of the United Provinces, sheds further light on Ashk's understanding of modern Hindi and its relationship with Urdu (it should be noted, however, that this passage is conspicuously absent from the later book, which in many parts is otherwise a verbatim copy of the original article). Ashk saw this process of

¹³⁶ Ashk, 'Ādhunik', 146.

influence as unproblematic, and “*prabhāv*” is the word he employed most often to characterise the relationship between Hindi and Urdu poetry as regards this new trend. However, it is not clear that such a term carried particular connotations of subordination or submission on the part of the Urdu authors; rather, it would seem that Ashk was praising these various poets for looking beyond the narrow confines of ‘traditional’ Urdu, in terms of both register and form, and creating a form of Urdu poetry and song that was accessible to all.¹³⁷ It was for this reason that he reserved special praise for Miraji who, according to Ashk, had fulfilled the potential of this type of writing by expanding its horizons to include free verse, and with great success.¹³⁸ Fundamentally, Ashk’s understanding of Hindi and Urdu was a syncretic one: he saw these new forms of poetry as existing not so much at a point on a linear Hindi-Urdu spectrum, but in an amorphous and (probably intentionally) ill-defined arena that encompassed a broad range of registers, a malleability of form, and in which cultural influences from a variety of traditions – including Punjabi and, thanks to the efforts of Miraji among others, foreign poetry – were welcome. As an illustrative example, he quotes a poem by Maulana ‘Vaqaar’:

Jagat merṁ ghar kī phūṭ burī!	<i>In the world, a rift in the house is bad!</i>
<i>Phūṭ ne raghuvar ghar se nikāle pāpan phūṭ burī,</i>	A rift forced the boon of the Raghus from his house – bad sinful rift,
<i>Rāvan se balvān pichāre jal gāī laṅkāpurī,</i>	He defeated one as strong as Ravana, Lanka burned,
Jagat merṁ...	<i>In the world...</i>
<i>Phūṭ paṛī to karbal jākar hue husen śahīd,</i>	A rift occurred and Hussain went to Karbala and was martyred,
<i>Mān ho jin kā sāre jag merṁ mare unherṁ yazīd,</i>	He who was honoured by the world was killed by Yazid,

¹³⁷ See Rockwell, 105-14, for her own rehabilitation of the term in the context of discussing Ashk’s own novels.

¹³⁸ Ashk, *Urdū Kāvya*, 130.

Jagat merī...	<i>In the world...</i>
<i>Phūṭ ne aṇnā deś bigāṛā kho dī sab kī lāj,</i>	A rift ruined our country, laid waste to our honour,
<i>Banā huā hai deś akhāṛā phūṭ burī mahārāj,</i>	The country has been made into a wrestling ground by this bad rift, sir,
Jagat merī...	<i>In the world...</i>
<i>Tan se kapṛā peṭ se roṭī phūṭ ne lī hathiyāy,</i>	This rift has snatched clothes from the back and food from the stomach.
<i>Dhan bal mān sabhī kuch aṇnā ham ne diyā gaṁvāy</i>	We have squandered our wealth, strength and pride...
Jagat merī ghar kī phūṭ burī!	<i>In the world, a rift in the house is bad!¹³⁹</i>

The attractions this piece must have had to Ashk and his project are immediately obvious. Vaqar created a nominally Urdu poem with a complete lack of what we might term ‘excessively’ Persian- or Arabic-derived vocabulary. Moreover, in his advocacy of Hindu-Muslim unity – or, specifically, in his warning against the debilitating effects of disunity – he highlighted the dangers of rifts or schisms not merely in contemporary society, but by drawing on two foundational tales from Hindu and (at least Shi’a) Muslim community narratives. The point – both Ashk’s and apparently Vaqar’s – seems to be that a poetry of unity has the space for both. In Ashk’s presentation of the poem, more emphatically, this was a form of poetry that defied easy or exclusive linguistic classification.

Certainly, forms existed outside this arena – Ashk warned his Hindi readers not to expect the kind of style that they would find in “*ucc koṭī kī hindī kavītā*” (“high-end Hindi poetry”), but explicitly compares such high-end styles to the most specifically Urdu forms of poetry, not merely the *ghazal*, but the *masnavī* and *rubāīya*.¹⁴⁰ His concluding remarks to the *Hindustānī* article demonstrate the ease with which he both effected and celebrated the merging of the two languages and their traditions:

¹³⁹ Maulana Vaqar, ‘Jagat merī’, in Ashk, *Urdū kāvya*, 36-7.

¹⁴⁰ Ashk, ‘Ādhunik’, 272.

*Merā uddeśya keval hindī-bhāṣiyom ko urdū ke is yug kī kavītāom se paricit karānā thā, aur sāth hī main is abhiyog kā uttar denā cāhtā thā jo pañjāb par laḡāyā jātā hai ki pañjāb hindī ke lie maru-bhūmi hai.*¹⁴¹

My aim was solely to make Hindi readers familiar with the Urdu poems of this day and age, and at the same time to answer the accusation that is laid against the Punjab, that it is a dying ground for Hindi.

Clearly, a sense of competition was present amongst both the Hindi and Urdu literati in the Punjab, *vis à vis* the literary élite of the United Provinces. Yet Ashk's contention here seems to be that Hindi could enjoy, and indeed was enjoying, a life outside Devanagari, in a new, demotic form that, while it may have looked like Urdu, was in fact a diverse, open and inspiring form of poetic production in which all writers could participate, regardless of their religious affiliations. One line from the *Hindustānī* article sums up his philosophy nicely:

Sac hai śāyaroṃ kā koī mazhab nahīm, yadi koī dharm hai to prem. Āj yadi kaviyom ke hāth meṃ viśva ke sañcālan kā bhār aur adhikār ho to deś aur dharm kī taṅg dīvāreṃ kharī na rah pāeṃ aur duniyā kī cappā-cappā zamīn bhāī-bhāī ke khūn se tar na ho.

The truth is that poets have no religion, or if they do then it is love. Today, if the responsibility and authority to run the world was in the hands of poets, then the constricting walls of country and religion wouldn't be able to stay standing, and the soil of the world would not be drenched with the blood of brothers.¹⁴²

Clearly not all poets were as committed to linguistic and communal unity as Ashk himself either was or liked to imagine. Yet such statements, I suggest, point less towards a naïve understanding of the world in which he lived, than to an expectation, perhaps an arrogant one, that all should share his eclectic and inclusive appreciation of poetry and poetic traditions. The idea of poets as possessing a distinct and shared identity *as poets*, independent of language and religion, echoes Shelley's defence of poets as the

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁴² Ashk, 'Ādhunik', 136. This line was also absent from his later *Nāi Dhārā*.

“unacknowledged legislators of the world”,¹⁴³ a sentiment one feels Ashk may well have shared.

Particularly forthright in this regard, Ashk continued presenting Urdu poetry to Hindi readers throughout his life. He edited and published not only the aforementioned *Sanket*, but also several other volumes of poetry in the 1960s.¹⁴⁴ Such volumes went far beyond his outspoken praise for the simplicity and “naturalness” of these new *gīt*: his selection of *ghazals*, for example, included representative samplings from the past greats of Urdu poetry (Mir Taqi Mir, Sauda, Dagh, etc.) through the greats of the colonial and independence eras, who as generations of self-conscious critics have affirmed, were hardly exponents of natural poetry. Ashk’s upbringing, training, and literary career all point to a man who, in many ways, stood at an intersection of various literary inheritances. His literary habitus – formed of tastes acquired through a Punjabi Arya Samaj education, apprenticeship to an Urdu *ustād*, exposure to the classics of Urdu and Braj as well as the local genres of the Punjab – was being shaped and changed by vast forces, including the aspirations of the national movement and the potential patriotic and let us not forget financial benefits of writing in Hindi. While he may have ‘switched’ to Hindi, his writing and anthologising demonstrate his inclusive approach to the language question and, as we have seen here, his understanding that poetic traditions and practices were by no means the exclusive preserve of one religious community or another.

¹⁴³ P.B. Shelley, ‘A Defense of Poetry’ in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, ed. Mary Shelley (London: Edward Moxon, 1840).

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Upendranath Ashk, *Urdū kī behtarīn ghazalēm* (Allahabad: Nilam Prakashan, 1962), *Urdū kī behtarīn nazamēm* (Allahabad: Nilam Prakashan, 1962).

We have seen – in the poetic compositions of Arsi Prasad Singh, in the eclectic and inclusive approach to poetry of Miraji, and in the positivist and celebratory anthologising of Upendranath Ashk – three aspects of poetic creativity that, in many ways, demonstrate the permeability of poetic genres and linguistic registers in the early 20th century. This calls to mind the blurring of the divide between Hindi and Urdu that Imre Bangha has demonstrated existed in so-called “intermediary genres” such as *rekhtā*, or as Francesca Orsini has highlighted in the case of 19th century *bārahmāsā*, of the multiple possible combinations between diction, imagery and register that poetry permitted.¹⁴⁵ It is the endurance of such modes into the 20th century in the face of increasing rigidity, and their reinvention or redeployment in new contexts and to new purposes, that is of such significance here.

2.V SOME CONCLUSIONS

This has been a necessarily selective survey of a vast range of poetry and criticism in Hindi and Urdu over a long span of years. Through a simultaneous consideration of Hindi and Urdu poetic tastes and practices, and through an appreciation of the discursive paradigms in which these poets and commentators operated as one that in many ways transcended formal divisions of script and language, I have argued that we can arrive at a new understanding of just how poetry was produced and consumed in colonial India, at a time when a substantial segment of the Hindi-Urdu poetic literati chose quite deliberately to act

¹⁴⁵ See Bangha, ‘Rekhta’, and Orsini, *Print and Pleasure*, ch.2 ‘Hindi and Urdu Barahmasas in Print’, 49-80.

in ways that were contrary to prevailing dictates of increasingly virulent and mutually exclusive religious and linguistic nationalisms. This is not to say that all such practices that pointed towards a transcending of the linguistic or literary divide *necessarily implied a desire to cross religious or communal divides* – not even all of the examples included here. Nevertheless, in the face of powerful drives to create “pure” Hindi and Urdu, and to separate out distinct literary canons and traditions and tastes, moments of non-conformity retain a special significance.

Such contrariness represented, in some cases, the endurance of a rich and diverse literary habitus, which persisted against the ultimately limited normative potential of the rupturing influences of these same nationalisms. In other cases, journals and publications acted as the means by which poets and poetry from the “other” tradition were (re-)introduced to readers, and the consumption of *śers* became a part of Hindi reading practices, for example. In yet others, it took the form of creative experiments with language, by which efforts a new habitus was formed that itself laid the groundwork for an enduring set of tastes that would withstand the ravages of independence and Partition. As Krishnadevprasad Gaur observed approvingly, it was indeed possible to create poetry of depth and meaning in a register that was accessible and free of the artificial, imported “excesses” of Persian, Arabic or Sanskrit vocabulary or conventions: a poetry which, even on close inspection, was almost impossible to classify as either ‘Hindi’ or ‘Urdu’.¹⁴⁶ A focus

¹⁴⁶ “*Kahīm kahīm to aisī kavīṭāem hone lagī haim ki āp kah nahīm sakte ki yah urdū kī kavīṭā hai ki hindī kī. Hamārā yah kahnā nahīm ki bhāṣā ke lie bhāv kī hatyā kī jāy; par ham yah bhī nahīm cāhte ki kavīṭā kī chāyā mem śabdom kā āḍambar racā jāy.*” (“In some places a kind of poetry has begun that is impossible to say whether it is Urdu or Hindi. I am not saying that affect should be murdered for the sake of language;

on these crossover figures, who themselves both searched for and helped to create the 'common ground' that is the focus of this study, in no way denies the reality of the quite frankly undeniable effect that linguistic and literary divisions ultimately had. It aims instead to broaden our understanding of the Hindi-Urdu field of cultural production, and to bring us a step closer to appreciating the nuances and slippages between these apparently separate fields that existed in the early decades of the 20th century.

but I also don't want that the pretension of words should flourish under the cover of poetry.")
Krishnadevprasad Gaur, 'Hindī kavītā kī bhāṣā', 67.

TELLING TALES OF TOLERANCE: ASPECTS OF HUMANISM IN HINDI AND URDU SHORT STORIES

*Mazhab nahīn sikhātā āpas meñ bair rakhnā
Hindī haiñ ham, vaṭan hai hindustān hamārā.*

Religion does not teach mutual animosity,
We are Indian, our homeland is India.¹

Iqbal's famous couplet, from his well-known poem *Tarāna-e Hindī* (The Indian Anthem), stands almost as a metonym for the potential of literature to evoke ideals of tolerance and communal harmony.² Yet his assertion, that religion does not require or sanction communal violence, was to become an important theme for writers in Hindi and Urdu in the years after this poem's publication. Indeed, one of the most pressing concerns for early 20th century writers was communal harmony – or, more accurately, the distressingly regular and violent lack thereof – and the role of religion in inspiring, motivating, or alleviating such tensions. Political tensions had resulted in significant eruptions of Hindu-Muslim violence across the subcontinent, particularly in the late 1920s and early 1940s. As with other aspects of social reality deemed undesirable or in need of reform, narrative prose literature was held to be a valid method by which such issues could be addressed,

¹ Muhammad Iqbal, 'Tarāna-e Hindī', in *Bāng-e Darā* (1922). See D.J. Matthews, *Iqbal: A Selection of the Urdu Verse* (London: SOAS, 1993) 16.

² Indeed, the *śer* was used rather more recently for the title of an edited collection of Hindi short stories advocating Hindu-Muslim unity: see Satyendra Sharat ed. *Mazhab nahīn sikhātā* (Delhi: Sarasvati Vihar, 1981).

affected and rectified. Moreover, the short story constituted a direct and speedy form of intervention: self-evidently more quickly written than a novel, and able to appear relatively rapidly in the literary periodicals of the period.

Thus in what follows, I conduct a relatively close reading of a selection of short stories from the 1920s to the early 1940s by three writers – Premchand, Pandey Bechan Sharma ‘Ugra’, and Krishan Chander – that all touch on issues of religiosity, religious and communal identity, ideas of humanism and humanistic ideals. By turn euphemistic, satirical, and absurd, these narratives not only depict communal conflict as somehow senseless or self-defeating, but also actively challenge any understanding of religious identities as either monolithic or essential. In investigating these literary interventions in the religious conflicts of the period, I hope to demonstrate how such concerns transcended the boundaries of Hindi and Urdu. While none of the stories explicitly address the Hindi-Urdu language issue, they do employ mixed and inclusive registers across scripts, and their attempts to transcend artificial communal divides allow them to be read as metaphorically addressing that between Hindi and Urdu. As I show, these fictional accounts of communal disharmony provide an illuminating literary perspective on debates surrounding humanism, communalism, secularism and tolerance in South Asia, which supplements our understanding of the political dimensions of these issues. Ultimately, I want to suggest that this particular thematic overlap is indicative of much wider trends – that is, of broader shared themes and similar developments in the prose literature of both Hindi and Urdu – and underscores the fruitfulness of studying Hindi and Urdu literature as part of an interlinked and mutually aware literary tradition, existing within a complex and

multilingual field of literary production, rather than as wholly discrete categories or canons.

3.I READING VIOLENCE AND RELIGION

I propose to interrogate these stories of communal disharmony along three major axes: the motif of the naïve hero; Menippean satire; and humanism and secularism. These three strands intersect in interesting ways in many of these stories, though they are by no means the only lines along which the stories could be read together. Nevertheless, I believe that they make for a fruitful reading of this body of literature, shedding light on a neglected subsection of the Hindi-Urdu literature of the period from the late 1920s to early 1940s. Let us briefly consider each of them in turn.

3.I.1 THE NAÏVE HERO

In a significant number of the stories on communal violence and disharmony, the main protagonist is cast in the form of a naïve hero – that is, as an individual who denies the validity of the divisive tenets of those around him, who maintains a conciliatory and inclusive attitude in the face of increasing violence and disharmony, and who often meets with violence or even death by the end of the story. The presence of this figure in the works of all three authors requires us to analyze how this motif functions in the context of stories of communal violence, and invites us to speculate on why this figure was so attractive to writers as diverse as Premchand, Ugra and Chander.

The naïve hero is an established literary motif, understood in the Euro-American tradition as a structuring device in the formation of a structural irony. However, in such cases the naïve hero is usually understood in negative terms, as a character “whose invincible simplicity or obtuseness leads him to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader...just as persistently is called on to alter and correct.”³ The title character of Voltaire’s *Candide* is a prominent example of another brand of naïve hero, one who comes to realize and outgrow his inherited naïveté after a series of disillusionments. But what if we view – or, as readers, are *meant to view* – such a naïve character in a more positive light? In many of the stories discussed in this chapter, the central character’s insistence on communal harmony, non-violence, and truth endures in the face of criticism, intimidation, exploitation and violence. When the objective is to challenge established or prevalent orthodoxies – here, of religious difference as sufficient justification for violence – the *raison d’être* of the naïve hero is transformed. And so time and again we are presented with a simple hero embodying basic truths of decency, fairness, charity, forgiveness, and so on, exposing the pernicious effects of religious ideology in order to bring about an end to a “false consciousness” generated by wrongheaded rhetoric and fear mongering.

³ M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms, Ninth Edition* (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009 [2005]) 166. Or, in a similar work, a character who “cannot fully comprehend the world about him or her” – Ross Murfin and Supryia Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009) 326. And again: “A naïve hero is a protagonist who is so simple or honest that his view of what occurs in the narrative is obviously wrong or misguided to the audience or reader.” Lewis Turco, *The Book of Literary Terms: The Genres of Fiction, Drama, Nonfiction, Literary Criticism, and Scholarship* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999) 47.

This is, on the whole, quite clearly a proactive strategy on the part of our authors. In some cases, the downfall of the naïve hero is in itself the end of the story, with compromise and coexistence denied its place in an atmosphere and context of violence and mutual animosity. In others, the naïve hero effects reconciliation between warring communities, either through his rhetorical victory or through his noble self-sacrifice. This strategy, of a naïve character presenting the authors' arguments against divisions based on and produced by religion, allows for the creation of a utopian vision of harmony and tolerance, posited as an antidote to cynicism and hatred. Whether or not this utopia is realized by the end of the story, and the manner in which it is brought about, determines the affective tone of the individual story, ranging in this selection from despairing satire in some cases, to barely credible fantasy in others.

Yet the most important point to note regarding the motif of the naïve hero is the almost constant quality of his religiosity. These simple characters – utopian in both themselves and their worldviews – are held to have a truer perspective on faith than those around them. This quality is key to the stories' satirising of what usually emerges as “false religion” and, as I discuss below, allows for the identification of the reader with a perspective of tolerance, humanism, and a particular brand of secularism that stands opposed to religiously motivated and sanctioned violence. Thus the religious naïf stands in for a “true” religion, with his discourse and rhetoric drawing on pre-existing traditions of tolerance and projected ideals of co-existence and even syncretism, in opposition to the communal divisions and violence he encounters around him.

3.I.2 MENIPPEAN SATIRE

The satirical nature of many of the stories here discussed is plain to see, but I want to suggest that they might be more clearly understood by considering them as belonging to a particular brand of satire: Menippea. The classical genre of Menippean satire was reintroduced into Western literary theory and criticism most prominently by Northrop Frye⁴ and Mikhail Bakhtin;⁵ of the two, Bakhtin's is the more extensive formulation. He described the contours of this genre along fourteen criteria, including: a comic element; a "bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic" and "the creation of extraordinary situations" in order to test a philosophical idea; a realm of action comprising three planes – heaven, earth and hell; utopian elements often figuring in a dreamscape; the free use of "inserted genres"; and an emphatic topicality.⁶ With such characteristics, Bakhtin and others have traced the category of Menippea not only in the Greek and Latin classics, but also particularly in Renaissance literature, and so works as apparently diverse as Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and even Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*⁷ are commonly seen as exemplars of the genre.

The term itself and the criteria for including a work in the genre continue to be debated and refined. Recently, Bakhtin's inclusive schema has been narrowed down in the work of Howard Weinbrot, who has suggested that Menippea requires a more precise definition, and in pursuit of this end describes it as "a kind of satire that uses at least two

⁴ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, tr. Carl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁶ Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky*, 114-8.

⁷ James A. Parr, *Don Quixote: A Touchstone for Literary Criticism* (Kassel: Reichenberger, 2005).

different languages, genres, tones, or cultural or historical periods *to combat a false and threatening orthodoxy.*"⁸ This definition may or may not establish itself as superior to others, but it does draw our attention to the tendency of this satire to perform in its particular style the work of satire: that is, reformist social criticism. It certainly conforms to the fundamental quality of Menippea as identified by Bakhtin: namely, "a pointed interest in the topics of the day".⁹

Weinbrot's work, as others', stresses the self-aware nature of the Menippean tradition, in which authors are generally self-consciously writing in to a tradition and form that they know well. Yet other recent work has demonstrated the wide potential of the genre as a heuristic device for understanding non-Western/-European literature, outside of a readily identifiable pattern of heritage or influence.¹⁰ Susan Fisher, in her comparative reading of the postmodern novels of the Anglo-American Russell Hoban and the Japanese Murakami Haruki, has argued that the themes and tropes of Menippean satire may well be "particularly appropriate for the fictional treatment of life in a postmodern world."¹¹ Following Bakhtin in stressing the mutability and adaptability of the genre, she suggests the possibility of a Menippean satire "contain[ing] elements from a non-European cultural context, provided they were compatible with the essence of the genre."¹² Her approach – tracing thematic and rhetorical similarities across languages and asserting the validity of

⁸ Howard D. Weinbrot, *Menippean Satire Reconsidered: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) 6, emphasis added.

⁹ Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky*, 119.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that Bakhtin dismissed the idea that Dostoevsky might have "proceeded *directly* and *consciously* from the ancient menippea". Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky*, 121.

¹¹ Susan Rosa Fisher, 'A Genre for Our Times: The Menippean Satires of Russell Hoban and Murakami Haruki', unpublished PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1997, 282.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20.

reading works from very different traditions through this generic lens – opens up a way of reading even Hindi and Urdu short stories through the same lens, outside of a paradigm of influence or of conscious appropriation or imitation.

In surveying the various scholarly works on Menippean satire, Fisher quotes Scott Blanchard's suggestion that the genre retains a kernel of optimism and promise: "Menippean satire confronts a deluded and insane world with the only virtue that recognizes all human beings, past and present, as bedfellows in their shared absurdity: charity".¹³ This understanding of the insanity of the world existing side by side with the shared, universal commonality of humanity and human kindness is prominent in the stories discussed in this chapter: humanism and an idea of shared humanity are frequently appealed to, both by characters in the stories and through the broader rhetorical stance of the stories themselves. Most succinctly, Weinbrot described Menippean satire as "a genre for serious people who see serious trouble and want to do something about it."¹⁴ Whether this can be applied consistently to all examples of the genre remains to be seen, but it is certainly appropriate to my purposes here. The inter-communal divisions and violence to which these authors were reacting were probably the most pressing social issues of the time. Clearly in some cases – and particularly in Ugra's, as I show below – a satirical utopic/dystopic contrast provided one effective way to comment on, and possibly even affect, this highly undesirable turn of events.

¹³ W. Scott Blanchard, *Scholars' Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995) 43, quoted in Fisher, 'A Genre', 8.

¹⁴ Weinbrot, *Menippean Satire*, xi.

3.I.3 HUMANISM AND SECULARISM

As I have already suggested, humanism is a strong current in the stories analysed in this chapter. Whether it is embodied in the central character – often our naïve hero – or operates more generally as a foundational principle of the stories’ rhetorical stance, the central appeal of all of these stories is for a respect for the fundamental quality of *being human* as something which transcends communal and religious boundaries, but which same respect is simultaneously posited as a *fundamental quality of all faiths*. As such, this humanism is intimately linked with questions as fundamental to modern India as the role and quality of secularism, and the position of religion in public life and discourse.

The use of humanism as an axis of literary analysis requires some caution, especially in the colonial context. There is an obvious danger of ascribing to a set of writers and intellectuals a wholesale adoption of what has commonly been held to be an ideological product of the European Enlightenment.¹⁵ This would be a mistake, and is certainly not my intention. Yet, as Neil Lazarus has persuasively suggested, the tendency in post-colonial and post-modern scholarship to view humanism with deep suspicion due to its bourgeois and European connotations closes off avenues of analysis that, in the post-colonial context especially, might lead to a productive and genuinely humanistic reclamation of the term.¹⁶

Following Lazarus, Priyamvada Gopal has argued that humanity, humanism, and the idea of

¹⁵ Edward Said was at the forefront of attempting, in the words of one critic, to “decolonize Humanism as a Eurocentric fetish” and open it up as a genuinely heterogeneous category. See R. Radhakrishnan, *History, the Human, and the World Between* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) 179.

¹⁶ “[A] genuinely postcolonial strategy might be to move explicitly...to proclaim a “new” humanism, predicated upon a formal repudiation of the degraded European form, and borne embryonically in the national liberation movement.” Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) 143.

the human “serve[d] reflexively to open up possibilities beyond the temporal and historical limits of modernity” for writers and film makers in post-Independence India,¹⁷ and has gone on to analyse the invocation of precisely such ideas in the stories of Rashid Jahan and Saadat Hasan Manto, a novel of Ismat Chughtai, and the films of K.K. Abbas.¹⁸

Furthermore, it is worth noting how the writers considered here drew on their own cultural resources in advocating humanistic principles. It is this that links these literary articulations of humanism with the broader debates on secularism in colonial and post-colonial India. Recent years have seen a substantial amount of renewed scholarly interest in the nature and status of Indian secularism,¹⁹ with a majority of these taking the position of defending the secular project in the face of perceived assaults. Among such voices, Ashis Nandy’s anti-secularist position stands out as something quite exceptional. He sees the concept of secularism as an imposition of colonial modernity, appropriated by Westernised intellectuals and responsible, perhaps counterintuitively, for “the complicity of the modern

¹⁷ Gopal, *Literary Radicalism*, 9.

¹⁸ Humanism has also been used as a lens in the context of Hindi literature: Govind Narain Sharma, for instance, has written on what he describes as the distinctive contribution of what he terms “third world” humanists such as Premchand and the Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o to the concept of humanism. While I don’t necessarily agree with his categories, he has demonstrated the usefulness of exploring ideas of humanism and the human in comparative literary studies. See Govind Narain Sharma, ‘Third world humanism: Munshi Premchand and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’ in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing/World Literature Written in English*, 27;2 (1987) 296-307.

¹⁹ Studies have ranged from major monographs to a range of edited volumes. On the colonial context, see Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press/Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007). On the more recent “crisis” of secularism, see Brenda Cossman and Ratna Kapur, *Secularism’s Last Sigh? Hindutva and the (Mis)Rule of Law* (New Delhi: OUP, 1999), and Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan eds. *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007). For an exploration of secularism in post-Independence cultural contexts, see Priya Kumar, *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008). For a collection of essays surveying the broad contours of the historical and contemporary debate, see Rajeev Bhargava ed. *Secularism and its Critics* (New Delhi: OUP, 1998).

intellectuals and the modernizing middle classes of South Asia in the new forms of religious violence that have entered the Asian scene.”²⁰ He attributes the loss of modes of religious tolerance and the rise of exclusionary and regimented religious orthodoxies to the attempt by these same liberal elites to impose on India a definition of secularism that mandates the forcible exclusion of religion from the public sphere.

While I remain uncomfortable with parts of Nandy’s thesis, several aspects of his formulation are particularly illuminating in the context of these colonial-era literary evocations of humanism. Nandy’s essay is, at its heart, a plea for an appreciation of “[r]eligious tolerance outside the bounds of secularism”, that is, “tolerance of religions but also *tolerance that is religious*.”²¹ He argues that a fundamental divide has emerged in the religious traditions of the subcontinent, between “religion-as-faith” as a non-monolithic and plural way of life, and “religion-as-ideology”, which tends towards orthodoxy, absolutism, and bounded political identities.²² The loss of religious tolerance in both senses is thus a direct result of the primacy accorded “religion-as-ideology” in the context of the colonial and post-colonial nation state.

As I show below, these literary invocations of humanism by Premchand, Ugra and Chander correspond closely to Nandy’s ideal of “religion-as-faith”. There is a certain irony in this, as none of the three was a religious man. Nevertheless, their attempts to posit humanistic tolerance as a fundamental quality of both Hinduism and Islam constitute a

²⁰ Ashis Nandy, ‘The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance’, in Bhargava ed. *Secularism*, 321-44, 322.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 344, emphasis added.

²² *Ibid.*, 322-3.

determined attempt to forestall communal violence through a direct appeal to the religious ideals of both faiths. In many ways, this epitomises what Nandy identifies as the “third response” to the supposed “superior understanding of the relationship between religion and politics” of Western Man:²³ an affirmation of pre-existing modes of tolerance and coexistence imbedded in pre-colonial society and predating the advent of Western modernity.

Yet these stories also present an opportunity to supplement and complicate Nandy’s critique. As I have already suggested, the fundamental function of the naïve hero in these stories is to present a form of “true religion” against the falsities of religiously motivated violence and intolerance. This runs contrary to Nandy’s assertion that one of the principle distorting effects of the Western, colonial, Christian gaze upon South Asian religious traditions was to distinguish between so-called “true faith” and its “distortions” – that is, between something orthodox and enduring, located in scriptures and other sources of textual authority (“religion-as-ideology”), and folk, local, heterogeneous or in some way fallen forms of religious practice (“religion-as-faith”). Whether or not we accept Nandy’s proposition, the fact remains that these literary understandings of “true faith” maintained quite the opposite position to this distorting gaze. For these writers, true faith was something located in the common man, and in the long-standing coexistence and intermingling of the major religious communities of India.

Thus the stories in this chapter come close to what has become the “non-standard” “non-Western” definition of secularism in India. Often referred to as “equal respect for all

²³ Ibid., 336, 334.

religions”, or “*sarva dharma samabhāva*”, it has as its essence the proposition, identified by Nandy, that “while the public life may or may not be kept free of religion, it must have space for a continuous dialogue among religious traditions and between the religious and the secular.”²⁴ The word “secularism” does not appear in the stories of Premchand, Ugra or Chander, but it remains the fact that their advocacy of a mode of religious tolerance and coexistence corresponds closely and in illuminating ways with how that term has come to operate in post-colonial India.

3.II PREMCHAND ON THE NECESSITY OF CO-EXISTENCE

Premchand was one of the most prominent and popular of Hindi and Urdu writers during his lifetime (1880-1936), and has been so thoroughly canonised and continuously emulated and studied that he needs little in the way of introduction.²⁵ To summarise his writings in a phrase, the overarching characteristic of his entire oeuvre is one of humanistic concern: consistently highlighting be it the injustices of caste oppression, the subordinated state of women, or the horrors of particularly rural poverty, Premchand’s corpus is even now held up as the example *par excellence* of socially conscious and humane literature in India. However, while generally noted as having been a proponent of communal harmony (and, as

²⁴ Ibid., 327.

²⁵ For biographical accounts of Premchand, see Amrit Rai, *Kalam kā Sipāhī*, tr. Harish Trivedi, *Premchand: His Life and Times* (New Delhi: OUP, 2002 [1982]); Pandey, *Between Two Worlds*; Madan Gopal, *Munshi Premchand: A Literary Biography* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1964). On his writings on communal issues, see Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature: 1911-1956: Struggle for Freedom* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995) and Geetanjali Pandey, *Between Two Worlds*, referenced throughout. For a discussion of his scathing treatment of Hindu/Muslim bias with regard to particularly Urdu literature in ‘Urdū meñ firauniyāt’, see §1.VI.

discussed at length in Chapter 1 above, having made strident interventions over the issue of the Hindi-Urdu controversy), relatively little critical attention has been paid to his writings on the subject.²⁶ The present discussion is an attempt to remedy this lack to some degree, and to examine the ways in which Premchand addressed Hindu-Muslim tensions in his stories, how he depicted their resolution, and what these depictions and often quite idealised or idealistic representations have to say about his concern with and elaboration of humanistic principles. As we shall see, while he generally worked from within an understanding of separate religious communities as an undeniable part of the Indian reality, his concern was to bridge the divide between them and, on occasion, to move toward questioning the validity of such monolithic identities and their paramountcy.

3.II.1 'MUKTIDHAN': THE COSTS OF RELIGIOSITY

Premchand is perhaps most famous for his sympathetic portrayals of rural life, low caste characters and the plight of women (though one of his most famous stories, 'Kafan' ('The Shroud'), has received some criticism for its decidedly unsympathetic and unflattering account of low caste existence), and moreover the novelty of bringing such characters and

²⁶ The stories of Premchand discussed in this section are: 'Forgiveness' – 'Kṣamā' [Hindi], in *Mānasarovar* v.3 (Benares: Sarasvati Press, 1949) 200-8 (originally in *Mādhurī* (June 1924))/'Afū' [Urdu], in *Dayā Narā'in Nigam ke Risāla 'Zamāna' Kānpur (1903-1942) se Intikhāb 9: Premchand: Mazīd Afsāne* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1993) 276-83 (originally in *Zamāna* (May 1929)); 'Jihad' – 'Jihād' in *Mānasarovar* v.7, 173-83 (original publication unknown); 'The Temple and the Mosque' – 'Mandir aur Masjid' [Hindi], in Ram Anand ed. *Premchand Racnāvalī* v.13 (Delhi: Janvani Prakashan, 1996) 171-9 (originally in *Mādhurī* (April 1925))/'Dair o ḥaram' [Urdu] (original publication unknown); 'The Price of Freedom' – 'Muktidhan' [Hindi], in *Mānasarovar* v.3, 172-82 (originally in *Mādhurī* (May 1924)); and 'Violence, the Supreme Duty' – 'Himsā Parmo Dharm' [Hindi], in *Mānasarovar* v.5, 82-91 (originally in *Mādhurī* (December 1926)). Dates of original publication for the Hindi versions are taken from Kamal Kishor Goyanka, *Premchand Viśvakoś* v.2 (Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 1981).

situations within the ambit and to the forefront of Hindi and Urdu literature. In one notable story, 'Muktidhan' ('The Price of Freedom'), this same sympathy for the poor and downtrodden is artfully combined with Premchand's deeply held concern for inter-communal harmony. Rahman is an impoverished Muslim farmer who, in particularly dire financial straits after the *zamīndār* raises his land rent, has decided to sell his milch cow. Premchand sharply contrasts the cow and her owner, showing how well the cow has been loved and cared for:

Gāū mohinī-rūp thī. Choṭī-sī gardan, bhārī puṭṭhe aur dūdh se bhare hue than the. Pās hī ek sundar, baliṣṭh bachṛā gāū kī garden se lagā huā khaṛā thā. Musalmān bahut kṣubdh aur dukhī mālūm hotā thā.

The cow looked splendid. She had a slender neck, ample haunches, and udders full of milk. Beside her stood a beautiful and healthy calf. The Muslim, meanwhile, seemed agitated and upset.²⁷

The contrast – so counterintuitive in many ways – serves to demonstrate the poor farmer's love for his cow, which is far closer to a beloved pet than a source of food or wealth. Lala Daudayal, a local Hindu gentleman, comes upon the scene, and buys the cow from Rahman for 35 rupees, even though other prospective buyers – butchers, in fact – offer him more money for this prize specimen. Rahman's devotion to the cow is once again emphasised when he implores Daudayal to take good care of her, who is struck by such care and concern for a cow in a poor Muslim. The two part ways, but this is not to be their last meeting. The farmer's mother wants to perform the Haj pilgrimage before she dies. In order to take her, Rahman needs to borrow money (some 200 rupees), so he asks Daudayal for a loan, which he receives. But Rahman is unable to repay the loan on time: his mother falls ill on their return from Mecca, and medicines cost money. When she dies, the funeral

²⁷ Premchand, 'Muktidhan', 173.

rites require yet more money. A somewhat sympathetic Daudayal is willing to lend more, and does so, but on commercial terms. By this stage, Rahman is some 500 rupees in debt and, with interest, will have to repay 700. Shortly before this loan comes due, however, a fire wipes out Rahman's crop, leaving him utterly devastated and unable to pay. Summoned to Daudayal, he is stricken with remorse and guilt at his inability, and shame at having to ask for another extension. Yet instead of filing a court case, as was or might be expected, Daudayal surprises him (and the reader!) when he forgives the entire amount in an uncommon act of benevolence.

The story perhaps borders on the implausible – such a continuous stream of unmitigated misfortune almost strains credibility – yet what is the explanation for this astonishing denouement? Daudayal's own interpretation is worth analysing closely, and quoting in full:

“Ab tum mere ek paise ke bhī dendār nahīm ho. Asal merī maimne tumse jo karz liyā thā, vahī adā kar rahā hūm. Maim tumhārā karzdār hūm, tum mere karzdār nahīm ho. Tumhārī gaū ab tak mere pās hai. Usne mujhe kam-se-kam āṭh sau rupye kā dūdh diyā hai. Do bachṛe nafe merī alag. Agar tumne yah gaū qasāiyom ko de dī hotī, to mujhe itnā fāydā kyonkar hotā? Tumne us vakt pānc rupye kā nuksān uṭhākar gaū mere hath becī thī. Tumhārī vah śarāfat mujhe yād hai. Us ehsān kā badlā cukānā merī tāqat se bāhar hai. Jab tum itne garīb aur nādān hokar ek gaū kī jān ke lie pānc rupye kā nuksān uṭhā sakte ho, to maim tumhārī saugunī haisiyat rakhkar agar cār-pānc sau rupye māf kar detā hūm, to koī baṛā kām nahīm kar rahā hūm. Tumne bhale hī jānkar mere ūpar koī ehsān na kiyā ho; par asal merī vah mere dharm par ehsān thā. Maimne bhī to tumherī dharm ke kām hī ke lie rupye diye the. Bas, ham-tum donoṁ barābar ho gaye.”

“Now you don't even owe me a single paisa. In fact, I am still paying off the loan I took from you. I am in debt to you, not you to me. I still have your cow. She has given me at least 800 rupees worth of milk. Besides which, I've gained two calves. If you had given this cow to the butchers, then how would I have gained so? At that time you sold the cow to me even though it cost you five rupees. I remember that nobility of yours. I am incapable of returning that favour. When you can be so poor and helpless and yet suffer a loss of 5 rupees for the sake of a cow, then it is no great thing for me to forgive four or five hundred rupees when I have the capacity to do so. Even if you didn't knowingly do a favour for me, *it was still a favour for my religion*. I too merely gave you money for your religious duties. So, you and I are equal.”²⁸

²⁸ Premchand, 'Muktidhan', 181-2, emphasis added.

The expenses incurred by religious observances, rituals or duties are thus prominent throughout this story (held up to perhaps even greater satirical effect in the aforementioned 'Kafan', and prominent in many of Premchand's other works) and, grouped together as they are with the usurious demands of the landlord and the devastation wrought by the fire, are implicitly as unfair and capricious as these other costs, if not more so. More pertinent to this discussion, however, is the way in which Premchand sets up an ideal of mutuality and equivalence in religious concerns: the Muslim farmer aids the Hindu gentleman in the observance of his religious duties by selling him the cow at a loss; while the Hindu gentleman aids the Muslim farmer in meeting the costs of his religiously mandated tasks. In terms of narrative technique, it is devastatingly effective: the bulk of the story leads the reader towards and through a typical Premchandian critique of social inequality, coupled with an intense unease at the financial burden placed on the poor by religious observances, yet the denouement takes us in a flash from these concerns to an implicit critique of communalism *through* religion, that we as readers really cannot anticipate – the twist in the tale that is such a crucial element in the genre. A humanistic focus on the worth of the individual, on the redemptive effect of this ideal of religious equivalence and shared respect when it is put into practice, and on the basic commonality shared by different faiths and their members, establishes the ground upon which Premchand builds a socialist critique of both class differences and the financial hardship created by religious observances.

3.II.2 ‘KṢAMĀ’/ ‘‘AFŪ’’: THE LANGUAGE OF FORGIVENESS

As already noted, part of Premchand’s distinctiveness was not only his enduring simultaneous participation in the Hindi and Urdu spheres, but his insistence that his literary works – whether short stories or novels – should appear in both languages and scripts. We still await a comprehensive study of this process, the revisions it entailed and the ambiguities it produced: though there have been several forays in this direction already,²⁹ it may never be possible to know which version came first as regards composition, though we can at least take note of the original publication dates (where known).

I turn for my own contribution to this ongoing comparative reading to another of Premchand’s stories which deals explicitly with communal relations. ‘Forgiveness’ – ‘Kṣamā’ in Hindi, ‘‘Afū’ in Urdu – is a peculiarly affective tale. It tells the story of Daud, a vehemently anti-Muslim Christian man living in Spain in the era of Muslim rule, and his encounter one day with a Muslim youth, Jamal.³⁰ The plot is quite obviously intended as an

²⁹ To name a few: Frances Pritchett, ‘‘The Chess Players’’: From Premchand to Satyajit Ray’, *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 22;2 (Summer-Fall 1986) 65-78; Harish Trivedi, ‘The Urdu Premchand: The Hindi Premchand’, *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, 22 (1984) 104-18; see also Trivedi, ‘The Progress of Hindi’, for a discussion of the Hindi and Urdu versions of ‘Kafan’; and Alison Safadi, ‘The ‘‘Fallen’’ Woman in Two Colonial Novels: *Umra’o Jan Ada* and *Bazaar-e Husn/Sevadasan*’, *Annual of Urdu Studies* 24 (2009) 16-53, for a discussion of the Urdu and Hindi novel(s). Safadi highlights the many differences between the two novels, and raises interesting speculations on Premchand’s motivations for the changes; I, however, would be wary of seeing such differences as mandated by audience expectations (*viz.* whether or not Suman would be thought ‘‘worthy of such praise by Hindi readers’’, 49); I would also suggest that the biting irony of the Hindi title, ‘House of Service’, needs to be acknowledged.

³⁰ Premchand wrote very little historical fiction, but he clearly found this setting an effective one in which to explore communal relations through analogy. For a discussion of another case in which historical fiction was used to advocate Hindu-Muslim coexistence, see the discussion of the translations of *Nathan der Weise* in §1.III. See also Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment*, for his discussion of

analogy for the situation of Muslim rule in India, and provides an opportunity for Hindu readers to put themselves in Daud's place as he explores the nature of Islam, rule by Muslims, and his own pre- and mis-conceptions.

The argument between Daud and Jamal over the nature of Islam turns nasty, and Daud kills the youth in a sword fight. Daud flees the scene, sure that he will be killed by the other Muslims of the town in revenge, and hides from his pursuers. Emerging at night, he seeks shelter in a home where he encounters an elderly Arab reading the Quran by the light of a lamp. In a cruel twist of fate, this man turns out to be the father of Jamal, and has lost his only son as a result of Daud's actions. Despite this, and having given sanctuary to his son's murderer, Sheikh Hasan lies to the crowd of pursuing Muslims when they come to his house, saying he had seen the killer fleeing in the opposite direction. The final passage from the two versions provides the conclusion, as well as an opportunity for a brief comparative reading:

'Afū:

Śekh Hasan ek lamḥa tak sukūt meṁ kharā rahā. Phir bolā, "Dā'ūd, maiṅ ne tumheṅ ma'āf kiyā. Maiṅ jāntā hūṅ ki musalmānoṅ ke hāthoṅ 'isā'iyōṅ ko kāfī aẓiyateṅ pahūncī haiṅ, musalmānoṅ ne un par baṛe-baṛe maẓālīm ki'e haiṅ. Un kī āzādī chīn lī hai. Lekin yah islām kā nahīn balki musalmānoṅ kā qaṣūr hai. Fath ke gaur ne musalmānoṅko divāna banā diyā hai. Hamāre pāk nabī ne vah ta'līm nahīn dī thī jis par ham āj 'aml kar rahe haiṅ. Vah khud 'afū o raham ke bulandtarīn ma'yār the. Maiṅ islām ke nām ko baṭṭā na lagā'ūngā. Merī ūṅṅnī le lo aur rātoṅ rāt jahāntak bhāg sako, bhāg jā'o, kahīn ek lamḥa ke li'e bhī na ṭhaharṅā. 'Araboṅ ko tumhārī bū bhī mil ga'ī to tumhārī khairiyat nahīn hai. Jā'o tumheṅ khudā'e pāk bakhair o 'āfiyat ghar pahuṅcā de. Būṛhe śekh Hasan aur uske beṭe Jamāl ke li'e khudā se du'ā kiyā karnā."

Dā'ūd bakhairiyat ghar pahūnc gayā. Magar ab vah Dā'ūd na thā, jo islām kī bekh-kanī karnā cāhtā thā. Uske khayālāt meṅ gūna tagaiyur ho gayā thā. Ab vah musalmānoṅ kī qadr kartā aur islām kā nām 'izzat se letā thā.

“Moorish” Spain and “Turkish” Palestine [as] recurring motifs of great significance in modern literature” (45).

Kṣamā:

Śekh Hasan ne gambhīr bhāv se kahā, “Dāūd, mairne tumheṁ māf kiyā. Mair jāntā hūm, musalmānoṁ ke hath isāiyōṁ ko bahut taklifēṁ pahuṁcī hairi; musalmānoṁ ne un par baṛe-baṛe atyācār kiye hairi, unkī svādhīntā har lī hai! Lekin yah islām kā nahīm, musalmānoṁ kā qasūr hai. Vijay-garv ne musalmānoṁ kī mati har lī hai. Hamāre pāk-nabī ne yah śikṣā nahīm dī thī, jis par āj ham cal rahe hairi. Vah svayaṁ kṣamā aur dayā kā sarvoṁc ādarś hai. Mair islām ke nām ko baṭṭā na laḡāūṁgā. Merī ūṁṁnī le lo, aur rāto-rāt jahām tak bhāḡā jāy, bhāḡo. Kahīm ek kṣaṅ ke lie bhī na ṭhaharnā. Araboṁ ko tumhārī bū bhī mil gayī, to tumhārī jān kī khairiyat nahīm. Jāo, tumheṁ khudā-e-pāk ghar pahuṁcāve. Būṛhe śekh Hasan aur uske beṭe Jamāl ke lie khudā se duā kiyā karnā.”

Dāūd khairiyat se ghar pahuṁc gayā; kintu ab vah Dāūd na thā, jo islām ko jar se khodkar pherik denā cāhtā thā. Uske vicāroṁ meṁ gahrā parivartan ho gayā thā. Ab vah musalmānoṁ kā ādar kartā aur islām kā nām izzat se letā thā.

Sheikh Hasan {stood silently for a moment, then} said [with deep feeling], “Daud, I forgave you. I know the Christians have suffered much injury at the hands of the Muslims, that Muslims have wrought great tyranny on them, and taken away their freedom. But this is not the fault of Islam, rather of Muslims. The pride of victory has {made Muslims crazy}/[taken Muslims’ sense]. Our prophet did not teach the lesson by which we are living today. He himself was the highest example of forgiveness and mercy. I will not cast a slur on the name of Islam. Take my camel, and run all night as far as you can. If the Arabs should catch even a whiff of you, then there will be no safety for {you}/[your life]. Go, and may the holy God see you home {in safety and health}. Say a prayer to God for old Sheikh Hasan and his son Jamal.

Daud arrived home safely. But now he was not that Daud, who wanted to uproot and destroy Islam. There had been a wholesale change in his thinking. Now he held Muslims in esteem, and spoke of Islam with respect.³¹

In this passage – in many ways the moral and affective heart of the story – we can see that the linguistic and narrative variations between the two versions are *extremely* minor. The opening lines differ as to whether the Sheikh stood silently for a moment, or spoke with deep feeling, yet both variants produce much the same effect of contemplation, hesitation and sorrow. Other differences are similarly minor: victory had either made the Muslims crazy (*dīvāna banā diyā*) or taken their sense (*mati har lī*); either Daud or his life would find no safety (*tumhārī khairiyat* versus *tumhārī jān kī khairiyat*); and the slightly more emphatic

³¹ Premchand, “Afū”, 282-3; ‘Kṣamā’, 208. In the amalgamated translation, narrative additions and differences in the Urdu and Hindi versions are denoted within braces – { } – and brackets – [] – respectively, while other differences in vocabulary have been underlined in the Urdu and Hindi originals.

wish in the Urdu version that God should not merely guide Jamal home, but do so in safety and health (*bakhair o 'āfiyat*). This narrative correspondence applies in much the same way throughout the versions. As for register, the differences are several, but not always as binary as might be expected. There are several instances where, predictably, the Urdu version contains a Persian or Arabic word, while the Hindi uses a Sanskritic alternative: *mazālim* for *atyācār*, *Fath ke gaur* for *Vijay-garv*, and *Vah khud 'afū o raḥam ke bulandtarīn ma'yār* for *Vah svayaṁ kṣamā aur dayā kā sarvoca ādarś hai* prominent among them. While we know the original dates of publication for the two versions (the Hindi in 1924, the Urdu in 1929), we cannot know definitively which version Premchand composed first. This may not be particularly important for this discussion, as it would mostly affect our understanding of the direction in which such substitutions took place. Besides which, I wish to suggest that the similarities in vocabulary are at least as significant as the differences: the use of Persian-derived words in the Hindi version such as *māf*, *taklīf*, *qasūr* and *'izzat*, for instance, shows how comfortable Premchand felt with a certain amount of shared vocabulary; and the idiomatic and Indic *baṭṭā lagānā* remains constant in both versions. Yet, even going only this far, we come up against yet another block – namely, that we cannot even be sure if Premchand reworked one version into the other himself, or if he delegated the task to another.

However, a broader linguistic and narrative point emerges from the contrast between this passage and the preceding dialogue between the two, which is perhaps more significant than the variations between Persianate and Sanskritic noted above. From the moment Daud arrived at his dwelling, the Sheikh addresses him in the intimate, impolite or

inferior second person *tū* form; however, at this didactic and even epiphanic moment, he switches up to the neutral and also plural second person *tum*, a change consistent across the Hindi and Urdu versions. This represents not only a reconfiguration of the relationship between the two characters, as Sheikh Hasan addresses Daud with a greater degree of either respect or distance, but constitutes the didactic turn at the very core of Premchand's narrative. In a similar way to the shift in Krishan Chander's 'Muṣbit auf Manfī' (see § 3.IV.2 below), this switch subtly but profoundly reorientates the direction of the Sheikh's, and indeed Premchand's, marking of a distinction between Islam and Muslims (or, more broadly, religion and its practitioners). It is the lesson that Daud needs to learn, and contrasts sharply with his Islamophobic assertions at the outset of the story (see, for example, "*Islām ne dharm ke nām par jitnā rakt bahāyā hai, usmeñ uskī sārī masjidēñ dūb jāyēngī.*"³²/*Islām ne mazhab ke nām par jitnā khūn bahāyā hai usmeñ uskī sārī masjidēñ garq ho jā'engī.*"³³/*Islam has shed so much blood in the name of religion, all its mosques will drown in it.*").

By implication, it is the distinction that Premchand hopes his readers and society at large will begin to make, thereby locating blame in the individual and his motivations or personal prejudices, rather than in any collective religious identity. This is in keeping with the broader individualism of his humanist position, emphasising the shared quality of being human over distinctions of community or religion. 'Forgiveness' demands that the reader consider not an abstract, undifferentiated and essentialised religious community as the

³² 'Kṣamā, 201.

³³ "Afū', 277.

bearer of responsibility, but individuals instead. The Damascene rehabilitation of Daud invites readers to reflect on their own prejudices, as well of those invoked in divisive and phobic political discourse, most emphatically through the voice of the Sheikh. In writing such a story in both Hindi and Urdu, in a broadly commensurate and overlapping shared register, Premchand determined to make his point across linguistic and religious divides.

3.II.3 'JIHĀD': DRUNK ON RELIGION

A story with a name like 'Jihād' ('Jihad') might not seem an obvious choice for inclusion in any discussion of literary invocations or creations of a communal common ground. However, this story is an unequivocal jeremiad on religious zealotry and discrimination that emphasises the spiritual meaning of jihad over its modern military connotations.³⁴

In disconcerting and uncomfortable ways, 'Jihad' reads as an almost prescient account of the horrors of Partition that were to wrack the subcontinent in 1947. The action opens on a *kāfilā* or caravan of Hindus heading to the east to escape religious persecution, evocative of Partition-era migrations between India and particularly West Pakistan in both imagery and vocabulary.

Premchand describes a life of easy and longstanding peaceful coexistence between Hindus and Muslims, wherein even the idea of religious animosity was unknown ("*Dharmik dvesh kā nām na thā.*"³⁵), that suddenly changed without warning:

³⁴ On the variety of meanings of jihad, particularly as it has been used in the South Asian context, see Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Boston: Harvard University Press/Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008).

³⁵ Premchand, 'Jihād', 173.

Ek mullā ne na jāne kahān se ākar anparh dharmśunya pāṭhanom meṁ dharm kā bhāv jāgṛt kar diyā hai. Uskī vāñī meṁ koī aisī mohinī hai ki būḍhe, javān, strī-puruṣ khimce cale āte haiṁ. Vah śerom kī tarah garajkar kahtā hai, “Khudā ne tumheṁ islie paidā kiyā hai ki duniyā ko islām kī rośanī se rośan kar do, duniyā se kufr kā niśān miṭā do. Ek kāfir ke dil ko islām ke ujāle se rośan kar dene kā savāb sārī umr ke roje, namāz aur zakāt se kahīn zyādā hai. Jannat kī hūreṁ tumhārī balāeṁ leṅgī aur farište tumhāre kadamom kī khāk māthe par maleṅge, khudā tumhārī peśānī par bose degā.” Aur sārī jantā yah āvāz mazhab ke nārom se matvālī ho jātī hai. Usī dharmik uttejñā ne kufr aur islām kā bhed utpann kar diyā hai. Pratyek paṭhān jannat kā sukh bhogne ke lie adhīr ho uṭhā hai. Unhīn hinduom par, jo sadiyom se śānti ke sāth rahte the, hamle hone lage haiṁ.

Some mullah came along from who knows where and awakened religious feelings in those illiterate, irreligious Pathans. There was such sweetness in his tongue that he drew young and old, men and women to him. Roaring like a tiger, he would say, “God gave you life for this reason, that you should illuminate the world with the light of Islam, and remove all trace of the unbeliever from the world. The reward for bringing the light of Islam to the heart of one infidel is greater than that for a lifetime of prayer and alms giving. The virgins of paradise will sacrifice themselves for you, and the angels will cover their foreheads with the dust of your feet.” All the people got drunk on the sound of these religious slogans. That religious fervour gave birth to the difference between Islam and infidel. Every Pathan became impatient to experience these joys of heaven. And so they began attacking the Hindus, with whom they had lived in peace for centuries.³⁶

Premchand here depicts religiosity as a kind of intoxication – literally, that the populace became “intoxicated” (“*matvālī*”) by or drunk on religious slogans which represented, quite clearly, false religion. Hence the migration of Hindus away from the area. The story focuses on three young people in this human caravan – Dharmdas, Khazanchand and Shyama, the latter an object of affection for the first two – and their tragic encounter with their pursuers. While he gives a lot of attention to the plight and sorry state of this group of refugees, in fact Premchand’s focus is elsewhere. In some ways, he betrays a typically paternalistic concern with the common man; namely that, uneducated and therefore undiscerning, he could be easily swayed by the demagoguery of a zealot.

Indeed, this is a theme that is developed in the rest of the story, particularly through recourse to the (dis-)connection between religion (*mazhab*, *dharm*) and the mind

³⁶ ‘Jihād’, 173.

(‘*aql/akl*). The Arabic-derived ‘*aql* has multiple connotations, of course – with the mind itself, but also with wisdom, good or common sense, reason, knowledge and understanding.³⁷ Thus, when the Pathans have caught up to the story’s chief protagonist, Dharmdas, and offer him the choice of conversion to Islam or death, he protests, “*Jis bāt ko akl nahīm māntī, use kaise...*” (“That which the mind doesn’t accept, how should...”) to which comes the forceful and dismissive reply, “*Mazhab ko akl se koī vāstā nahīm.*” (“Religion has nothing to do with (/no connection with) the mind/reason.”).³⁸ Dharmdas does not so much accept this reasoning as he does acquiesce, and convert, in order to save his own life, but his friend Khazanchand manages instead to maintain his forceful rejection of forced conversion, again with recourse to the mind or intellect:

“Agar tum mujhe kāfir samjhe ho to samjho. Maiṁ apne ko tumse zyādā khudā-parast samajhtā hūṁ. Maiṁ us dharm ko māntā hūṁ, jiskī buniyād akl par hai. Ādmī meṁ akl hī khudā kā nūr hai aur hamārā imān hamārī akl...”

“If you want to think of me as a heathen, do so. But I consider myself more devoted to God than you. I accept that religion which is based on the mind (/discernment/judgement). Such discernment alone is God’s light in men, and our belief and our discernment...”³⁹

Premchand voices the Hindu Khazanchand’s conviction that he is a true devotee of god in Persianised and Islamic vocabulary – *khudā-parast* – which only serves to heighten the irony of the situation. Yet his firm commitment to reason, the mind, discernment – even free will – avails him not at all, and he is killed by the Pathans in front of Dharmdas and Shyama to cries of “*kāfir*” (“heathen”).

³⁷ ‘*Aql* has a central place in Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence, with reformers asserting that “*aql* as rationality is an integral aspect of Islam”. John Esposito ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (New York: OUP, 2003) 22.

³⁸ ‘*Jihād*’, 176.

³⁹ ‘*Jihād*’, 179.

Yet the conclusion of the story is in many ways about the re-establishment of the rule of *'aql* over intoxication and religious zealotry. The sorrow of Shyama at Khazanchand's death triggers feelings of remorse and guilt in the Pathans. Re-joining the caravan of Hindus, all return once again to the west, as "now there was no precondition of being a Muslim" (*"kyomkī ab musalmān hone kī śart na thī"*).⁴⁰ Only Dharmdas, a false convert, has no place, as his own feelings of guilt and self-loathing preclude his reintegration into the life of the town. After absconding from daily prayers, he takes to a solitary life and, after a final, rejected appeal to Shyama for forgiveness and acceptance, is found dead at the side of the road. Thus, what could initially appear as a problematic, if not inflammatory, story of Muslim aggression against Hindus is anything but. Both Khazanchand and Dharmdas made their appeal not to any sanctity or superiority of Hinduism *per se*, but instead to that shared and cherished Islamic and Enlightenment ideal of *'aql* or reason and logic (although it is a decidedly romantic intervention that saps the Pathans' of their violent urge to convert, in the form of Shyama's distress and sorrow). Moreover, the blame for this violence and hatred is vested squarely in the mullah who appears at the start of the story (combined with, as I have suggested, Premchand's apparent mistrust of the discernment of the crowd). No further mention is made of him; when Hindus and Pathans alike return to the town and resume their normal, former lives together, he is conspicuous by his absence. The fault, in this story, lies not with a group of people defined by their religious identity, but rather with the demagoguery of religious zealots, without whom the ideal of peaceful coexistence can, it is hoped, resume.

⁴⁰ 'Jihād', 182.

In constructing such a narrative, Premchand comes close to a romanticised view of the village or rural idyll that was so prominent in Gandhi's thought. Yet this literary emphasis on pre-existing communal harmony and coexistence is a well-crafted device that comes some twenty years before comparable evocations in Partition literature. Moreover, by constructing the division between excessive or misguided religiosity on one hand, and reasoned (or even enlightened!) tolerance on the other, the decidedly areligious Premchand put forth a humanist critique of violence and discord by calling not for a removal of religion in its entirety, but rather a different and implicitly pre-existing brand of acceptance and religious tolerance.

3.II.4 'HIMSĀ PARMO DHARM': THE POSSESSOR OF VIRTUE

Finally, and briefly, I turn to Premchand's story 'Himsā Parmo Dharm' ('Violence is the Supreme Religion'). The central character, Jamid, is the naïve hero of the story. His philosophy is summed up when he says, "The lord is the lord of everyone – whether Hindu or Muslim!" ("Ṭhākurjī to sabke ṭhākurjī hai - kyā hindū, kyā musalmān!").⁴¹ His musings on his religious activities in his village reveal him to be a Muslim who, with a fine singing voice, regularly participated in the singing of *kirtan* in the village temple. The village temple then is a Hindu space in which members of both faiths participate, a situation that is in stark contrast to that which Jamid encounters in the city. When he is found sitting in the temple by a group of worshippers, his village innocence is exploited and he is held up to be a convert from Islam to Hinduism. He is prized as such, and becomes something of an exhibit

⁴¹ Premchand, 'Himsa Parmo Dharm', 84.

in the temple. Later, however, when he intervenes to stop a young Hindu man beating an elderly Muslim, he is beaten by that same young man in return and, according to the other witnesses to the event, reveals his true (that is, inner or Muslim) nature by daring to stand up to this 'real' Hindu adorned as he is with marks of virtue.

Our innocent, then, is Premchand's depiction of the common man as the possessor of virtue. He has no understanding of the tension between religious groups as experienced during his time in the modern, urban setting, coming as he does from a background that, from his perception at least, makes little or no meaningful distinction between religious identities. He is the ultimate naïve hero who cannot apprehend the reality of the situations in which he finds himself. However, Jamid's is a naïveté which we are supposed to admire and sympathise with, as it stands as a utopian antidote to the violence and mistrust of combative religiosity in the urban environment.

There are other characters in 'Hiṃsā' who articulate aspects of religious tension. A significant passage comes towards the end of the story, with an argument between a Hindu woman and the Muslim *kājī/qāzī* who had taken Jamid in after his altercation. She is taken to the house mistakenly and the Qazi makes plain his intention to abduct her, converting her by force to Islam. His defence is that Hindus have already kidnapped and raped many Muslim women, and he portrays his actions as self-defence of the Muslim population. The Hindu woman's assertion that only the lowest class of Hindus could possibly have done such a thing does not dissuade the Qazi from taking this *badlā* ('exchange' – used here in the

sense of ‘revenge’, and later of ‘compensation’).⁴² Only with Jamid’s intervention is the woman released and returned to her home. Her grateful husband insists on *nekī kā badlā*, compensation for kindness, but Jamid asks only that he refrain from *śārārat kā badlā*, revenge for wickedness. Jamid’s message of innocence then is a call to break the cycle of revenge and, with his return to the village, an evocation of the potential of communal harmony and peaceful coexistence.⁴³ His innocence allows the reader to imagine an alternative to the religious violence that wracked the cities of India in this period, facilitating a suspension of cynicism and a yearning for simplicity.

3.II.5 PREMCHAND’S HUMANISM

The programmatic nature of the stories considered here is obvious. Premchand would hardly have objected to such a description: he was resolute in his belief that literature had a purpose – that it *had* to have a purpose – and that purpose was social reform in the broadest and most holistic sense. Indeed, as Amrit Rai has noted with regard to ‘Mandir aur Masjid’ and ‘Muktidhan’, Premchand wrote stories that were “highly idealistic, and quite unashamedly and unapologetically so.”⁴⁴

⁴² The woman says “*Sambhav hai, tum logon̄ kī śārāratom̄ se taṅg ākar nice darje ke log is tarah badlā lene lage hon̄; magar ab bhī koī saccā hindū ise pasand nahīm kartā.*” (“It is possible that some low-class people may have taken such revenge having become fed up with your wickedness; but even so, no true Hindu would approve of this.”) ‘Himsā’, 89.

⁴³ It would be easy to see Premchand’s perhaps overly neat binary as a Gandhian eulogy for the village and the rural against the modern and impersonal spectre of the city and urban; however, it is worth remembering that Premchand was no blind romantic as regards village life, as works such as ‘Kafan’ (The Shroud) demonstrate.

⁴⁴ Amrit Rai, *Premchand: His Life and Times* tr. Harish Trivedi (New Delhi: OUP, 2002 [1982]) 211.

Reflecting on several of the same stories (particularly ‘Mandir aur Masjid’ and ‘Muktidhan’, along with ‘Vicitra Holī’), Geetanjali Pandey concludes that, while he was undeniably in favour of peaceful coexistence, Premchand created a paradigm of amalgamation that was distinctly one-way and one-sided. By depicting a Muslim who bathes in the Ganges, another who loved his cow, and others joining in the singing of *bhajans* and playing of *holi*, yet all the while failing to write about the similarly syncretic potential of Muslim festivals and modes of reverence, Premchand showed himself to be “influenced by a ‘Hindu’ mode of apprehending the contemporary social reality, without quite realising that in the process the Muslims had been bypassed or treated as the ‘other’.”⁴⁵ These are certainly valid points, and well made, but there seems to me a danger in over-reading Premchand’s programme here. Certainly, Premchand was not free of the pervasive narrative of a fall from a former ‘Golden Age’, effected by successive Muslim and English invasions, that had resulted in India’s present, sorry state. Yet while Premchand wrote from within the social milieu with which he was most familiar, he was vehemently critical of what he perceived as the excesses and evils of Hindu religious and social practices. Moreover, the very premise of these stories is that there should be mutual tolerance and support of all forms of religious expression. The character of Daudayal makes this explicit: just as Rahman showed an inadvertent respect of the moneylender’s Hindu beliefs, so he was willing and able to support the farmer in his religious activities, and viewed the two as equal in value, both moral and fiscal.

⁴⁵ Geetanjali Pandey, ‘North Indian Intelligentsia and Hindu-Muslim Question: A Study of Premchand’s Writings’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19;38 (22 September 1984) 1664-70, 1669.

Commenting on ‘Himsā Parmo Dharm’, Sisir Kumar Das suggested that “[t]he kind of humanism that Jamid represents is certainly a component of all religions”⁴⁶ – the central tenet, in many ways, of Premchand’s critique of communalism articulated in his fiction. Das saw these stories as part of Premchand’s effort to “[construct] a fable of Hindu-Muslim unity...[and create] a body of literature projecting the historical experience of a multireligious community.”⁴⁷ And this, then, is rather the point: Premchand did not advocate abolishing religion in these stories, but instead evolved a sustained critique of both the excesses of religion and the divisions propagated through simplistic binaries of religious identity through a language and idiom that was profoundly religious. That he did so consistently across the nominal divide between Hindi and Urdu short story writing only makes his contribution all the more relevant. His characterisations challenged the idea that an individual’s religion was the key determinant or even component of his identity. His deep concern with nationalism prompted a focus on the human-as-individual as a way to overcome the increasing divisions between Hindu and Muslim, and to pave the way for another criteria to take pride of place in the construction of identity: Indianness.

3.III SECULAR SATIRE: UGRA’S ANTI-EXTREMISM

Pandey Bechan Sharma Ugra’s place in the Hindi literary canon is more ambiguous than that of Premchand, and his relationship to the mainstream of Hindi writers and critics

⁴⁶ Sisir Kumar Das, *History*, 358.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 357.

during his lifetime was strained.⁴⁸ As his choice of penname suggests ('extreme'), Ugra revelled in the controversies he could and did provoke through his writings. He himself couched this choice in terms of nationalism and patriotism – "...forty years ago, patriotic writers chose harsh pennames to make the cruel rulers of the powerful British empire tremble at these names"⁴⁹ – yet, while he undoubtedly expressed strong anti-imperial sentiments in his writings, and was even imprisoned for them, his literary extremism stretched far beyond the confines of this issue alone, into social taboos and controversial themes. Though one of the most popular authors of his generation, Ugra maintained an antagonistic relationship with many prominent writers and critics. He pithily characterised his literary undertakings thus: "...doing the work I know how to do, in various ways, for my own satisfaction – setting fires and burning trash."⁵⁰ The metaphor of fire echoes the charges levelled against him for his "obscene" writings during a particularly acrimonious period following his 1924-27 publication of a series of stories on male homosexuality. Serialised in the Calcutta-based Hindi journal *Matvālā*, and published together as the collection *Cākleṭ* ('Chocolate'), the stories created a storm: denounced as *ghasleṭī* or inflammatory by luminaries such as Banarasidas Chaturvedi, and defended by Ugra and his supporters as exposing a real social ill to didactic effect, the stories demonstrate perfectly not only Ugra's ability to combine entertainment with censure, but

⁴⁸ Biographical details on Ugra are drawn primarily from his autobiography: Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra', *Apnī Khabar* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1984 [1960]), tr. Ruth Vanita, *About Me* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2007). References here are to Vanita's English translation.

⁴⁹ Ugra, *About Me*, 111.

⁵⁰ Ugra, *About Me*, 143. Vanita notes the devotional overtones of the phrase "*svāntaḥsukhāya*", for personal satisfaction, through which Ugra implies the selfless, if not almost transcendental nature of his devotion to literature (see notes 78, 112).

perhaps most importantly his deft understanding of publicity and popularity.⁵¹ *Matvālā* ('The Intoxicated One'), and the group of writers associated with it, provided Ugra with a fertile and favourable forum in which to cultivate his literary radicalism. One anonymous contributor characterised the journal's chief purpose as "convening the literary wrestling match", juxtaposing this with Chaturvedi's own journal *Viśāl Bhārat* ('Mighty India'), which apparently existed to "promote colonialism, and sniff at obscenity, etc."⁵² The full extent of that journal's radicalism deserves further investigation; suffice it to say, we have in Ugra a writer who courted controversy, who was encouraged to do so, and who therefore engaged with the most provocative and compelling themes on a regular basis in his literature.

Provocative is an apt description for another of Ugra's works – the epistolary novel *Cand Hasīnom ke Khutūt* ('Letters from Beautiful People'). Published in 1927, it told the story of an inter-communal love affair, set against the backdrop of the Hindu-Muslim riots that had engulfed Calcutta in the previous year. As Francesca Orsini has shown, the polarised reactions to this hugely popular novel accurately reflect the ambiguity that lay at the heart of the book; the heady admixture of apparently realistic and yet all-consuming passion with a convincing plea for social reform was appreciated by some, while others decried the covering up of unsuitable material in the cloak of an "ostensible serious aim".⁵³ This of course is strikingly similar to the divided opinions with which *Cākleṭ* was greeted by the

⁵¹ For a more detailed account of the episode, and a translation of the stories, see Ruth Vanita tr. and 'Introduction', Pandey Becchan Sharma Ugra, *Chocolate, and Other Writings on Male-Male Desire* (New Delhi: OUP, 2006). See also the brief analysis in Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 164-6.

⁵² Anon., 'Kuch Hindī Patra-patrikāem aur unke uddeśyā', *Matvālā* (23 March 1929) 53.

⁵³ See Francesca Orsini, 'Reading a social romance: *Cand hasīnom ke khutūt*' in Vasudha Dalmia and Theo Damsteegt eds. *Narrative Strategies: Essays on South Asian Literature and Film* (New Delhi: OUP, 1999 [Leiden: CNWS, 1998]) 185-210.

literary establishment, with the dangers of titillation and entertainment defended for the sake of exposing and discussing urgent social issues. This was clearly a powerful formula for Ugra, deployed several times in his writings and enjoying broader support in the pages of *Matvālā*, which regularly added propagandist fuel to the apparently profitable fire (the proprietor of the journal, Mahavir Prasad Seth, was also the publisher of many of Ugra's stories).⁵⁴ Yet, if we accept that such social romances could be and were used to subvert discourses of social reform to purposes of entertainment, popularity, and profitability – and I suggest we should – we should also recognise the moments in Ugra's oeuvre when issues of national import were aired outside such morally ambiguous contexts.

With this in mind, I turn to another significant collection of his stories published shortly after the inflammatory-albeit-reformist *Cāklet* and titillating-albeit-reformist *Cand Hasīnom*. Entitled *Dozakḥ kī Āg* ('The Fires of Hell'), this 1928 publication constituted an important and forthright literary intervention into questions of Hindu-Muslim relations and their deterioration.⁵⁵ The stories in the collection touch on communal issues as played

⁵⁴ See, for instance, a selection of articles from 1928-9: supportive opinions on Ugra and his stories were reprinted, attacks on Ugra and his works were vilified, and Ugra himself defended his subjects and style, while attacking his detractors e.g. in *Matvālā*: 'Cāklet par pakṣ aur vipakṣ kī rāem' (8 September 1928) 10; 'Ugra likhit krāntikāriṇī, pustakem' (20 October 1928) 10 and (10 November 1928) 10; 'Sri Baman', 'Ghāsleṭī yā Cākletī?' (17 November 1928) 6-7; Mukharji, 'Cāklet Āndolan par' (22 December 1928) 12-4; 'Ugra ko Phāmsī dī jāy' (29 December 1928) 6-9; 'Hindī kī sarvaśreṣṭh māsik patrikā Sarasvatikī sammati Cāklet-āndolan yā Ugra-sākitya par' (2 February 1929) 15. The standard tag-line in adverts for his works during this period ran: "Ugra likhit sacitra vicitra krāntikāri kahāniyām aur upanyās" ("Illustrated, surprising, revolutionary stories and novels by Ugra"), capitalizing on his notoriety.

⁵⁵ Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra', *Dozakḥ kī Āg* (Mirzapur: Bisvin Sadi Pustakalaya, 1928). The stories included in this volume were: 'Dozakḥ kī Āg', 'Dillī kī Bāt', 'Dozakḥ! Narak!!', 'Āmḥom meḥ Āmsū', 'Īsvardrohī', 'Kḥudā ke sāmne', 'Śāp', and 'Kḥudārām'. I make reference to all of these excepting 'Āmḥom...', but use a recent and more readily available edition of Ugra's collected works for ease of reference. See Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra', *Śreṣṭh Racnāem* vols. 1 and 2 (Delhi: Atmaram and Sons,

out in some of the most important areas of day-to-day life and as they intersected with debates of long-standing and national significance, including cow protection, conversion and music before mosques.⁵⁶ The issue of romance is largely absent: in only one of the stories does any suggestion of a Hindu-Muslim love affair exist, and it is rather tangential to the main thrust of the narrative. Instead, the collection marks a satirical *tour de force* by the yet young Ugra, whereby the various reasons for disharmony, disunion and even violence are exposed as convenient pretexts, and the divisive tenets of religion are subordinated to the putatively shared and universal values of a transcendental humanism. Ugra expressed his personal ambivalence towards his own nominal religion, Hinduism, or at least to his caste status, in his autobiography⁵⁷; in these stories, however, a pronounced scepticism counters any and all religious pronouncements that do not advocate either the unity of the divine or the commonality of humankind. As I examine below, Ugra repeatedly directs his affective satires towards debunking what he sets up as myths and misapprehensions: that co-religionists constitute a natural source of help; that one religion or the other offers privileged access to or understanding of the divine; and, crucially for this discussion, that distinctions based on language and linked to religion are of any value whatsoever.

2003). Several if not all of the stories in the collection were probably published originally in *Matvālā* before the collection was released.

⁵⁶ For an informative study of these and other issues, and the importance of debates surrounding them to the intellectual history of secularism in South Asia, see Tejani, *Indian Secularism*.

⁵⁷ See Ugra, *About Me*, 18-9.



Figure 3.1 Plates from the 1929 edition of *Dozakh ki Āg*, clockwise from top left: ‘Dozakh ki Āg’; ‘Īśvardrohī’; ‘Dozakh! Narak!!’; ‘Khudārām’.

As we shall see, register becomes another tool that Ugra employs to establish a common ground between the communities, based on substantive argumentation, rationality, or even fantastical escapism. The language of Ugra’s humanism is here a language of religiosity, in a composite register, and important as such. It is in works such as this that we can locate the early modern vernacular articulations of popular “secular” sentiments: sentiments that draw on the panentheistic traditions and idioms of *nirguṇa bhakti* and Sufism, but that have little if anything to do with understandings of secularism as an absence or disavowal of religion as such. As I show, Ugra articulated his critique of communalism through a religiously infused satirical idiom that was both provocative and powerful.

3.III.1 THE MYTH OF COMMUNITY

One of the words that Ugra employs with some frequency in this collection is *abhāgā*, or its feminine nominative form *abhāgini*: ill fated, unfortunate, and helpless describes at least one character in many of the stories. Quite naturally, these characters are often depicted as searching for help, be it financial or otherwise. Yet time and again, Ugra uses these pleas for assistance to suggest that, contrary to expectations, one cannot rely on religious or communal commonality to provoke sympathy and assistance. Instead, these helpless characters are often spurned by their co-religionists, if not actively brought low by them, and find instead their help coming from a benevolent member of the opposite community.

The most prominent example of this comes at the start of ‘Īśvardrohī’ (‘Apostate’). A young Muslim woman of noble lineage is begging on the streets of Calcutta. Finding a young Muslim man, she asks for help in religiously inflected language (“*Khudā ke nām par, bare miyām, kuch raham ho*”/“In the name of God, sir, show some compassion”: the relationship between *raham*, compassion, and *rahmān*, compassionate and one of the names of Allah, is not lost).⁵⁸ This appeal to shared religiosity is unsuccessful however: she detects in the man’s suggestion that she come to his house to receive his largesse a quite obvious ulterior motive. Refusing to accompany him, she turns instead to what he indicates is a Muslim home: instead, she finds the house of Gopal and his son Ram. There is an instant attraction between the two young people, and a humorous exchange where she insists, despite evidence to the contrary, that Ram must be a Muslim. The key exchange comes when Gopal, having heard her story, takes pity on her:

⁵⁸ Ugra, ‘Īśvardrohī’, in *Śreṣṭh Racnāem* 1, 385-96, 385.

Yuvak ke bābūjī ne kahā, “Is ghar meṁ rahogī, beṭī?”

“Maim̄ musalmān hūm̄.”

“Kōī harj nahīn̄. Musalmān bhī ādmī hai, hindū bhī. Maim̄ ādmīparast hūm̄, hindū yā musalmānparast nahīn̄. Tumheṁ agar kōī etrāz na ho to is ghar meṁ tumhāre lie bahut jagah hai.”

Bhikhārin̄ kī nice jhukī huī ānkhoṁ̄ ūpar uṭhīn̄. Vṛddh̄ kī ānkhoṁ̄ ne dekhā us abhāginī ke netron̄ meṁ ek itihās thā jise ‘hindū’ nahīn̄, ‘musalmān’ yā ‘īsāī’ bhī nahīn̄, keval ‘ādmī’ hī parh̄ saktā thā!⁵⁹

The young man’s father said, “Will you stay in this house, daughter?”

“I am a Muslim.”

“That isn’t a problem. Muslims are human beings, just as Hindus. I am a devotee of humans, not of Hindus or Muslims. If you have no objection, then there is plenty of space in this house for you.”

The poor woman’s lowered eyes lifted. The old man saw that there was a history in her eyes that, rather than ‘Hindu’, ‘Muslim’, or even ‘Christian’, could only be read as ‘human’!

This humanism – here in the form of sympathy for a young woman regardless of her religion – is reaffirmed throughout the story: the roots of Gopal’s agnosticism, or apostasy, are detailed, with his own dubious and mixed-caste parentage revealed by his adoptive father on his death bed, and the deceit practiced by a middle-aged Brahmin woman that he employs after his wife’s death again suggesting the irrelevance of shared religiosity when it comes to matters of trust (“...bād ko yah̄ anubhāv̄ kar kī brāhmaṇī devī ‘rām dohāī’ aur ‘bhagvān jānem̄’ kī āṛ meṁ Rāmjī ke hisse kā dūdh, ghī aur makkhan̄ apne yā apne baccom̄ ke masraf meṁ lātī haim̄...”⁶⁰ / “...later he discovered that this Brahmin goddess, under the cover of praising lord Ram and invoking god, was taking his son Ram’s share of milk, ghee and butter for herself or her own children...”). Yet his agnosticism is a gentle one: he engages in playful debates with his religiously minded son and his own Muslim, Maulvi friend. This theme of help coming not from members of one’s own religious community is echoed time and again in the collection.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 388-9.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 391.

In fact, it is the very act of providing assistance to a member of the opposite community, albeit unknowingly, that sets the stage for the events in the somewhat fantastical ‘*Khudārām*’.⁶¹ Ulfat Ali, who previously went by the name of Devanandan, is forced by his fellow Hindus to convert to Islam when he is judged to have been polluted by the presence of a Muslim serving girl in his home. Despite his attempts at purification, he is held to be beyond redemption:

Prāyaścitt kī carcā calne par, vyavasthā ke lie, purohit aur paṇḍitoṃ kī pukār huī. Bas, brahmaṇoṃ ne cāroṃ ved, chahoṃ śāstra, chattisoṃ smṛti aur aṭhārahoṃ purāṇoṃ kā mat lekar yah vyavasthā dī ki ‘ab Devanandan pūre mlecc ho gae. Vah kisī tarah bhī hindū nahīn ho sakte.’

At this discussion of atonement, there was a call to action for the family priests and pandits to provide an opinion. Finally the Brahmins, having consulted the four Vedas, six Shastras, thirty-six Smritis and eighteen Puranas, gave their interpretation: “Devanandan has become a total non-believer. He cannot be a Hindu in any way.”⁶²

The Muslims of the *qasbah* welcome Devanandan and his family, and so the ground is laid for his son’s desire to reconvert to Hinduism upon the arrival of the Arya Samaj and their programme of purification.

Betrayal by one’s own community figures prominently in what could be the most ridiculous story of the collection, ‘*Dillī kī Bāt*’ (‘The Matter of Delhi’).⁶³ Rather, it is the premise that is ridiculous: Muhammad Ali Jinnah implores Gandhi to help him with a young man of the city who, inspired by his mother, has been stirring up communal tensions and is intent on killing as many Hindus as possible. The bulk of the story is taken up with the mother recounting to a disbelieving Gandhi and Jinnah her story: how she was formerly a

⁶¹ Ugra, ‘*Khudārām*’, in *Śreṣṭh Racnāem* 1, 415-25. The title of this story affords no easy direct translation: it is an amalgamation of the Persian-derived *khudā*, meaning god, and the Sanskrit *rām*, being both the name of the Hindu god Rama and a common, particularly poetic, shorthand for god, especially in *nirguṇa bhakti*. So, ‘God-god’.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 417.

⁶³ Ugra, ‘*Dillī kī Bāt*’, in *Śreṣṭh Racnāem* 1, 372-8.

Hindu woman, married, widowed, became pregnant with her brother-in-law's child, and was cast out of the family home. Arriving in Benares, she is taken in by a kindly Mullah, and converts to Islam: as such, she directs her ire and desire for revenge towards her former co-religionists, and instils the same hatred in her son.

We could examine other instances of betrayal by one's co-religionists: the mistreatment of the protagonist's wife by his fellow Muslims after his death in 'Dozakh kī Āg'; or the killing of Ishak by his fellow Muslims when he attempts to prevent them from killing a cow belonging to the local holy man in 'Śāp' ('The Curse'). Likewise, there are other instances of help being rendered to the helpless by members of the opposite community: the nameless young Hindu man pictured entering into heaven at the end of 'Dozakh! Narak!!' ('Hell! Hell!!'), his reward for sacrificing his life defending a Muslim during the riots in Calcutta; or the richly evocative passage wherein the Hindu Nastik (whose name itself translates as unbeliever, atheist, or sceptic) is killed protecting his Muslim friend's wife from a group of young Muslim rioters in 'K̄hudā ke sāmne' ('In front of God').⁶⁴ The point to take away is this: time and again, Ugra demonstrates the irrelevance, or at least the limits, of shared religious affiliation when it comes to practical matters, particularly here of trust, charity and compassion. In the imaginative universe of this collection, both self-interest on one hand and a natural empathy on the other will reliably trump religious considerations. This relegation of religion to a position of secondary importance presents

⁶⁴ In this passage, the Hindu Nastik is compared to a mosque, and his murder to its demolition: "Dekhte-dekhte saikaṛom musalmān us akele vyakti par tūt̄ par̄e aur k̄ṣaṇ-bhar mer̄ un rak̄ṣasom̄ ne k̄hudā kī us saccī masjid ko girākar dhūl mer̄ milā diyā!" Ugra, 'K̄hudā ke sāmne', in *Śreṣṭh Racnāem* 1, 397-404, 404.

proofs both positive and negative of the areligious humanism that permeates these stories. In many ways, Ugra's more cynical and satirical attitude towards these issues is the flip-side of Premchand's more optimistic perspective. That said, in depicting relations of real worth as being between members of different religions, Ugra strongly implies the irrelevance of religion as a privileged constituent of community, a feature he clearly shares with Premchand.

3.III.2 WHILE DOGS FIGHT OVER SCRAPS OF RELIGION: THE SUBVERSION OF DIVINE WILL

*Mazhab ka tukrā bic merī phenkkar kutte laṛ gae aur lage khudā kī khudāi kī chīchāledar karne – īsvar ke astitva par dāmt garāne! Jhagrā śurū kaise huā zarā uskā itihās bhī sunie.*⁶⁵

The dogs were fighting over a scrap of religion, tossing it amongst themselves, and it was as if they were chewing God's godliness – sinking their teeth into God's existence! Just listen to the tale of how this fight began.

Metaphors such as this have an obvious, and particularly shocking, aspect. The idea that religion, or the holiness of both the Islamic *khudā* and the Hindu *īsvar*, could be fought over by dogs, the most unclean of animals, produces a jarring and disquieting effect. This is only heightened by Ugra's self-evident implication, that the dogs are in fact people who, in fighting over and for religion, achieve nothing but its debasement. While his frequent suggestions that compassion and/or self-interest come irrespective of religious affiliations build the case for a humanism that supersedes religious considerations and serve to devalue religious affiliation as a marker and maker of community, another strand of denunciation and condemnation runs through this collection that is much more forceful and explicit. In story after story, Ugra strongly condemns any kind of religiously motivated or inspired

⁶⁵ Ibid., 401.

violence as a corruption of scripture or divine ordinance; on more than one occasion, he puts this condemnation into the voice of god, at times articulating what approaches a kind of panentheism,⁶⁶ and presents a single united supreme being who is the same for Hindus, Muslims and Christians alike.

On a worldly level, a variety of Ugra's characters challenge those who advocate violence against others based on their religion. Consider the following passage from 'Īśvardrohī', wherein Gopal discusses his adopted Muslim daughter with his friend, Maulvi Sadaatullah:

Maulvi: "The Muslims of the neighbourhood know that this daughter of yours is not a Hindu."

Gopal: "So? What does this mean?"

Maulvi: "I don't know what it means. Certainly, people are saying amongst themselves that they should demand her from you, and then return her once again to the faith of Islam. Muslims can't stand to look at their offspring living in the house of a Hindu, like a Hindu."

"Ha ha ha ha!" Laughing loudly Gopal said, "Where were these Muslims on the day that poor woman was starving to death? Where was the faith of Islam on the day when that dog who calls himself a Muslim was hell-bent on soiling her spotless skirts? Really, my friend! Malice, devilry, villainy and aggression: their name is not the 'faith of Islam'. Why are you so set on defaming God and religion?"

[The discussion continues: the Maulvi suggests these people appreciate the true value of their religion, while Gopal counters that people should appreciate instead the true value of other people. He reaffirms his atheism, and equates distinctions based on religion to those based on clothes: simple, and irrelevant. Concluding, he remarks:...]

"...Fighting over clothes is neither Muslim-ness nor Hindu-ness: it is donkey-ness!"

Turning serious, the Maulvi asked, "And if riots break out here in Calcutta, what will you do?"

"I will take the side of the weak, help the innocent, and fight the villains."

"And who will these villains be?"

"Whoever starts a fight and stirs up violence. Be they Hindu or Muslim, it doesn't matter."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ I use "panentheism" as perhaps the most suitable descriptor of the brands of religiosity described and advocated both in the poetry of, for instance, the 15th century *nirgun bhakti* poet Kabir and Ugra's depiction of a shared divinity. It is a conception of the divine that encapsulates both the monotheism suggested by some of these writings (that the divine is one, albeit worshipped and apprehended in differing ways), along with its simultaneous immanence and transcendence.

⁶⁷ Ugra, 'Īśvardrohī', 392-3. Given the length of the passage, I have omitted the original in this one instance. The translation from the Hindi is mine.

The suggestion that local Muslims might take the girl, his adopted daughter, from him in order to restore her faith is ridiculous to Gopal. For him, the proponents of such actions are hypocrites: loudly talking about religion and propriety, yet failing to show the most basic values of compassion and charity. Despite his own atheism, Gopal is forthright in denouncing religiously motivated violence (“Malice, devilry, etc.”) as a perversion of faith. This defence of Islam, coming from a nominally or culturally Hindu character, is all the more significant for its provenance. It echoes in many ways Premchand’s insistence, most notably in ‘Kṣamā’/‘Afū’, on distinguishing between a religious community and an individual who happens to profess a particular faith (see §3.II.2 above). Crucially, this is not to say that violence in and of itself is wholly abhorrent to the character of Gopal: as he clearly suggests, it is justifiable on the basis of defence of the innocent and helpless, but it can never be justified through or for religion.

This is a theme that Ugra develops throughout the collection. The character of Nastik in ‘*Kḥudā ke samne*’ is welcomed in gatherings of both communities, Hindu and Muslim – able to ‘pass’, as it were. Yet, in spite of his long standing access to and acceptance in both groups, he increasingly finds his attitudes of acceptance and tolerance are increasingly in the minority. In multiple situations, he is confronted with the suggestion that the only way to defend a religion is to attack the practitioners of the other. One “*sanātani*”, or orthodox Hindu, suggests that such violence would be a prelude to a more insidious violence against Muslim woman, specifically the daughter of the neighbourhood cigarette vendor, while a young Muslim insists that the only way to deal with the music played by Hindus during prayers in the mosque is through direct, and if

needs be violent, confrontation.⁶⁸ Nastik counters these suggestions vehemently, and consistently in the language of non-aggression. Moreover, he soundly rejects the suggestion that this kind of violence would in any way serve religious ends. He rather cuttingly suggests that if the orthodox Hindu is happy to rape Muslim women, he should not be scared of marrying them openly.⁶⁹ And his response to the young Muslim is particularly scathing:

Maimne mānā hindu ghaltī par hairī, par us ghaltī ke lie khūm-rezī karnā kahān tak durust hogā, yah kaun kah saktā hai? Hinduon ke ghanṭe kī āvāz ko sunī-ansunī kar apne khudā ko yād karnā acchā hai yā sir-phuṭavval kar masjid aur mandiron meṁ kisī tīsre hath se tāle lagvānā? Agar kānse ke ghanṭe kī āvāz khudā kī yād ko āpke dilon meṁ nahīm āne detī to cāndī ke ghanṭe kī āvāz to āpke allāh ko khatm kar degī. Āp masjid meṁ namāz parhne ke lie āte hairī yā ghanṭe sunne? Itnā kamzor khudā hai – aisā nāzuk imān!*

I accept that the Hindus are in the wrong, but who can possibly say that bloodshed is the appropriate response to their wrongdoing? Is it better to remember your own god, regardless of whether you hear the bells of the Hindus or not, or to go to no end of trouble and have mosque and temple closed by another's hand? If the sound of bronze bells prevents the memory of your god from coming into your hearts, then the sound of silver bells will finish your Allah off. Do you come to the mosque to pray or listen to bells? How weak god is – such fragile faith!⁷⁰

The sarcastic, satirical implication is clear: it is not God who is weak, but rather it is the faith of those whose prayer to and remembrance of God cannot withstand the sound of bells, and who seek an excuse for bloodshed, that is in question.

The character of Khudaram is one of the most interesting in the collection: able to work miracles, yet apparently subscribing to no religion in particular beyond a loosely conceived humanism, he is distinctly unimpressed by the proposal of the Hindus and Arya Samajis in the town to hold a procession of the Vedas and meet with force any who would try to

⁶⁸ Ugra, 'Khudā ke samne', 398 & 400.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 399.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 400. The 1929 edition has *phoṛavval* instead of *phuṭavval*.

prevent the reconversion of Inayat Ali to Hinduism. Speaking with the head of the Arya

Samaj in the town, he reflects:

“Soc rahā hūm, ki kyā upāy karūm, ki khudā-khudā meṁ laṛāī na ho. Tum log laṛoge?”

“Nahīm, laṛne kā vicar nahīm hai, par, savārī zarūr niklegī.”

“Khānā nahīm khāūmḡā, par muṁh meṁ kaur zarūr ḡālūmḡā. Hā hā hā hā! Yahī matlab hai na?”

“Lācārī hai, Khudārām.”

“To dharm ke nām par khūn kī nadī bahegī? Hā hā hā hā! Tum log insān kyoṁ hue? Tumheṁ to bhālū honā cāhie thā, śer honā cāhie thā, bheṛiyā honā cāhie thā. Vaisī avasthā meṁ tumhārī rakt-pīpāsā maje meṁ śānt hotī. Dharm ke nām par laṛne vale insān kyoṁ hote haim?”⁷¹

“I am thinking, what should I do to prevent a fight between gods. Will you fight?”

“No, we have no thoughts to fight, but the procession will certainly go out.”

“I won’t eat food, but I will fill my mouth. Hahahaha! This is your meaning, isn’t it?”

“We have no choice, Khudaram.”

“So you will make a river of blood in the name of religion? Hahahaha! Why were you made men? You should have been bears, or tigers, or donkeys. There would be peace in your taste for bloodthirst in such a condition. Why are there men who fight in the name of religion?”

In this story, violence in the name of religion is similarly condemned as in ‘Khudā ke sāmne’, though perhaps more strongly satirised. Eventually, albeit improbably, Khudaram does manage to prevent bloodshed: when the two groups of men, Hindu and Muslim, are on the point of fighting, he leads a procession of the town’s women and children who unite against their menfolk, turning them from violence at the last moment. The use of the women and children is a humanist appeal against the irrational frenzy of religion. Not only this, but Ugra’s satirical questioning points us towards a more fundamental humanistic concern with the very nature of mankind and its behaviour.⁷²

Beyond echoing the idea of men as animals, fighting over religion, and resembling the passage from ‘Khudā ke samne’ quoted above, the exchange also invites speculation as to why man was created with the capacity for such violence. This is a question raised

⁷¹ Ugra, ‘Khudārām’, 422.

⁷² The possibilities for a gendered reading of this and other stories does not escape me, but for the sake of the present discussion I have chosen to foreground other issues.

directly by an anthropomorphised Dharma in ‘Dozakh! Narak!!’ before God, in the court setting in which both Hindu and Muslim stand accused of murder:

Dharm ne bhī āṁkhorī meī āṁsū bharkar pāp ke bayān ka samarthan kiyā magar in śabdorī ke sath:

“Prabho! Ismeṁ inkā kyā aprādh hai? Tum manuṣyom ko itnā durbal banāte hī kyom ho? Saṁsār ko hatyā, raktpāt hāhākar aur vidveṣ kā dān tumne nahīm to aur kisne diyā hai? Yah aprādhī haim zarūr, magar aise aprādhīyom se saṁsār bharā huā hai.”⁷³

Religion, with tear-filled eyes, agreed with Sin’s account, but added these words:

“Lord! What is their crime here? Why do you make men so weak? If you haven’t given the gifts of murder, bloodthirstiness, uproar, and enmity to the world, then who has? These are criminals, certainly, but the world is filled with such criminals.”

Yet this defence of human beings by ‘Religion’ is utterly ineffective – both are condemned by God in the harshest terms, before being sentenced to eternity in hell – and its allegorical function, to any defence of violence based on religious principles, is obvious. The terms used by this God figure, who posits himself as the god of Hindus, Muslims and Christians alike, are unambiguous: religion is not religion that justifies murder; murder is the work of devil worshippers, not devotees of god. Ultimately, God suggests that every religion is false, while containing a portion of truth, and that if you want to find the true god, you waste your time looking for him in temple, mosque or church (the resonance with *nirguṇa bhakti* is obvious). This is an extended version of the brief encounter with god that comes at the end of ‘*Khudā ke samne*’: confused, the deceased Hindu and Muslim rioters find themselves before the same god, at a house that resembles neither mosque nor temple:

Musalmānorī ne fariṣtorī se pūchā, “Kyā yahī khudā hai?”

Hinduom ne yamdūtom se pūchā, “Kyā yahī parameśvar hai?”

Parameśvar ne muskarākar kahā, “Tum mujhe nahīm pahcān sake.”⁷⁴

The Muslims asked the angels, “Is this Allah?”

The Hindus asked Yama’s messengers, “Is this the supreme lord?”

⁷³ Ugra, ‘Dozakh! Narak!!’, 382-3.

⁷⁴ Ugra, ‘*Khudā ke samne*’, 404.

God smiled and said, “You couldn’t possibly recognise me.”

The message is clear, whether delivered from the mouths of men or the divine: however you may conceive of the divine, God does not approve of violence done in his name.

3.III.3 DOES GOD SPEAK HINDUSTANI? REGISTER, REALISM, AND THE POTENTIAL OF SATIRE

Ugra was a Hindi author who was, more evidently than many of his contemporaries, at ease with the breadth of literary heritage and traditions available to him as a producer and consumer of literature. Vanita has suggested that his favourite poets were Tulsidas and Ghalib, and the evidence from his stories and novels emphatically supports this.⁷⁵ He evinced admiration for Ghalib in particular, compiling a Hindi commentary on his ghazals,⁷⁶ and also found space for Urdu poetry in several of his stories. The same is true in this collection, though only on two occasions: a Mir couplet quoted by Nastik in ‘*Khudā ke samne*’, and a Sufi couplet in ‘*Dozakh! Narak!!*’.⁷⁷

Yet his linguistic eclecticism is most evident in the range of registers in which he writes. Capable of at times abrupt and eclectic shifts in linguistic register, he regularly demonstrates both his own versatility and, perhaps more importantly, the comfort of his characters with the full range of the Hindi-Urdu spectrum regardless of their religious identity. This stands in contrast to many of his later stories, wherein he seems regularly to default to a fairly Sanskritised idiom. One could almost suggest that Ugra was

⁷⁵ Vanita tr., *Chocolate*, 21.

⁷⁶ Pandey Bechan Sharma Ugra, *Ghālib-‘Ugra’* (New Delhi: Ranjit Publishers, 2nd ed. 1993 [1966])

⁷⁷ See Ugra, ‘*Khudā ke samne*’, 400, and ‘*Dozakh! Narak!!*’, 380.

endeavouring to create a linguistic commonality between the poles of Hindi and Urdu through his freewheeling choice of vocabulary, which would parallel his advocacy of a shared ground of tolerance and humanism that his stories elucidate.

More likely, however, is that Ugra simply enjoyed the full range of the language and, in certain cases (especially ‘Dozakh! Narak!’) found it useful to use the double-wording that Hindi-Urdu allows to reinforce the social and religious points he was making (so, in this case, that hell is hell regardless of which word you use for it, similarly belief in either *bahiṣt* and *svarg* will lead you to the same destination). However, and lest we view this collection in too optimistic and celebratory a light, there are important counter indications that complicate this rosy picture of secular satire. Most obviously, there are several references to the “Muslim *gūṇḍā*” – a stereotyped figure that, as Orsini has noted, also makes an appearance in *Cand Hasīnom*.⁷⁸ This combines with the fact that, across the stories, many of those characters lauded as heroes tend to be Hindus. Consider too the Gandhian resolution to ‘Dillī kī Bāt’, in which the problem mother is reconciled to the Hindu fold and her son taken by Gandhi to his ashram: do Ugra’s stories advocate a pro-Hindu, or anti-Muslim, vision of society?

A re-examination of the various scenarios outlined and analysed above suggests that this is emphatically not the case. Ugra is as free with his criticisms of Hindus and Hinduism as of Muslims and Islam. These noted exceptions do not mar the overall character of the collection: a satirical, sometimes shocking (though, unlike his other works

⁷⁸ See Orsini, ‘Reading a social romance’, 198.

from the same period, never scandalous), and at times fantastical, contrived, and utterly unrealistic take on a profoundly serious and contemporaneous issue.

Indeed, it is the very quality of strained realism – that is, characters whose actions defy logic and reason, who are themselves tropes or exaggerated signifiers of broader, and particularly in this collection bigoted, positions – that lends to his writing a sense not so much of melodrama, but of what I suggest conforms with the criteria of Menippean satire. We have seen carnivalesque scenarios, the inversion of norms and expectations, the multiple planes on which the stories operate (hell, earth, heaven), dream sequences, and the positioning of language itself as an object of representation, all of which Bakhtin lists as qualities of the genre.⁷⁹ Hence the absurdity of the widow's position in 'Dillī kī Bāt': who, slighted by her brother-in-law and taken in by a kindly Muslim, crafts her son as an implement of revenge upon *all* Hindus; who, were she not there with the specific purpose of justifying her actions, would regard even looking upon the Hindu Gandhi as a sin; and who, in the final, trite, and absurd denouement, is packed off to Benares by the mahatma. Hence also the absurdity of Inayat Ali's claim in 'Khudārām' to be able to speak pure Hindi because of the pure Hindu blood that flows through his veins despite making such claims in a relatively unmarked register of Hindustani.⁸⁰

Other features of the collection correspond to typical characteristics of Menippea: in Khudaram's humorous deportment and apparent insanity, as well as the improbable utopian resolution he effects; in the peculiar experience of Yaar Ali in 'Dozakh kī Āg' as he

⁷⁹ Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky*, 114-8

⁸⁰ A point succinctly made by Christine Everaert. See Everaert, *Tracing the Boundaries*, 113.

recounts his actions, anticipates heaven and instead is forced to witness a hell of his own devising (and perhaps, one wonders, a hell imagined out of his own, inner fears); the multiple planes of action – earth, and the thresholds of heaven and hell – in ‘Dozakh! Narak!!’ and ‘*Khudā ke samne*’ through which human psychology and actions are examined and, ultimately, judged; and, as discussed above, through making language itself an object of representation by means of his expansive and at times counterintuitive use of the broad range of Hindustani. This is not to suggest that Ugra’s short stories exactly replicate the forms or meet the criteria of Menippean satire – of most pertinent concern is the fact that the generic label has not, to my knowledge, been applied to short fiction. Rather, the comparison helps us appreciate Ugra’s choices and intentions as a writer. These stories, in presenting a varied mixture of settings and situations, and a clever blend of dystopian and utopian scenarios, constitute a sustained condemnation of communalism and communal violence, which had plagued Calcutta in the preceding years, had spread across the sub-continent, and were to grow in intensity despite such critiques.

Such stories nevertheless allow us to investigate further the intellectual and social history of tolerance, humanism, and even secularism, as they were articulated in terms of both religiosity *and* areligiosity in the literary sphere. Ugra, much as Premchand, was clearly aware of the dominant tendency to speak in terms of homogeneously conceived religious communities, yet his stories present a powerful challenge to such discursive paradigms. His interest in and focus on the individual as human chimed, as noted above, with some of Premchand’s own stories. However, what emerges most strongly in Ugra’s collection is an almost *nirguṇa* panentheism: an understanding of god as above and

unlimited by religious orthodoxies and the limited conceptualisations offered by individual faiths. Such an approach allows an express disavowal of religiously motivated actions and religiously inspired statements deemed harmful to society at large, and lends authority to the critique. This is not a secularist position as would be understood in western traditions, but rather a clear literary incarnation of a “religion-as-faith”-based response of the type Nandy has identified.

Finally, the humanistic element is paramount. Ugra invests virtue in a variety of figures – educated and uneducated, Hindu and Muslim, urban and rural – whose sole common trait was their simultaneous espousal of the sanctity of human life and denial of the validity of religion as a marker of difference and identity. Despite his self-styled ‘extreme’ nature, it is clear that Ugra was making a significant satirical and humanist intervention against social, religious and linguistic extremism in all its forms.

3.IV KRISHAN CHANDER ON RELIGION, EXCLUSION AND ABSURDITY

Krishan Chander (1912-77) has similarly received rather little attention in literary histories, despite his great popularity and involvement in some of the most important trends and developments in Urdu literature. Born in Gujranwala in a Punjabi Khatri family, he studied at Punjab University in Lahore for his MA in English literature and, aside from his prolific short story writing, worked at All India Radio from 1939-42, moved to Pune and worked on several film scripts, before finally settling in Bombay. After Partition, and the creation of the separate Indian and Pakistani PWAs, Chander became the General Secretary of the

Indian PWA in 1953, and was awarded the Padma Bhushan for his services to literature in 1969. Yet his writing has received rather superficial and on occasion quite dismissive treatment in English scholarship. A recent and otherwise excellent anthology of Urdu literature characterised his oeuvre thus:

Krishan Chander's writing was devoid of any depth or complexity; he could and did write on a variety of subjects only in a charming and superficial way. He has been called a 'romantic' because of the unabashed sentimentalism that colours his work. But he was a remarkable prose stylist; lyrical, almost too mellifluous at times, his work has a naïve quality that appeals to readers.⁸¹

This is not the place for a wholesale revision or assessment of Chander's literary career; nevertheless, a selection of his early stories shows that, rather than superficial, Chander could and did write stories of serious merit and almost dazzling complexity. Moreover, several of these tackle issues of communal disharmony, and questions of religious identity, in a satirical, ironic and particularly effective manner, contributing another perspective to this study's broader discussion of literary humanism.

3.IV.1 FRACTURED MONOLITHS: RELIGION, SOCIETY, AND FAULT LINES

Mazhab ne mandiron meñ faiktariyāñ khol rakhīñ thīñ aur bhagvāñ ko lohe se bhī zyādah mazbūt salakhon ke andar band kar diyā thā...

Religion had opened up factories in the temples, and locked god away behind bars stronger even than iron...⁸²

So opines the cynical and almost agnostic narrator of Krishan Chander's 'Purāne Khudā' ('The Old Gods'), who is time and again confronted with not only the failure of religion to

⁸¹ Mehr Afshan Farooqi ed. *The Oxford India Anthology of Modern Urdu Literature: Fiction* (New Delhi: OUP, 2008) 56.

⁸² Krishan Chander, 'Purāne Khudā', in *Purāne Khudā* (Hyderabad: Abdul Haq Akademi, 1944) 32.

include, but more specifically its distinct tendency to exclude and divide, as he takes the reader on a journey through the centre of Krishnaite devotionism – Mathura – and through reminiscences of his time in other centres of the Vaishnava geographical and spiritual heartland of Braj. The story is whimsical at times, and one could be forgiven for taking it to be a somewhat superficial and capricious flight of apparently aimless narrative. However, Chander time and again lures the reader in, and through humour, allegory and empathy makes us complicit in what is, in the final reckoning, a piercingly effective satire on established or institutionalised religion, as well as the apparently unbridgeable divides in modern Indian society – barriers of regional identity as well as class.

Mathura is seen, or shown to the reader, through the eyes of a Punjabi Hindu narrator who is, or is made, profoundly conscious of his own origins. Far from being a devotional space unified by its Hindu character, this pilgrimage place is shown to be rife with internal divisions. Our narrator remarks on how the various temples and guesthouses are known to be *for* a particular regional or ethnic sub group, and is confronted with biases regarding both his own identity (“Is it true that Punjabis kidnap girls?”) and others’. More pernicious, and more sarcastically confronted in the narrative, is the payment required in order to participate in these fundamental religious activities of pilgrimage and puja – how presumptuous, our narrator suggests, of poor farmers to expect to be able to sleep on the ghats or bathe in the Jamuna for free!⁸³ And, on the plight of one expelled from a temple:

Ek paṇḍe ne ek gaṛīb kisān ko garden se pakarkar ghāṭ se bāhar nikāl diyā. Kyonki kisān ke pās dakśinā ke paise na thī. Śāyad kisān samajhtā thā ki bhagvān kī ārtī paison ke bagair bhī ho saktī hai.

⁸³ Ibid., 20-1.

A Pandit grabbed a farmer by his neck and threw him outside the ghat, as the farmer didn't have the fee to view god. Perhaps the farmer thought god could be worshipped without money.⁸⁴

The critique of institutionalised religion, and of the associated imaginary of a unitary religious identity, is relentless. In Vrindavan, the sadhus' chants of "Radhe Shyam, Radhe Shyam" reminds the narrator of nothing so much as the English language of an army marching in step – "left, right, left right"; and in Gokul, the celebrated episode from Krishna's *līlā*, in which he playfully steals the herdgirls' clothes, is subverted by the actual and decidedly irreligious theft that three female pilgrims suffer at the hands of a deceitful holy man.

It is the ambiguity of the story, however, that is truly telling. It allowed Aziz Ahmad, who authored the introduction to the collection, to comment on the story thus:

Is kā mauzū' na'e afsānī adab ke sāth hī sāth urdū meñ āyā. 'Angāre' meñ bhī yah mauzū' bār bār duhrāyā gayā thā. Lekin Kriśan Candar ke is afsāne meñ kahīn gāliyān nahīn. Purāne khudā'on se nahīn balki purāne "khudā parastoñ" se afsāna nigār ko haqīqī dilcaspī hai. Laṭīf aur pur khulūṣ ṭanz yahān vah kām kar jātā hai jo rāst a'itrāz se nahīn ho saktā. Manṣar nigārī kī ḥad tak yah afsāna ek śāhkār hai. Mathurā ke har qism ke pujārī, vahān ke rahne vāle, aur vahān āne vale sab zinda taṣvīroñkī ṭarah calte phirte naṣar āte haiñ. Taṣvīreñ haiñ aur unkī ma'āśī tāvīleñ haiñ, magar is khūbī se ki vah taṣvīroñ kā rang m'alūm hotī haiñ. Ākhir meñ Kriśan aur Rādhā kā qīṣṣa hai, Hindustān kī 'aurat kā khulūṣ aur intīzār aur us kā phal...

Its subject has come into Urdu with the new short story writing. The same subject came time and again in *Angāre*, but in this story of Krishan Chander's there is no swearing or offensiveness. The author's real interest is not so much in the old gods, but more in "old devotees". Delicacy and wholly affectionate ridicule here accomplish what could not be done through direct criticism. It is also a masterpiece in terms of scenery. One sees every kind of priest, resident and pilgrim in Mathura coming and going like living pictures. They are pictures, and their living elucidation, but their true quality is that we know them to be pictures. In the end, this is the tale of Krishna and Radha, of the purity and steadfastness of the women of India, and their reward...⁸⁵

Could this simplistic reading be further from the truth? While the story does turn to the mythological Radha and her long wait for Krishna to return, she is by now an old, shrivelled

⁸⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁸⁵ Aziz Ahmad, 'Introduction', in Chander, *Purāne Khudā*, 5-15, 6-7.

and wholly miserable old woman who has kept faith to no reward. And the enduring symbol of religious devotion that runs through the story – the Jamuna itself – is similarly impotent: while it may well have risen to touch Krishna’s feet on the occasion of his birth, it is now incapable of rising far enough to touch the trains that run over its bridges – symbols of mechanical modernity tantalisingly out of reach and indifferent to the river they cross; and it marks the sharp divide between the rich, electricity lit temples on one bank, and the poor lamp-lit dwellings on the other. Braj, and Hinduism itself is, in Chander’s piercing satire, profoundly fractured along lines of ethnicity, gender and class, yet the imperative of religious unity is wholly indifferent to these cracks and divisions. Far from being a paen to Krishna or to the women of India, this is a particularly effective, humanist and Marxist critique of society and the vanities of religiosity.

3.IV.2 STREAMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE ABSURD

Chander is at once more explicitly concerned with Hindu-Muslim relations, and yet at the same time intrinsically opaque, in the second story of the collection, ‘Muṣbit aur Manfi’ (‘Positive and Negative’). Aziz Ahmad suggests in his introduction that this story shows the influence of particularly James Joyce and surrealism in its style and composition. Certainly the stream-of-consciousness approach that Chander employs is at times reminiscent of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, though it also contains elements that evoke and invite comparisons with T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*:⁸⁶ its intertextuality; its strong satirical tone; the almost overwhelming

⁸⁶ Given that Chander studied for his MA in English Literature at Punjab University, it is quite possible that he had encountered several of these texts.

sense of foreboding mixed with frustration; and the ambiguous position of the narrator, at once immanent and self-eliding, to list the most obvious. Yet we are not concerned here with questions of influence or imitation, nor with the advent of Modernism in Hindustani fiction – Chander’s story stands on its own and, as a remarkable combination of elegy, political commentary and satire, merits consideration as such.

Chander puts the reader off balance from the first lines, with an opening devoid of any context or immediately discernible meaningful content:

Cand dā'ire nīle pīle lāl, gulābī, nāranjī, arqvānī, maiñ ne kahā Śahid bhāiyā, vah muskurāe, Mirzā śāḥab sar khajāne lage, śafaq dūr hotī ga'ī aur samundar kā pānī cīkhne lagā, Kanhaiyā la'l, Kanhaiyā la'l. Tum bare gadhe ho, Mirzā śāḥab sar khajāne lage.

Multiple rings blue yellow red, pink, orange, purple, I said Shahid Bhai, he smiled, Mirza began to irritate me, the twilight had gone into the distance and the water of the ocean began to cry out, Krishna, Krishna. You are a great fool, Mirza began to irritate me.⁸⁷

The invocation to Krishna is just that, and the identities of Shahid and Mirza are never revealed. We are then introduced to the Taj Mahal; or, rather, the historical spectre of the imagined black mirror image or mausoleum that Shah Jahan supposedly intended to build on the opposite bank of the Jamuna before his son, Aurangzeb, imprisoned him in the Agra Fort.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, the somewhat spectral character of Shahid Bhai, still smiling, walks through the landscape, and lava rises up from his footsteps. This surreal improbability is compounded when the lava gives way to a veritable army of ants who, coming together “like the god of some huge country”, give way in turn to Shaitan/the Devil, whose laughter resounds as the divide between the titular positive and negative – that is, the threshold

⁸⁷ Krishan Chander, ‘Muṣbit aur Manfī’, 51. Originally published in *Sāqī* 27.1 (January 1943) 92-4.

⁸⁸ See Catherine Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*, New Cambridge History of India I.4 (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) for a discussion of this enduring myth.

between life and death – blurs for our apparently barely lucid (or perhaps preternaturally perceptive?) narrator. The coloured circles from the story’s opening lines reappear in Shahid’s smile, and the stage is set for a disjunctive and surprising mythological interpolation.

All else fades away into darkness, and we are left with a large rock on the road. A stream of ants moves past it, oblivious, as suddenly Ram and his brother Lakshman appear before the rock. The stone addresses them:

“Merā qaṣūr m’āf kar dījī’e. Maiñ ‘aurat hūñ, merā nām Ahalyā bā’ī hai, maiñ riśī putrī hūñ, mujhe raja Indra ne vargalā thā.” Rām ne muskurākar apnā pā’oñ pathar par rakhā. Aur kāle kāle bāloñ kī laṭeñ un kañval kī ṭarah pākīzah pā’oñ se lapat ga’īñ, aur cūñṭiyāñ zor zor se cīkhne lageñ, “Ae Rām, tum ne ek pā’oñ kī jumbiś se Ahalyā ko zindagī bakhśī, lekin dūsre pā’oñ se darjanoñ cūñṭiyōñ ko maut ke ghāt utār diyā.” Muṣbit aur manfī, muṣbit aur manfī, ‘aurat aur mard, safedī aur siyāhī, khūśī aur gamī, zindagī aur maut, nekī aur badī, ‘aql aur bevaqūfī, ho sakta hai ki jis ko maiñ ne ‘aql samjhā ho, vah bevaqūfī ho, jo badī hai vah daraṣal nekī hai. Jo maut hai vah daraṣal zindagī hai. Kanhaiyā lāl kā zard cahrā ekāek khal uṭhā. Us ne zor se kahā, “Tum bare gadhe ho.” Śāhid bhā’ī muskurāne lage. Mirzā ṣāḥab sar khajāne lage...

“Please forgive my sorry state. I am a woman, my name is Ahalya bai, I am a sage’s wife, king Indra seduced me.” Smiling, Ram placed his foot on the stone. And black, black curls of hair curled up from that pure, lotus-like foot, and the ants began to cry out, “O Ram, with the movement of one foot you have restored life to Ahalya, but with the other foot you have opened the road to death for dozens of ants.” Positive and negative, positive and negative, woman and man, light and darkness, happiness and sadness, life and death, goodness and wickedness, intelligence and stupidity, maybe that which I had thought intelligence, is stupidity, what is wickedness is in fact goodness. Death is in fact life. Krishna’s pale face suddenly turned wicked. He said loudly, “You are a great fool”. Shahid began to smile. Mirza began to irritate me.⁸⁹

The mythological episode of Ram and his release of Ahalya from her curse is here complicated with the death, or murder, of the ants. The sublime is juxtaposed and even merged with the mundane, and the miraculous occurs simultaneously with the abhorrent, even reprehensible. It is this very dichotomy that strikes the narrator, and leads him to re-evaluate his previously (we assume) firm convictions: it seems that the entirety of human

⁸⁹ Chander, ‘Muṣbit’, 53.

existence is here reduced to a long list of opposite pairs, but the essence and integrity of these distinctions has been thrown into doubt in and by this surreal, dream like experience. The ants' complaint goes unanswered, and Ram offers no guidance to the narrator, much less the reader.

And this disjointed narrative experience continues: “that Arab” (which Arab?) is still praying in the desert (which desert?), even as his camel's gaze remains fixed on the west – that is, Mecca – as if the camel too were offering prayers, or at least suggesting that the imperative linking devotion to the direction one faces is more than a little farcical; the closed eyes of Shah Jahan are no longer able to see the Taj Mahal, whose wavering reflection in the waters of the Jamuna has taken the place of Ram's foot as the lotus emblem; and the thoughts provoked by the ripples remind the narrator of a ghazal – “*Tere li'e jahān meñ cain hai na qarār hai*” (“For you in this world there is neither peace nor rest”) – an intertextual reference to and a minor reworking of the lyrics from the then recently released film *Khandaan* (dir. Shaukat Hussain Rizvi, 1942);⁹⁰ which segues to a cat singing on a piano. In other words, multiple religious practices and symbols, literary sources and traditions, and a span of time stretching from the mythological, historical and contemporary are telescoped into a matter of moments and a single, unbroken paragraph of fragmented narrative.

⁹⁰ In Rizvi's *Khandaan*, the first word is “*mere*”, instead of “*tere*” (that is, “for me”, rather than “for you”).

More precisely, the entire story is a single paragraph, with the only concession to formatting afforded to the single line of poetry quoted above.⁹¹ The reader, it would seem, is not meant to pause, and is not to be allowed to step back, take a breath, and assess. This is a chaotic stream of consciousness, almost impossible to fully or even adequately represent with extracts, but nevertheless a few more significant moments should be highlighted. Intertextually, we have a brief appearance from that staple of Arabic, Indo-Persian, and particularly Punjabi, folk narratives, Majnun:

“Main dūdh pītā nahīn” Majnūn ne kahā, aur cāqū se apnā sīna ched dālā, aur lahū kī dhār registān meñ bah niklī, sū’e hijāz, nahīn sū’e marākaś, nahīn sū’e kū’e Lailā...Āj Majnūn kambakht agar kaśmīr meñ paidā huā hotā to Lailā kā rang seb kī tarah surkh hotā...

“I don’t drink milk” Majnun said, and gouged his chest with a dagger, and a stream of blood flowed in the desert, towards Arabia, no towards Marrakesh, no towards Laila’s street...Today, if poor Majnun were to be born in Kashmir, then Laila would be coloured as red as an apple...⁹²

Chander here makes explicit the geographic orientation and perspective of the story: what was implicit in the image of the Arab (and his camel!) at prayer is made more explicit now, as the legendary literary trope of Laila and Majnun/Qais is transported to an imagined birth in India, and as his blood flows through the desert towards the Middle East – it is not already there. Thus, in addition to the telescoping of time and history mentioned above, we also see the establishment of a geographical literary space in which the literary and mythical aspects of both Hindu and Muslim traditions exist alongside one another – indeed, in which they tread the same dream-like path.

As the temporal shifts continue, we are told that Shah Jahan is already dead, and his son starts battles to secure the throne and crown of his father; which tumult heralds the

⁹¹ This concession is missing from the original version in *Sāqī*.

⁹² Chander, ‘Muṣbit’, 55.

spread of darkness once again, the coming together of earth and sky, and the lane becomes that narrow band between them in which existence has been crushed (“*kā’ināt tang hotī ga’ī*”), rather than the archetypal poetic setting for lovers’ trysts. The devil’s influence or shadow has spread in all directions: darkness is predominant, but always involved in a struggle against the light, even if the latter is embattled and tenuous. Violent imagery returns in the form of the machinery of modern warfare (a particularly pertinent topic in early 1940s British India, as we know):

Aur kāgaz chalnī ho jātā hai, aur levis gan kī tarātar, aur kamānḍar kahtā hai, “Āge baṛho bahādur sipāhiyo, aur duśman kā sīna chalnī kar do.” Yah kis kā sīna hai? Tumhārā yā merā. Yah sīna jis meṅ se lahū kī dhār bah rahī hai. Yah aiks re kī maśīn hai. Yā levis gan. Ae fūlād kī duniyā, apne qadamoṅ ke mahīb sāiyōṅ meṅ insānī cūṅṭiyōṅ kī rīngtī hu’ī qīṭār dekh. Us kā nauḥa sun.

And the paper is perforated, and the rattle of the Lewis gun, and the commander says, “Advance, brave soldiers, and pierce the chests of the enemy.” Whose chest is this? Yours or mine. This chest in which a stream of blood is flowing. This is an x-ray machine. Or a Lewis gun. Oh, world of steel, look at the crawling line of human ants in the fearsome shadow of your steps. Hear their lamentation.⁹³

The implications of this passage are subtle, yet discernible. The idea that opposing and simplistic binaries might either encapsulate the world or allow the narrator and the reader to categorise and make sense of it was already in some doubt. It remains so – emphatically – yet here Chander sets up another binary, between the x-ray and the Lewis gun. These are two devices inextricably linked to British rule, and to the modern age, with all its rapid and much lauded progress. Yet progress, as we see, is a double-edged sword: what need for an x-ray machine, the question is implied, when a Lewis gun allows us to see inside a body just as effectively? “*Muṣbit aur manfī*”, positive and negative, indeed, but we are left with a

⁹³ Ibid., 58.

decidedly negative picture of downtrodden humanity, crushed by the indifference of a rapidly changing yet ultimately uncaring world.

What then has this all been leading to? As we approach the end of the story, the narrator returns to his contemplation of the Taj Mahal, and in fact addresses it directly (the “you” of the story is here explicitly the Taj; it is much less clear elsewhere to whom “you” refers):

Terā marmareñ ā'ina ānsū bankar jamunā kī ānkh se dhalak paṛe, terā is fūlād kī duniyā meñ kyā kām, jā apnī rotī hu'ī insānī muḥabbat kī dastān us rūḥ ko sunā, jis kī abhī takhlīq nahīñ hū'ī. Us zamāne ko dikhā jo abhī āyā nahīñ, us tahzīb par 'ayān kar jo abhī pardah o gaib meñ hai.

Let your tears of marble spill from the eyes of the Jamuna, what is your role in this world of steel, go and tell your tale of woe and of human love to that soul that has not yet been created. Show it to that era that has not yet come, make clear that civilisation that is as yet covered and hidden.⁹⁴

We see hints here of a possible future redemption – while its characteristics are not clearly laid out, they can surely be inferred – the outlines of which I turn to below. Meanwhile, after speculating on the value or otherwise of a Taj Mahal constructed from potato, the narrator graces us with a moment of meaningful lucidity:

...muḥabbat meñ aur nisāste meñ vahī nisbat hai, jo maut aur zindagī meñ, muṣbit aur manfī, muṣbit aur manfī, kyoñ jhagrā karte ho jī, hindū aur musalmān, sikh aur 'isā'ī, hindustān aur pākistān. Muṣbit aur manfī...

...that same attribute exists in love and stew, in death and life, positive and negative, positive and negative, why do you fight sirs, Hindu and Muslim, Sikh and Christian, India and Pakistan. Positive and negative...

Binaries once again. This is in many ways the single clearest line in the story, though it relies on the setting up and subsequent pulling down of false dichotomies that has preceded it throughout the story for its full meaning. Also significantly, the object addressed has been momentarily yet dramatically expanded to the plural: gone is the intimate, surreal

⁹⁴ Ibid., 59.

and almost absurd conversation between narrator and reader, or perhaps narrator and invisible other marked by *tū* – this is instead an all-inclusive broadside, directed out for a single moment, and demanding an explanation.⁹⁵ Indeed, the reference to not just religious communities, but to the then-as-yet-unfulfilled visions of Hindustan and Pakistan, emphasises the expansive nature of this interrogation. However, no explanation is forthcoming. The story ends (I quite consciously avoid saying “concludes”) with a return to the intimate mode, as the narrator bemoans his inability to sleep, and encourages “you” to stay sleeping:

.....sotā rah m’asūm phūl tū is tazadd se āgāh nahīn, muṣbit aur manfi, muṣbit aur manfi.....Dham dham tāre hī tāre. Lahar hī lahar, tārikī, samundar, kuch bhī nahīn....

*.....stay sleeping innocent flower you are not aware of this absurdity, positive and negative, positive and negative.....pulsing stars are only stars. Waves are just waves, darkness, the ocean, nothing at all....*⁹⁶

Much has been left out in the course of this discussion, but that is perhaps inevitable in the face of such sweeping stream of consciousness narrative. Even so, beyond being a masterful explication of the Modernist form in Urdu literature, ‘*Muṣbit aur manfi*’ is a richly complex piece of gradualism that crescendos to an almost astonishingly straightforward denouement – absurdity. That all is absurd is the only conclusion at which the reader can arrive, and it is tempting to read the word as an ironic commentary on the story itself. We may have spent our time thinking we were being taken through a bizarre and frankly confusing dream sequence, but the final stages of the story make it clear that the narrator is not, in fact, dreaming. We as readers have in fact witnessed a geographically located, albeit

⁹⁵ Although *tum* can of course be singular, the listing of categories strongly suggests this should be read in the plural. The other use comes when Chander asks whose chest is being pierced.

⁹⁶ Chander, ‘*Muṣbit*’ 60.

temporally fluid, commentary on the state of modern society, at the heart of which lies a kernel of humanism in its most basic form – love for one's fellow man. The constant recourse to the titular 'positive and negative' (or perhaps we would talk, in modern parlance, of 'plusses and minuses') implies not some kind of moral equivalence, but rather requires a recognition of the dual nature of most if not all actions and situations – good in the bad, and vice versa. Nevertheless, it seems clear that, at the end of the story, we are (over)due a rebalancing. The story of basic human love and decency cannot be told and, with the Taj Mahal as its symbolic representative and would-be advocate, has no place in the world as it is. What is required is a move beyond senseless violence; a violence that has no explanation or justification, even in the most apparently absurd of contexts.

Absurdity is then the characteristic that emerges most strongly from these stories. In 'Muṣbit aur Manfi', it is the absurd and incomprehensible division and fighting between religious groups, emphasised by the very structure of the story itself; in 'Purāne Khudā', it is the inexplicable and unjustifiable privileging of wealth and regional identity in matters of supposedly shared and accessible religiosity. Indeed, if one were to read the stories as they appear, sequentially, in *Purāne Khudā*, one might wonder at the further absurdity of the opposition of Hindu and Muslim in the second story, given the fracturing of would-be monolithic religious identities encountered in the first. However, the key operation that Chander performs through these stories is the dissolution of normative, oppositional and supposedly homogeneous Hindu and Muslim identities, thereby enabling a more inclusive focus on the human and humanistic. This is a critical departure from what had gone before,

not only in the primacy of communal identities and “communal consciousness” in, for instance, the writings and writers of late-19th century Hindi literature, but also in most of the work of Premchand.⁹⁷ Through such writings, Chander moved towards ameliorating the damage caused by “the traditional mode of social identification” which had operated “as a wedge between the two communities”,⁹⁸ and moves towards a more explicitly Marxist concern with society and its potential reformation. As should be clear, even this necessarily limited reading of some of Krishan Chander’s early writings shows him to be far more than merely “charming”, “superficial”, or devoid of depth,⁹⁹ even if some of his later work exhibited a more pronounced didacticism. We see in his writings on matters religious a profound concern for both the human subject and the humanistic ideal; early indicators of his later place at the forefront of progressive writing in Urdu and the Progressive movement in the subcontinent. The subtlety of such sentiments does not detract from their significance.

3.V SOME CONCLUSIONS

If riots mean murder and mayhem and carnage, physical pain and misery, the inescapable conclusion is that they cannot be viable subjects of literature, regardless of all the anguish we may feel on account of our emotional attachment...Of course this does not mean that writers

⁹⁷ Sudhir Chandra, ‘Communal Consciousness’, 171. Chandra uses the phrase to identify not a necessarily divisive tendency negative attitude towards members of the other religious community, but rather a pervasive or even preoccupying sense of the primacy and homogeneity of religious community identity.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁹⁹ Farooqi/A. Sean Pue, quoted above.

shouldn't write about such events even though they fall outside the thematic parameters of literature. Writers are not producing literature all the time.¹⁰⁰

Writing in 1976, and addressing specifically representations of the events of 1947 in Urdu literature, Muhammad Hasan Askari was arguing against considering literary depictions of violence as being literature at all. Such stories, he contended, were inappropriate, and themes of violence and trauma were best considered in other contexts such as journalism. Yet Askari's position was clearly not shared by writers of Partition literature, nor by other scholars, who have argued that such literary and cultural products have been vital to creating a historical memory of the period, and in dealing with its trauma.¹⁰¹

The stories discussed in this chapter – tales of pre-Independence communal violence and disharmony in the main – form part of a longer history of literary responses to such themes. Moreover, these responses and treatments were inextricably linked to ongoing debates surrounding the didactic purpose and reformist potential of literature. Writing, for these authors, did not exist or take place in a vacuum, but was both commenting on and seeking to affect contemporary society – a goal that Premchand had strongly and consistently advocated.¹⁰² However, what we have seen here is the shared nature and simultaneous treatment of these societal concerns, in this case across the

¹⁰⁰ Muhammad Hasan Askari, 'Fasādat aur Hamārā Adab', in *Insān aur Ādmī* (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1976) 139-49, tr. Muhammad Umar Memon, 'Communal Riots and Our Literature', *Annual of Urdu Studies* 25 (2010) 142-9, 143.

¹⁰¹ "What political debate will never fully do – and the reason we so badly need the literature – is defeat the urge to lay blame, which keeps animosity alive. Only the literature truly evokes the sufferings of the innocent, whose pain is more universal and ultimately a vehicle of more honest reconciliation than political discourse." Mushirul Hasan, *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India* (New Delhi: OUP, 2002) 38-9.

¹⁰² His best known call for literary action is in Premchand, 'Sāhitya kā uddeśyā' (Presidential speech at the Progressive Writers' Conference, Lucknow, 9 April 1936).

Hindi/Urdu spectrum. It is this striking mutuality that both demonstrates the interconnectedness of literary production in the two languages, and highlights the productive potential in treating the literatures together and comparatively. This interlinguistic mutuality can only be fully appreciated through this kind of comparative reading, and I hope that the advantages of this kind of inter-linguistic approach further demonstrate the necessity of a new approach to the cultural production of the period.

Moreover, we have seen how all three authors in this discussion – Premchand, Ugra, and Chander – used a religiously inflected idiom to be highly critical of aspects of contemporary society and religious practice that they found objectionable. Indeed, writing with reference to religion made these humanist critiques even more effective than they might otherwise have been. We have seen that humanism in pre-Independence India referred to an understanding of the primacy of the human subject, and of the shared quality of being human, over religiously constructed individual or group identities. We have seen too how these writers shared a common rhetorical approach, emphasising the essential and fundamental quality of humanism and tolerance as a constitutive part of both Hinduism and Islam, in a clear call for the primacy of what Nandy has identified as “religion-as-faith” over “religion-as-ideology”. The approaches these writers took, the sensibilities they evinced, and the particular discursive contexts in which they situated their tales of tolerance demonstrate a shared understanding of this ideal that crossed the linguistic divide.

There are certain differences between the writers discussed here. For Premchand, most obviously, nationalism was concomitant with and dependent on religiously defined

communities and the fostering of cooperation between them.¹⁰³ His humanism was thus a call to coexistence, non-violence and recognition of equivalence that crossed the boundaries of language and script. Ugra's Hindi satires were more piercing, more focused on the individual and more evocative of *nirguṇa* panentheism than the others. For Chander, on the other hand, such religious categories could not be allowed the primacy and prominence they had possessed to date. His Marxist perspective moved him towards both a denial of religiously defined unities and also a more explicitly class-oriented critique of religion, while his experiments with literary modernism lent themselves to a provocative disaggregation of monolithic and discrete religious traditions.

Ultimately, what we see here is the emergence of a humanistic critique – of religiously inspired, motivated, or sanctioned malpractice – conducted in explicitly theistic terms. Shared motifs – of the naïve hero, most prominently – and satirical modes underpinned a secularist critique that, rather than mandating the removal of religion from public life, posited a worldview that places the individual-as-human at the moral and affective centre of society. In the final analysis, such a humanist and humanizing focus on the human qualities of all people, and the prioritizing of such qualities over the mandates and dictates of religiosity, reads as the attempt to create a literary, cultural, rhetorical and political common ground, and to advocate the same to a wide audience at a time of division and turmoil.

¹⁰³ I draw and extend this formulation from Sudhir Chandra. See Chandra, 'Communal Consciousness', 179-80.

HINDUSTANI FILM: THE ELOQUENT LANGUAGE OF INCLUSIVITY

‘The curse of Babel,’ Sheikh Iftekhhar Rasool said laconically, in reply to my question if talkies were likely to take India by storm as effectively as the silent film had done. After a pause, he continued, ‘But talkies will grip the imagination of the Indian cinema-goer eventually, when there are talkies in his own tongue. The silent film was a natural development of the charade, and of the dumb show with which anyone who is a stranger in a country and ignorant of the language of the country is familiar. The eloquent language of gesture had the touch which makes all the world akin.’¹

Sheikh Iftekhhar Rasool, actor and director of the Elephanta Film Corporation, was here addressing perhaps the most significant issue for the Indian film industry of the 1930s. The advent of sound in film and of “talkies”, beginning with Ardeshir Irani’s 1931 feature *Alam Ara* (‘Light of the World’), presented a novel dilemma to the producers. As Sandra Freitag has succinctly put it, the introduction of sound;

introduced the complications of language in a way never before encountered, so that filmmakers now found their markets reduced to a tenth of their previous size, while economies of production in a few dispersed centres were fragmented by the need to create films catering to specific regional/linguistic cultural areas.²

The polyglot, hetroglossic and multi-lingual nature of India was nothing new, but its intrusion into the world of film was something of a technological double-edged sword, at

¹ J.C. Roome, ‘Future of the Talkies in India: Interview with Sheikh Iftekhhar Rasool on the Prospects of Establishing Sound Studios’, *Filmland*, 4 July 1931, reprinted in Samik Bandyopadhyay ed. *Indian Cinema: Contemporary Perceptions from the Thirties* (Jamshedpur: Celluloid Chapter, 1993) 126-8.

² Sandra B. Freitag, ‘Visions of the Nation: Theorizing the Nexus between Creation, Consumption, and Participation in the Public Sphere’ in Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney eds. *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India* (Oxford: OUP, 2001) 35-75, 65.

once opening up the media to exciting, crowd-pleasing and thus potentially lucrative opportunities and innovations, while at the same time forcing producers to consider carefully the language of production and, with this, their intended audience. In the Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani context, this became a question of register, of which range of the oral continuum would be appropriate for a given character, film or situation. This chapter explores some of the choices made in this regard during the early 1940s, charting the variety of styles and registers that were employed in films that have often hitherto been conveniently referred to as Hindi Cinema.³ Broadly, it argues that this cinema came to embody and employ an expansive and inclusive register of Hindustani as the default medium of communication, in both dialogue and song; that, while differing registers were occasionally used to mark religious identities, there was no imperative to make exclusive communal associations; that elements of script that surrounded individual films – their paratexts – quickly defaulted to Roman script; and that an understanding of this oral/aural

³ Studies of Indian cinemas invariably run up against the issue of nomenclature, whether knowingly or otherwise, and particularly in this ‘Hindi’ context. How should we refer to the product at hand, delineating its specificity, its linguistic and/or regional boundaries, while avoiding at times unhelpful linguistic labels? This chapter examines the Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani cinema of 1940s India. Produced in Bombay, and marketed strongly in the north (including, perhaps most prominently, the Punjab, which was the biggest market for films generally: see Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the making of empire cinema: Image, ideology and identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 17), these films cannot be simply classified as Bombay films, given the concomitant and not infrequently overlapping production of Marathi language films in the same city and oft-times studios. They certainly cannot be classed as “Bollywood” productions: Ravi Vasudevan has pinned the rise of this term to “the development of a substantial external market for the Bombay cinema, one which exports the elaborate staging of Indianness through the rituals of the so-called traditional family.” See Ravi Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010/New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 304 and, for a fuller discussion of the rise and contested nature of the term itself, ch.10.

extension to the field of cultural production has important perspectives to offer on the Hindi-Urdu debate that is the broader subject of this study.

Indeed, the convenient and common, if not dominant, designation of “Hindi Films” obscures an important dynamic that I argue lay at the heart of the transition from stage to screen, from silent movies to “talkies”, and in both the propagation of these films to a national audience and their imagination as a national industry. In this chapter, I therefore refer to these films as “Hindustani” films chiefly because of the linguistic fluidity that they exhibited and, in many cases, apparently revelled in. While remaining fully aware of the disputed nature of the term in especially literary contexts and debates over the national language question,⁴ my own use of this moniker in the cinematic context is not without scholarly precedent: Ashraf Aziz, for example, has consistently applied it to Hindustani film music, suggestively pointing towards the linguistic hybridity and inclusivity that I too believe to be constitutive of the medium.⁵

On a broader scale, and particularly from the perspective of the present study, the advent of film, and particularly of sound in film, constituted a significant intervention in the dynamics of the Hindi-Urdu public sphere. In the context of the shifting forms of patronage available to litterateurs, which had been in constant flux from the 18th century on, the film industry was a significant new source of employment and of income on a level potentially much greater than that generated by literary production and publication. As

⁴ Discussed at length in chapter 1 above.

⁵ See Ashraf Aziz, *Light of the Universe: Essays on Hindustani Film Music* (New Delhi: Three Essays, 2003). More generally, the musicological comfort with the term Hindustani is also revealing, generally referring to a contrast in the South Asian context within the “classical” tradition and against Carnatic forms, and markedly less concerned with questions of language and register.

such, writers of all stripes were drawn into the ambit of the industry. In the Hindi-Urdu context, this quite naturally involved writers of both Hindi and Urdu literature. Some of the most prominent figures of early 20th century literature were, at one point or another, and for varying lengths of time and to varying degrees, involved in writing for films. Premchand is, perhaps, the most notable example, though his dalliance was emphatically that. Other prominent writers involved include Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra', Krishan Chander, Shakeel Badayuni, Saadat Hasan Manto, and many others. The writing of not only scripts, but also of lyrics, was therefore undertaken by a group of writers who, from the perspective of their literary backgrounds, spanned the Hindi-Urdu divide.

Moreover, these writers were writing in and for a profoundly different media, with significant implications for the way language was consumed. Orality/aurality was, to some extent, the defining feature of the filmic medium, and this same feature represented a potentially ground breaking innovation in the context of the Hindi-Urdu debate. At a time when language was being increasingly defined by script, and when script was increasingly associated in conflicting and competing nationalisms with exclusive and bounded religious identities, this oral medium allowed at the very least for the divorce of language from its written form, and potentially for the development and even crystallisation (as opposed to formalisation or standardisation) of a neutral, unmarked register of Hindustani. By crystallisation, I mean a process that was informal, unforced, unofficial, and perhaps even organic. It is in many ways the direct opposite of the formal, literary-institutional attempts to create, control, or police language and its use, such as those of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan or Hindustani Academy discussed in chapter 1. Indeed, it is the very novelty of

the film industry, its relative freedom from direct interventions on the part of the established literary critics (though not that of other commentators), and perhaps its location in Bombay and at a distance from the intense language politics of the Hindi heartland, that allowed for the development of conditions of linguistic and creative experimentation and fluidity.

Yet, this chapter also shows that this rather utopian trajectory was complicated by two significant factors: firstly, there were of course textual frames in and through which the films were situated and marketed; secondly, there were plenty of occasions on which religious identities were marked and language associations reified through the subtleties and complexities of language use. Thus, while I argue that Hindustani Film was the site wherein Hindustani as a common register did in fact flourish in the pre-independence period, and moreover that the label of “Hindustani Film” is intrinsically more appropriate and accommodating than “Hindi Film” in both the pre- and post-independence periods, the evolution of this filmic language was neither linear nor inevitable.

I begin by examining the various ways in which register was employed to mark identities, both contemporary and historical/imagined, suggesting that while these variations in register often served to mark out religious differences, they were just as readily used to mark differences in class and education levels, as well as being deployed for entertaining purposes. Therefore the Hindustani film came to *contain* these various registers, rather than necessitating a *choice* between them. The same is true of the song lyric. Here we can note the moments of assonance and dissonance between these *filmī gīt* and the written, published poetry these film lyricists also produced. The wide range of

registers employed by individual writers, and not uncommonly within individual films, is suggestive of both their own versatility, and of the broad continuum in which they felt the film could operate. I also show how certain discontinuities between a lyricist's work in films and his published poetry demonstrate a kind of slippage between the two media, while also strengthening the case for a crystallisation of an accommodating brand of Hindustani within the film industry. I also consider how issues of language use and register interacted with film thematics and subject matter, offering fresh perspectives on issues of communal harmony and national unity as performed in an unnamed, but unmistakably inclusive, *filmī* Hindustani language. Finally, I both acknowledge and investigate the limits of this filmic orality through the paratexts that were produced around the films themselves, demonstrating how the framing of films by credits, titles, and adverts reveal a strategic openness and inclusivity concerning issues of language and script across the board. Fundamentally, I argue that it was in and through this oral/aural medium that the filmic Hindustani with which we are so familiar today became concrete, and established, albeit largely unwritten.

4.I MARKING IDENTITIES? THE MULTIPLE USES OF REGISTER

Even within the context of what I am arguing was a broad and inclusive use of an accommodating register of Hindustani in the context of films, the use of language in the films themselves could and did mark characters in various, and often subtle, ways. The broad linguistic spectrum of Hindi-Urdu offered abundant potential for this linguistic

characterisation, wherein individual characters could speak in a register that marked them out, and distinguished them in some way from other characters not only on the basis of language, but thereby also on bases of religious identity, social class and educational level. However, as the following examples illustrate, different registers worked across these various axes of differentiation in mixed, and inconsistent ways, demonstrating a plurality of approaches to the language of film in the late colonial period.

I begin with Mehboob's epic historical film *Humayun*, which chronicled the period of the early Mughal emperors Babur (played by Shah Nawaz) and Humayun (played by Ashok Kumar). In a film strongly criticised by contemporary members of the Hindu-right, for having created a "myth" of historical Hindu-Muslim unity,⁶ Mehboob freely employed highly Persianised vocabulary, and indeed Persian itself, in an attempt to depict or evoke the historical reality of the Mughal court. Particularly in formal moments, such as the arrival of the emperor in the court (first Babur, later Humayun), a particularly Persianised register emphasises the formality of the occasion, and in occasional short moments Persian itself is employed to address the emperor and the assembled nobility. How can such distinctive interventions be understood in the context of a film that, during a time of intense linguistic antagonism, purported to strive to represent harmonious Hindu-Muslim co-existence? I wish to suggest that we view these moments not as sites of exclusion (as only a very small percentage of the film audience, regardless of religion, would have been fluent or even conversant in Persian in 1945), but as heteroglossic interventions into a

⁶ See Urvi Mukhopadhyay, 'The Perception of the Medieval in Indian Popular Films: 1920s-1960s', unpublished PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2004, 131-2.

monoglossic environment, broadly understood, wherein comprehension and therefore access was relegated to a position of secondary importance behind an almost tangible aural pleasure. A *soupaçon* of Persian may well have affected filmgoers in very similar ways to my own use of a French noun in place of its common or garden English alternatives – dash, sprinkling – affects the reader: adding a slight sense of the exotic, or cultured; demonstrating a level of multilingualism and flair; creating a moment of linguistic diversity and variation; or, it must be acknowledged, alienating some by virtue of pretension and inaccessibility. What my own addition does not possess, however, is any claim to representational veracity. The combination of this latter effect with any or several of the above-listed perceptions serves to produce an aural experience that, taken together with the visual spectacle of the court scenes (a spectacle further appreciated and enhanced, some 15 years later, by the use of colour in several of the court scenes in K.K. Asif's *Mughal-e Azam*), produces an experience that Mehboob clearly intended to be both spectacular and, if not historically accurate, then at least evocative.

More generally, the characters in *Humayun* employ a broad range of registers along the Hindi-Urdu spectrum. It is not accurate, however, to suggest that “the dialogue used for Hindu characters were [sic] generally Hindi, while Urdu was used for the dialogue of the Muslim characters.”⁷ Such assertions ignore the intrinsic fluidity to oral, filmic language which, as I have already suggested, facilitated much more expansive individual vocabularies to flourish unmarked by the most compelling visual signifier of difference – that is, script. The somewhat careless positing of an oppositional distinction between Hindu characters

⁷ Ibid., 132.

speaking ‘Hindi’ and Muslim characters speaking ‘Urdu’ furthermore obscures the subtle, nuanced and diverse ways in which Mehboob and his scriptwriter, Aga Jani Kashmiri, employed the full range of Hindustani often within a single character. The figure of the Rajput prince Randhir Singh (played by Chandra Mohan) is illustrative in this regard: while he is presumably the Hindu character in whose speech Mukhopadhyay detects ‘Hindi’, and while he does indeed employ slightly more words of Sanskritic origin than his Muslim counterparts in the Mughal court, he is portrayed time and again to be at least as comfortable with a Persianised register as he is with any other, and as comfortable as any of his interlocutors. Consider, for instance, the early dialogue between the Rajput prince and Humayun, when the former bursts in and interrupts Humayun’s attempted seduction of Nargis’ character, Hamida Bano:

Randhir: Śāhzāde, talvār lāo.

Humayun: Kyom?

Randhir: Mairi badlā lene āyā hūm.

Humayun: Ajīb badmazāq ādmī ho tum. Kitnā acchā mauqā hāth se nikalvā diyā. Jab tak ho talvār hāth mein, badlā lene cale ā rahe hai.

Randhir: Bāteñ banāne kī koī zarūrat nahīn. Mairi laṛne āyā hūm laṛūmḡā.

Humayun: Śāhzāde is vaqt laṛne ke lie taiyār nahīn. Agar laṛnā ho, havā se laṛiye.

Randhir: Śāhzāde, hoś mein āo. Yah mazāq kā vaqt nahīn.

Humayun: Yah mazāq ke lie vaqt o bevaqt kaisā? Aur ab to kumārī bahin ke vajah se ristā hī aisā qāim ho cukā hai.

Randhir: Lekin meri pratijñā pūrī hokar rahegi!

Randhir: Prince, bring your sword.

Humayun: Why?

Randhir: I have come to take revenge.

Humayun: You are a strange, unfortunate man. You’ve lost me such a good opportunity. There you are with sword in hand, come to take revenge.

Randhir: There’s no need for discussion. I have come to fight, and fight I will.

Humayun: This prince isn’t ready to fight just now. If you want to fight, fight the air.

Randhir: Prince, come to your senses. This is not a time for humour.

Humayun: What’s this good or bad time for fun? Besides, we have a relationship through your sister the princess.

Randhir: Yet my vow will still remain!

Randhir's one word of Sanskritic origin – *pratijñā* – is all that sets his speech apart from his Mughal counterpart, and it is this same kind of sprinkling that occurs time and again throughout the film.

It is also worth noting that Randhir's ease with the Persianised register of the court is not simply because he is a male member of the Mughal elite, as Veena Kumari's Rajput princess speaks in as Persianised a register as any of her interlocutors, including Babur and the prince Humayun, despite her Hindu identity and gender. Kashmiri's use of language is both playful and inclusive: consider, for instance, the exchange between Veena Kumari and the character of Hamida Bano, the commoner and love interest of Humayun, played by Nargis, as they discuss the prospect of the latter's engagement:

Hamida Bano: Āp to śā'irī farmāne lagī?

Rajkumari: Jī hāñ. Abhī to āp ko manāne ke li'e pūrī kavītā kahnī paṛegī.

Hamida Bano: Have you started reciting poetry?

Rajkumari: Yes. Now you too will have to start reciting poetry to be accepted.

This exchange, coming immediately after the Rajkumari's recitation of an Urdu *śer*, perfectly captures the counter-intuitive ways in which Kashmiri played with the registers of Hindustani: first, the formal Urdu *śer*, with Islamicate religious overtones, from the Rajput princess; then, the commoner offers comment on this newfound interest in reciting poetry, using the formal, Urdu or Persianised *muśā'ira* term of *śā'irī farmāna*; then the princess affirms the necessity of the recitation of poetry, in the more Indic term *kavītā kahnā*, as a *sine qua non* of courtly life.

Such filmic moments, especially wherein the spectre of the literary comes to the fore, demonstrate beyond doubt the broad linguistic range on which screenwriters felt able

to draw. Rather than emphasising dichotomies – Hindi in the mouth of a Hindu character, Urdu in that of a Muslim – we must acknowledge instead the fluidity that these individual characters embodied and employed. This is not to deny the occasion of linguistic marking altogether: Hindu characters in *Humayun* are manifestly more likely to use Sanskrit-derived vocabulary (immediately prior to the *śer*, the princess mentions a *sundar sapnā*, for instance, rather than a *khubsūrat khayāb*: given the several occurrences of *khayāb* in the preceding dialogue, such a deviation not only gently reinforces her identity, but more importantly enriches, enlivens and varies the dialogue) than their Muslim counterparts. Yet Mehboob and his writers also employed minor variations in register to exceptional dramatic effect: when Humayun lies dying, for instance, his former enemy Randhir invokes *bhagvān*, followed immediately by Babur’s dramatic prayer to Allah, followed in turn by the Rajkumari’s own prayer to *bhagvān* once again, as Hindu and Muslim alike offer prayers for the Mughal prince’s life. If it is indeed divine intervention that the accompanying shots of lightning signify, this divinity is clearly unmarked as either Hindu or Muslim.

Films such as *Humayun*, then, exemplify the broad horizons of filmic Hindustani: while language differentiation can on occasion mark religious identities, the characters employ a broad range of vocabulary that, crucially, presents no impediments to mutual intelligibility within the context of the film’s dialogues. Most importantly, the clear expectation was surely that, excepting the example of Persian already noted, this same broad register would be intelligible, accessible and indeed attractive, to the film’s audience.

Yet let us consider an example in which register really does not function to mark out individuals as distinct, yet that language remains broadly conceived and inclusive. The

dialogue of Sunny's *Mela*, written by Azim Bazidpuri, rarely reaches the lofty heights of rhetoric in which Kashmiri's script revels. As such, Bazidpuri uses a decidedly, if not emphatically, mixed Hindustani register, and largely eschews higher registers and styles. The village provides the setting for this almost wholly unmarked and undifferentiated speech, in which characters frequently employ words of dramatically different provenance in the context of their conversations. A good example is a scene at the village fair, when the hero Mohan (Dilip Kumar) assures the heroine Manju (Nargis) that she has nothing to worry about (using "*taklīf*") as he has 8 annas – more than enough to allow them both to enjoy the fair. Moments later her friend, Basanti, arrives and inserts herself into their conversation and plans: Mohan assures her that his muttered aside, calling on god for help, was nothing of the sort – instead, he was calling down blessings ("*āśīrvād*") for her.

Such uses are unremarkable in the context of the film, however. Distinction, where it is to be found, comes primarily through the songs of the film (discussed in §4.III below), and distinctive speech registers are employed only in scenes that mandate a particular mode of expression – for example, the Persianised legalese of the court room. The paradigm is one of accessibility, and the context is one wherein characters converse in a shared language; this is a language that is the property of no individual nor community, is understood by all, and that easily accommodates Sanskritic or Perso-Arabic terms as and when they seem appropriate. Thus the dialogue of *Mela* in many ways exemplifies the feasibility of unmarked Hindustani as the language of cinema: the Sanskritic *āśīrvād* and the Arabic-derived *taklīf*, to use the same example, are neither Hindi nor Urdu in their oral presentation and aural reception; this tale of ill-fated romance is concerned with

entertainment and pleasure, a good story aiming at popularity rather than any ill-conceived notion of linguistic purity.

One moment of non-Hindustani intervention occurs in *Mela* when the hero Mohan's rival for Manju's affections attempts to use English in order to impress his fellow villagers as to the validity of his argument. The English is garbled, creating a comic moment for those sufficiently fluent in the language of command to enjoy, and establishing a pattern of comic characterisation that has been successfully employed many, many times in the history of Hindustani film.

English functions as the marker *par excellence* of authority, whether correctly employed or otherwise, both here and in Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar* ('The Low Village'). In Anand's film, however, English is used in a similar fashion to the heavily Persianised dialogues from Mehboob's *Humayun*, with the former displacing the latter in this contemporary milieu as the signifier of authority and authoritative discourse. Such a transformation has, I argue, significant implications for the role of filmic Hindustani as a language of inclusivity in a modern setting: if the 'other' is marked by English, and as we shall see by class, how much closer does that make the average Indian, whether Hindu or Muslim, to his fellow subalterns? Two episodes in *Neecha Nagar* deserve somewhat close attention in this regard: an early scene in which the residents of the eponymous low village come to confront the landlord over his plans to redirect a water flow, and its attendant sewage, through the village; and a later scene in which one of the villagers, Sagar, returns to his friends after a private meeting with the landlord.

The group of villagers which goes *en masse* to the landlord's house is diverse in religion, age and temperament, though indistinguishable from one another when it comes to speech register. It is the hero's friend, Sagar, who makes the first break from their uniform way of speaking, which is preceded by the suggestion "*Hamāre khyāl meṁ sarkārjī se angrezī meṁ bāt karnā cāhie.*" ("I think we should speak to the landlord in English.") Accompanying his attempts to smarten his appearance – brushing off his shoes and arranging his trousers – this receives approval from another of the villagers, and the moment marks both orally and visually an aspiration to participate in authoritative discourse. Yet, when they proceed to meet the landlord, the conversation takes place in Hindustani, accented by the Persianised vocabulary of politeness ("*taśrīf rakhiye*", etc.). It is only in a moment of frustration that Sagar blurts out his garbled, frantically rushed assertion in English that the landlord should not redirect the water towards the village – "What you see what is want don't you see what it mean that the dirty *nalā* ['sewage'] should not go there do you see" – an attempt at speaking the language of power that is utterly ignored by the landlord, who turns instead to the *khadi*-wearing leader of the group and the Muslim village elder to continue the discussion in Hindustani.

This brief intervention on the part of English is accompanied by a variety of other oral and visual signifiers of distinction. The landlord is seated, luxuriating in a cigar and, while he passes a box of cigarettes out to the villagers, all of whom take one, the apparatus of smoking, and implicitly of leisure, serves to mark out the difference in class and wealth. In terms of dress, the landlord wears a well-cut western suit and tie, while the villagers are dressed in an assortment of Indian garments, with only the aforementioned Sagar sporting

a poor imitation of western fashion. And framing these visual signifiers is the difference in the *manner* of speaking, rather than the register. The landlord's competence in English is taken for granted; the villagers' limited facility is mockingly displayed. Moreover, however, the landlord speaks in a measured pace, firmly but quietly, and with quite distinct enunciation, while the speech of (most of) the villagers is hurried, loud, and markedly less clear. Linguistic marking, as it occurs here, is done through the manner and mode of delivery, and highlights differences of class, rather than religion. The Muslim village elder's speech is the closest to the landlord's, but this is a mark of dignity rather than religious affiliation.

The second scene for consideration once again involves Sagar who, having received the hospitality of the landlord (and, it should be noted, having tried rather pathetically to reproduce the language of polite discourse, bobbing his head and repeatedly offering a nervous and doubled "*śukriyā, śukriyā*" when presented with tea, a cake, a cigar, another cigar, and sugar) returns to the village to give an account of his meeting. Wearing a suit, and smoking a cigar, Sagar makes his entrance: "Hello, how do you do? *Māf kījiegā mujhe zarā der ho gayī, magar main sab tay kar āyā hūm, āp ko'ī fikr na kiji'e - sab kām ban gayā.*" ("Please forgive me, I'm a little late, but I've come having solved everything - please don't worry, everything has been sorted out.") He assures his assembled friends that the rerouting of the waterway will not cause any problems, and should there be any filth, it will be easily fixed. His friend Balraj, however, immediately intuits what is patently obvious to the film audience: that, beyond his imitation of the landlord in terms of style, clothing, and affectation, he is in fact precisely reproducing the arguments he has just been presented

with. The argument is framed in English, and with it the visual signifiers of authority, yet it is unsuccessful. The villagers recognise their other; he is marked by English, marked by class and, in the case of Sagar, marked by class betrayal.

Anand and his screenwriter, K.A. Abbas, created a complex and subtle interlacing of signs that escaped government censorship despite its clear invocation of the Gandhian village utopia and its associated symbols (*khadi*, handloom, etc.).⁸ Language was used as one signifier among many to mark out the morally lax and, as I have argued, the other. Rather than an opposition between Hindi/Hindu and Urdu/Muslim – the widespread distinction being made at the time – this distinction was being made between English/Anglicised/corrupt on one hand, and Hindustani/authentically Indian/pure on the other. This latter category was therefore indivisible, constituted as a co-operative and harmonious whole, in which members of both religious communities co-existed and defined themselves against a class-based oppression. The cohesive potential of this shared and implicitly linguistic identity is demonstrated in the film’s denouement: addressing the assembled municipal board, covered in mud having washed herself in the filthy water now flowing through the village and causing widespread sickness and even death, our heroine adds to the mixed register of Hindustani employed throughout the film a critical element of the language of command: “*Kṛpā karke is tajvīz par voṭ le lījī’e.*” (“Kindly vote on this proposal.”) The Sanskritised, Arabicised and Anglicised come together in a microcosmic exemplification of

⁸ The screenplay was based on a story by Hayatullah Ansari, itself based on Maxim Gorky’s 1902 play *На дне* (*The Lower Depths*), an unredeemptive depiction of Russian peasants in a shelter for the homeless (EIC 306).

the fluid nature and inclusive capacity of this filmic language,⁹ the vote goes in favour of the villagers, and the landlord suffers a rather extended heart attack and painful death shortly afterwards.

We have seen how register functioned in inclusive, heterogeneous ways in several films of the 1940s – particularly *Humayun*, *Mela*, and *Neecha Nagar*. While the potential existed, and was employed, to mark out religious identities, this was frequently done in the context of a broader conceptualisation of the Hindustani language as inclusive of different religious identities and as realised through the oral media. Of course, there are counterexamples aplenty. *Nek Pervin*, for instance, is an example notable for the consistency of register. Its characters speak in such a way that differentiation is almost impossible: of course, the preponderance of Muslim characters might well explain the consistently Persianised Hindustani that is employed. Occasional uses of English speech and phrases (“very good”, “it is very bad”) serve to mark out slightly comic moments or comic (male) characters; otherwise, characters speak in a remarkably uniform Urdu-Hindustani register regardless of class, gender, age or situation. As I discuss at further length in §4.III below with regard to paratexts, the target audience of this Muslim social was almost certainly a predominantly Muslim one, and Allah is frequently invoked, for favour, in gratitude and the like. Nevertheless, the register is not so Persianised or “Urdu” that it would have been incomprehensible to a “Hindi” audience, and there are no oral/aural moments that would alienate or exclude audience members in the thorough manner of the

⁹ Reflecting, in some sense, the participation of Abbas at the nexus of the Hindi, Urdu and English literary worlds. See Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism*, 128 (though *Neecha Nagar* is conspicuously absent from Gopal’s analysis of Abbas’ work).

surah peritext analysed below. In a similar but opposite manner, Hindu mythologicals such as *Ram Rajya* (in which the register is almost entirely *śuddh* Hindi) remind us that not all directors or writers chose to utilise the full spectrum of Hindustani in their films. However, it is clear that films in which a more restricted register – that is, a register that could be characterised quite distinctly as Hindi or Urdu and accepting little in the way of compromise – was employed tended to take as their subject matter a theme that was intrinsically suited to such exclusivity. In the absence of a formal, programmatic determination of what should or could constitute the language of film, directors and screenwriters were free to draw on the full range of the Hindi-Urdu spectrum, and did so to dramatic, creative and inclusive effect.

4.II POET OR LYRICIST? THE VICISSITUDES OF GENRE

While our discussion of register as it was used in film dialogues has revealed the plurality of approaches to Hindustani that existed, it tells only half the story. Songs – lyrics and music – are an incredibly important part of Indian and Hindustani cinema. As Tejaswini Ganti has noted, they often function as advertising for the film itself, released ahead of the film and, thus, already familiar to audiences by the time they see the picture.¹⁰ Furthermore, other studies have demonstrated the inseparability of the songs from their films, and the necessity of appreciating them as part of an organic whole,¹¹ rather than dismissing them

¹⁰ Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004) 15.

¹¹ See Anna Morcom, *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

for failure to conform to some kind of empirical or classical realism.¹² Perhaps most significantly, the poetry of songs represents the most obvious link between the then new, oral film and the literary forms that long predated its arrival.

With this in mind, I turn once again to S.U. Sunny's *Mela*. This tragic romance was one of the early films for which Shakeel Badayuni wrote the lyrics. I suggest that the contrasts between the various moments of song and poetry in the film – inextricably linked with their connecting dialogue and central to the narrative and affective power of the film – provoke fruitful comparisons with the corpus of poetry that Shakeel, as both film lyricist and “serious” poet, has left behind. Seeing these moments as embedded within the broader contours of the filmic text, especially its visual scenes but also the mode of delivery – what I am terming the multiple textures of Hindustani – allows to examine just how poetry and song featured in the film, and how they compare with their other, more “literary” contexts. Such contrasts enable us to appreciate the full extent of the linguistic and symbolic range that the lyricist, in conjunction with the screenwriter, could and did employ in making a Hindustani film that, in this case, was released shortly after independence.

Shakeel Badayuni (1916-1970) is well known for his film lyrics, particularly those in *Mughal-e Azam*, *Chaudhvin ka Chand*, and *Sahib, Bibi aur Gulam* – three particularly memorable and successful productions on which he worked. A graduate of Aligarh Muslim University, he began working as a lyricist when he moved to Bombay in 1946, leaving his relatively poorly paid government job in Delhi. He was a prolific poet as well as lyricist – his first

¹² See Rachel Dwyer, *All you want is money, all you need is love: Sex and romance in Modern India* (London: Cassell, 2000) 107-8 for a discussion of the various modes of realism as applied to Hindi cinema.

collection of poetry, *Rā'nāiyān* ('Graces'), was published in 1944, and subsequent collections and later reprints testify to the enduring popularity of his work.¹³ This popularity rests, no doubt to a large extent, on the penetration achieved by his film lyrics – many have entered the popular consciousness of Hindi India and remain there to this day.

Turning to the film itself, however, it is interesting to note the variations that exist between various parts of Shakeel's contributions. The most striking difference is, in fact, in the songs: Shakeel proved his own versatility and adaptability, with Hindustani songs such as 'Yeh zindagī ke mele' included alongside other, more celebratory songs such as 'Āe sāvan ṛtu āyī', the latter clearly taking its thematic and linguistic inspiration from the pre-modern Braj lyrics of Krishna devotionalism. (This was a pattern Shakeel followed in other, later films; consider, for instance, 'Pyār kiyā to ḍarnā kyā' and 'Mohe panghaṭ pe' from *Mughal-e Azam*.) Yet these distinctions are further enhanced, along with our appreciation of Shakeel's own range of expression and poetic diction, when these lyrics are set alongside snippets of their author's more formal poetry, as they are in *Mela*.¹⁴ These various selections – surrounded by the dialogue of the characters (written by Azim Bazidpuri), and encased in the overarching narrative continuum of the film – can of course be juxtaposed and contrasted on the basis of their linguistic diversity alone. However, I turn to the idea of texture as a way of more fully appreciating the role these various utterances play in the film, and as a means by which the film as a single speech act can be understood as

¹³ *Rā'nāiyān*, for example, had its first edition in 1944 (Delhi: Kutub Khana Azizia) before a second edition in 1950 (Bombay: Taj Office), and subsequent editions in the 1960s and 70s, followed by its incorporation into various editions of his collected works.

¹⁴ I maintain a useful, albeit somewhat artificial, distinction here between lyric and poem here, for the sake of convenience only.

constituting a distinct intervention in the linguistic milieu of Hindi-Urdu. In doing so, we can begin to appreciate how register functions not as a proof of irreconcilable difference or distinctiveness, but instead is exploited, appreciated and enjoyed alongside extra-linguistic elements as an element of deep, filmic texture.

I use the term ‘textures’ to refer to the ways in which language is situated in a broader, meta-linguistic, and here particularly visual context. This denotes a mode of perception – of looking, of reading, of appreciating and here particularly of listening – that implicitly assumes the involvement of multiple senses, for it recognises the inseparability of the linguistic utterance (speech, song, text) from its attendant extra-linguistic accoutrements (speaker, audience, script/page). We are able, of course, to examine the linguistic elements of any given texture in isolation, but in doing so we risk denuding these speech acts of their markers, and blinding ourselves to the full expressive richness of any given utterance. Indeed, I believe such an investigation of texture may provide a way to reconcile the “visual bias” that has not only predominated in particularly western film scholarship with the self-evident importance of the song to the Indian cinema, and suggest albeit only in the most tentative way a mode of reading simultaneously the lyrical, musical, and visual.¹⁵

It is with this in mind that we can turn to the poetic intervention mentioned above.

We have already heard the film’s signature song:

*Ye zindagi ke mele duniya mein kam na honge
Afsos ham na honge...*

¹⁵ Morcom, *Hindi film songs*, 10.

Itself penned by Shakeel, the song is sung against the backdrop of the village fair. It is entirely worldly, in terms of both content and presentation. Hardly upbeat, the song considers the transitory nature of human existence, expressing regret that, whatever goes on, we cannot remain to see it all (“There will be no shortage of fairs [read: spectacles] in this life: unfortunately, we won’t be here [to see them]”). However, we then cut to something that, in tone, imagery, delivery and context, is something recognisably different: an Urdu *śer*:

*Vahī zindagī vahī marḥalle vahī kārvān vahī rāste,
Magar apne apne maqām par kabhī tum nahīn kabhī ham nahīn.*

That same life, those same stopping points, caravans and roads,
But we were never in our own place, neither you nor I.

The *śer* is taken from a longer *ghazal* by Badayuni (‘Merī zindagī pe na muskarā mujhe’) that, considered as a whole, on the written, published page, provides a further point of comparison with the filmic utterances.¹⁶ Most striking, however, is the thematic continuity between the couplet and the preceding song. Both reflect on missed opportunities, with the resting places, roads and journeys of the *śer* mapping out life’s journey in a decidedly more sombre tone (there are no “fairs” in this version). Yet this thematic continuity serves to highlight the disjuncture between the two moments: their styles and contexts – what I suggest we regard as their textures – are wholly different. The former is sung by an anonymous narrator and, despite its somewhat melancholic outlook, is accompanied by a rather sprightly tune and, as already mentioned, overlaid with images of fun and

¹⁶ The first line of the *śer* is slightly modified from the published version, which reads *Vahī kārvān vahī rāste vahī zindagī vahī marḥalle*. The film version moves *zindagī* to the front of the line, emphasising the echo effect to the song lyrics. See Shakeel Badayuni, *Kulliyāt-e Shakīl* (Lahore: Makhtabah-e Urdu Adab, n.d.).

enjoyment at a fair. This oral and visual backdrop alleviates the melancholia, suggesting rather than explicitly articulating a sentiment akin to *carpe diem*; if life is indeed transitory, one should enjoy its more pleasant moments (see Figure 1).¹⁷ The texture of the *śer*, on the other hand, is emphatically different: the landscape shifts abruptly to an eerie, desolate vista, through which our hero Mohan, nearing the end of his life, wanders alone through the dark. The couplet is delivered in portentous tones, declamatory and yet sombre. The formal nature of this distinctively Urdu couplet is thus further marked apart by its filmic texture. Essentially, the texture and in particular the mode of delivery serves to mark this poetry as poetry, as a genre apart from what has come before.



Figure 4.1 *Mela* screenshots: "Ye zindagī ke mele" and "Vahī zindagī"

The linguistic register of the *śer* is not *dramatically* different from that of the song that preceded it; however, as already noted, its difference is marked out more by its texture than any particularities of register. The couplet is in fact the least Persianised of the six couplets that make up Badayuni's published *ghazal*, which in other verses abounds with

¹⁷ The lyric is reminiscent of a common Hindi phrase, describing this world or life as "*cār din kā melā*" or a four-day fair. It is a phrase found in Kabir's poetry, as well as a variety of song recordings (occasionally as "*do din kā melā*", or a two-day fair).

distinctive markers of Persian syntax (especially the free use of the *izāfat*) and Arabic-derived vocabulary.¹⁸ What this demonstrates, however, is the capacity of film to include elements of formal, “high” literature, in an admittedly somewhat limited context, alongside the more demotic film song, and to move swiftly and dynamically between moods, registers and textures. The distinction between poet and lyricist may well then be less than imagined by later critics and literary historians such as Muhammad Sadiq, who freely denounced poets for “selling out” to the film industry – spending their time composing popular, pleasing, and implicitly inferior verses – and dismissed their work out of hand.¹⁹ Certainly, Badayuni’s work testifies to the high standards he achieved in both arenas, with his accomplished song lyrics and elegant poetry here at least co-existing side by side.

A later song serves to demonstrate not only Badayuni’s own range, linguistic competence and versatility, but also the accommodating nature of the filmic medium regarding divergent registers, forms and traditions. The decidedly upbeat ‘Āe sāvan rūtu āyī’ posits the Mohan of the song (“*Mohan ghar ā jā*”/“Mohan come home”), as both an epithet of Krishna and the Mohan of the film. Manju takes the place of Radha or the principle *gopī*, while her female companions join in the recitation of the chorus. Mohan’s own intervention, “*Duniyā hai do dīn kā melā kuch ro le kuch gā le*” (“The world is a two-day festival: cry a little, sing a little”), both echoes the theme of the film and ‘Ye zindagī ke mele’ in its call to seize the day and make the most of the transitory passage of life and love,

¹⁸ Consider, for example, the following couplets: “*Merā kufr ḥāṣil-e zūd hai merā zūd ḥāṣil-e kufr hai / merī bandagī vo hai bandagī jo raḥīm-e daur-o ḥaram nahīm*”, and “*Mujhe rās ā’e khudā kare yahī istibāh kī sā’atērī / unḥērī aitbār-e vafā to hai mujhe aitbār-e sitam nahīm*”. From Badayuni, *Kulliyāt*.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Muhammad Sadiq’s condemnation of Abdul Hayee ‘Sahir’ Ludhianvi in his *History of Urdu Literature*.

and also evokes the carefree abandon with which Krishna conducts his *līlā* in so many devotional Braj Bhasha lyrics. The setting is idyllic, with the women happily gathering wheat and singing while they work their sickles. The song contrasts distinctively with the register, tone, and literary heritage of both ‘Ye zindagī’ and ‘Vahī zindagī’, yet all these poetic moments are linked together by the common context of the neutral, unmarked and accommodating register that Bazidpuri employed for the film’s dialogue.

Even this one example of Sunny’s *Mela* shows how films had the potential for an expressive breadth that surpassed even the most eclectic of literary journals. Poets such as Shakeel Badayuni employed varied and divergent registers, invoked a range of literary motifs and heritages, and in doing so demonstrated the expressive potential of a broadly conceptualised Hindustani that stretched from the formal and established tones of classical Urdu poetry to the rich and evocative phrases and phonetics of Braj Bhasha devotionals.²⁰ Significantly, these examples show Badayuni’s deliberate creation of quite different poetic compositions – he wrote the song lyrics as song lyrics, and published his poetry as poetry, lent only an appropriate couplet to the film script rather than the entire *ghazal* and – in contrast to other lyricist-poets such as Sahir Ludhianvi, who substantially reworked a Persianised *nazm* for the screen – thereby kept these two strands of production somewhat separate. Most conclusively, we can apprehend the centrality of song and music, and of

²⁰ This is not to suggest, however, that Urdu poetic genres such as the *ghazal* have been seamlessly integrated into the world and language of films. Naseem Hines has noted the ways in which Ghalib’s poetry was denuded of its mystical elements through a process of “romanticisation” in two post-independence productions (see Naseem Hines, ‘From ghazal to film music: The case of *Mirza Ghalib*’ in Pauwels ed. *Indian Literature*, 147-69). I have discussed the transformations that Sahir Ludhianvi wrought on his *nazm* ‘Cākle’ to prepare it for inclusion in Guru Dutt’s 1957 film *Pyasa* elsewhere.

poetry, to an understanding of the language of film in the broadest sense. As poetry entered into film, either imported in its original state or through the expressive medium of song, it became less the “core marker of linguistic difference”,²¹ and more a source of pleasure that took full advantage of the liberating effects of orality and aural reception, enabling the consumption of Hindustani in an environment that was beyond the scope of literary or linguistic puritanism.

4.III FREE FROM SCRIPT? THE FILMIC PARATEXT

Insofar as a film, much like any other linguistic product, may be analysed as a ‘text’, it seems pertinent to consider the ways in which Hindi-Urdu films of the pre-Independence period were framed and mediated by their paratextual elements. In one sense, films represented perhaps the greatest potential for the articulation and employment of a broadly conceived Hindustani, as the oral nature of the medium apparently removed the thorny and persistently intractable issue of script from the equation.²² Indeed, David Lelyveld’s comparison of the development of very different language registers in the broadly concomitant media of radio and film attributes the evolution of the starkly

²¹ David Lelyveld, ‘The Fate of Hindustani’, 210.

²² This is not to say that the issue of script, or written language more broadly, was entirely absent during the silent period. One critic bemoaned the poor quality of titles as prepared for the silent films, and the irregularities in quality between titles prepared in various languages, while asserting the need for higher production standards particularly with regard to Hindi titles. He wrote, regarding the 1931 production *Devi Chowdhurani*, “The lack of Hindi language [intertitles] in such a popular film was really disappointing to many admirers of Bankimchandra’s works who are unfortunately incapable of understanding English and Bengali titles...It is expected that the producers will not ignore a language which is treated as the *lingua franca* of India.” S. Mehra, *Filmland*, 12 December 1931, reprinted in Bandyopadhyay ed. *Indian Cinema*, 71-2.

divergent styles of Hindi and Urdu on All India Radio, as opposed to the mixed and relaxed nature of “Filmi Hindi”, to both the requirement that radio programmes be prepared in written form prior to broadcast, and the intense government and literary scrutiny that radio language received (scrutiny from which film remained largely free during the period in question).²³ However, while the orality (and, let us not forget, visuality) of these filmic texts may be their distinguishing feature, they were in fact (or, perhaps, of course) framed by paratextual elements that were, inescapably, written.

Embracing the hermeneutic continuum of film-text-opus so clearly articulated by Georg Stanitzek,²⁴ we are free to investigate the Hindi-Urdu filmic forms of what Gérard Genette has identified as paratext, and has suggestively defined as “a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public”.²⁵ Indeed, and as we shall see, it is precisely the discontinuity between the oral nature of the film and the written nature of its paratextual elements that makes this investigation, in the context of the Hindi-Urdu controversy, so potentially illuminating. Script, and on occasion multiple scripts, figured in the audience’s reception of any given film, both during and immediately before and after the consumption of the film itself (what, in Genette’s terminology, would constitute the *peritext*), and in the larger public sphere through advertising, review and commentary (our extrapolation of Genette’s

²³ David Lelyveld, ‘Talking the National Language: Hindi/Urdu/Hindustani in Indian Broadcasting and Cinema’ in Sujata Patel, ed. *Thinking Social Science in India: Essays in Honor of Alice Thorner* (New Delhi: Sage, 2002) 355-66.

²⁴ Georg Stanitzek, ‘Texts and Paratexts in Media’ tr. Ellen Klein, *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Autumn 2005) 27-42.

²⁵ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* tr. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: CUP, 1997 [1987]) 2.

epitext). These peritextual elements – titles, credits, and other miscellaneous script moments inserted in and around the film – are linked to certain epitextual elements, especially advertisements, by the common agency of production that they share. They constitute a frame for the film proper that is constructed and disseminated by the producers (in the broadest sense) of the film and, as I shall argue, provide us with certain indications of the attempts by film producers and exhibitors to anticipate, and to some extent construct and shape, their audiences. While such factors can serve as an indicator of expected appeal, other epitextual elements – chiefly commentary and reviews – can serve as a measure, albeit a limited one, of consumption and reception, further elaborating our understanding of the complex linguistic structures that surrounded this linguistically fluid, if not ambiguous, medium. Taken as a whole, we will see how the language of film in general, or of a given individual film in particular, was determined, deployed, represented and received in a variety of quite different, and sometimes quite surprising, ways.

4.III.1 AN ISLAMIC PERITEXT

A dramatic example of peritextual intervention comes at the end of S.M. Yusuf's 1946 film *Nek Pervin*. The happy resolution of the story, in which the protagonist is rewarded for her patience and unwavering faith in God with the ultimate reform of her husband, is followed by the appearance of the Quranic, Arabic *surah* quotation “*Inna Allāha ma’a al-ṣābirīn*”, above its Urdu translation “*Khudā ṣabr karne vāloñ kesāth hai*” (“Allah is with those who are patient”), projected onto a moving background of clouds. The visual impact of this

conclusive, and profoundly moralistic, coda is heightened by the use of the distinctive Thuluth script for the *surah* and Nastaliq for the Urdu translation. Even more striking is the contrast between this decidedly Islamic script visual, and the inherently less marked, more mixed, and predominantly Roman nature of the film's other peritextual elements. As is clear in Figure 4.2, Roman script is the default choice for the name of the studio (along with its Latin motto, *Surgite Lumen Adest*, "Arise, the light is near"), is chosen to signal The End, and is the most prominent and central of the three scripts used for the film's title, perched between the Nastaliq and Nagari versions (it is also used for the credits, though these are not shown here).



Figure 4.2 Screenshots from *Nek Pervin* (1946)

Perhaps such peritextual anomalies are simply another marker of the 'Muslim social', delineating it from the other genres and sub-genres of Hindi-Urdu film. Compare, for instance, the peritexts that framed two other contemporary productions: Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar* (1946) and Mehboob's *Humayun* (1945) (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4). Perhaps influenced in some way by winning (or by entering) the Cannes film festival of 1946, *Neecha Nagar* is framed entirely by Roman script, and indeed by significant passages in English, and eschews altogether the use of either Nagari or Nastaliq in titling. Mehboob's *Humayun*, on the other hand, demonstrates a similar preponderance of Roman and English in its textual frame, but includes the already common feature of dual titles in both Nagari and Nastaliq.

However, its Mughal/Islamicate theme has not resulted in an increase in Urdu/Nastaliq (though the spoken language of the film is, as discussed elsewhere, another matter), and certainly nothing comparable to the *surah* quotation in *Nek Pervin*.

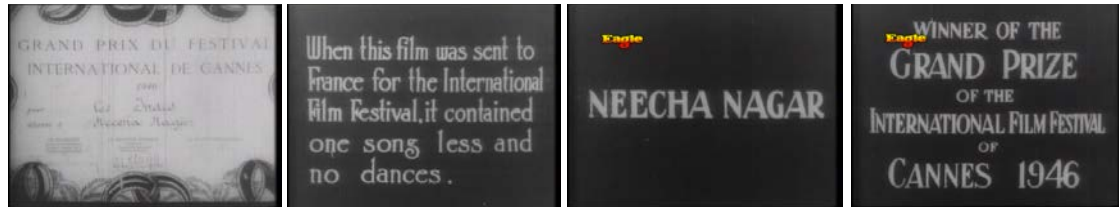


Figure 4.3 Screenshots from *Neecha Nagar* (1946)



Figure 4.4 Screenshots from *Humayun* (1945)

Such comments on the peritext of the film are in no way intended to suggest that the Quranic quotation was in any way inappropriate or out of context; rather, it is clear that the narrative of the film builds seamlessly to this parabolic denouement. Nevertheless, following Genette's schema, it is useful to consider what mediating effects such a distinctive textual coda may have had on contemporary audiences. Certainly, we can appreciate the enabling effect that such Muslim socials must have had on Muslim audiences, whereby the moral and moralising nature of the subject matter ameliorated anxieties over the presence of particularly female family members in such desegregating public spaces as the cinema hall (indeed, the opening scene of the film, in which a moralising play directed and stage-managed by the character of Parveen is presented in the context of a girls' school, can be read as a somewhat self-reflexive, generic commentary on the positive potential of this

relatively new form of entertainment).²⁶ In such cases, a verse from the Qur'an would have been quite simply an affirmation not only of the film's plot, but also of the expectations generated by the title alone (*Nek Parvīn*, or Pious Parveen, indicates the direction of the story just as clearly as the title of Nazir Ahmad's well-known and thematically similar 1869 novel, *Mirāt ul-'Arus*, or The Bride's Mirror).²⁷ The title would have functioned in a similar way for non-Muslim potential audience members: there is almost nothing else a film with this title *could* be about, and it is hard to imagine viewers arriving in anticipation of anything other than a moral, Muslim tale. This said, the exclusively Perso-Arabic form of this penultimate textual intervention, lacking an oral rendition (the Urdu translation of the Arabic would have been, after all, easily understood by speakers of almost any variant of Hindustani), would have been undeniably alienating for those not literate in Urdu. This is not to suggest that long passages of English would not have alienated certain sections of a 1940s film audience in a similar way; however, this latter alienation would have been predominantly class-based, and is of little relevance in the context of the Hindi-Urdu debate. Without access to contemporary reviews or reactions, it is impossible to assess fully the effect this may have had. However, it is worth remembering that this brief Arabic and Urdu peritext was just that: brief, and in a wider context of Roman script and inclusive

²⁶ For an earlier, fictional representation of the movie theatre as a space of moral laxity, see Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra', 'Pālaṭ', in *Matvālā* (19 July 1924); Ruth Vanita tr. 'Kept Boy' in *Chocolate and Other Writings on Male-Male Desire* (New Delhi: OUP, 2006). Such a satirical depiction as Ugra's may well have been intended as a response to the not uncommon sense of unease that the cinema hall generated, especially as a desegregated space. See, for a prominent example, Gandhi's own views on the subject: "...I have never been to a cinema. But even to an outsider, the evil that it has done and is doing is patent." Statement to the Indian Cinematograph Committee 1927-28, quoted in Rachel Dwyer, 'The Case of the Missing Mahatma: Gandhi and Hindi Cinema', *Public Culture* 23:2 (2011) 349-76.

²⁷ See Nazir Ahmad, *The Bride's Mirror*, tr. G.E. Ward (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001 [1903]).

titling, both in *Nek Pervin* and other films from the period (the same was true of, for instance, S.U. Sunny's *Mela* (1948), with the prominence of the Roman title greatly exceeding that of the Nagari and Nastaliq – see Figure 4.5).²⁸ As such, it seems appropriate to view this as a potentially alienating element, which was recognised as such and therefore introduced only sparingly, thereby allowing a film such as *Nek Pervin* to cater to a primary, perhaps intended or imagined audience of Muslim viewers (creating, in Genette's terms, a small but significant "privileged place"), while not going too far towards alienating potential (paying!) customers with less or no familiarity with Arabic. The dominant trend, indicated by the plurality of peritextual instances, seems to have been towards the neutral ground of Roman script, with a sprinkling of Nagari and Nastaliq thrown in for good measure.

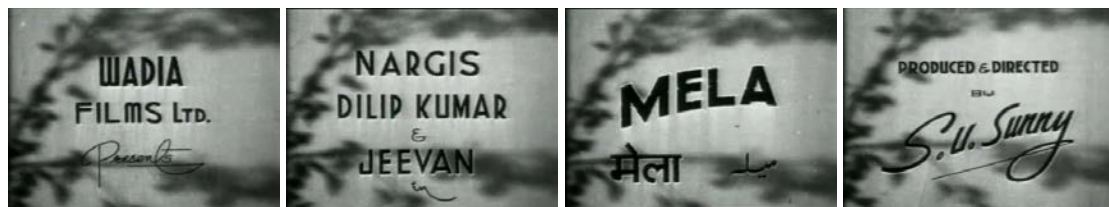


Figure 4.5 Screenshots from *Mela* (1948)

Of course, some films were framed by peritexts that were almost entirely in Nagari. Vijay Bhatt's epic mythological *Ram Rajya* (1943) is a perfect example of this. While the title itself displayed the common, three-script formula discussed above, the most prominent script was Nagari, and while the studio name was presented in Roman, other elements – including the dedication, the cast and crew credits, the closing screen ("samāpt"), and the striking

²⁸ Roman script was also used for the brief textual intervention in *Nek Pervin*, when the names of the various cities that Parveen's husband visits in pursuit of his gambling flash up on the screen over rolling railway tracks.

visual representation of an undivided (British) India framed in petals – were presented exclusively in Nagari/Hindi (see Figure 4.6). The Hindu theme of this film no doubt justified, if not suggested, such a preponderance of Nagari in its framing. Returning again to Genette’s formulation, such a framing suggests the creation of a privileged space of interaction and inclusion, though to a decidedly less exclusive extent than that created by the *surah* in *Nek Pervin*. However, as we shall see below in regard to advertising, the textual framing of even this most emphatically Hindu subject matter was considerably more varied than its peritexts might suggest.



Figure 4.6 Screenshots from *Ram Raja* (1943)

4.III.2 THE FILM MARKETPLACE: ADVERTISING ACROSS SCRIPTS

If the examples of peritexts examined above constituted the primary means by which a filmic text was framed by its producers, the epitexts produced as advertisements for films were another strategy through which producers created an interface between the film and its (potential) audience. Moreover, advertisements were per force affected, though not necessarily restricted, by the intended institutional spaces in which they were placed. The Delhi-based Urdu literary journal *Adib* (or, as it styled itself in English/Roman, *The Adeeb*) provides an excellent lens through which to examine the dynamics of film advertisements’

interaction with print media, due to the wide variety of film adverts that it carried.²⁹ The languages, scripts and styles employed by advertisers not only reveal more about the marketing strategies they used, but also provide a window into the readership of the journal – a print audience reimagined as a film audience.

Adeeb classified itself, perhaps somewhat self-consciously, as “a purely literary monthly Magazine of high standing”. That this description began to appear in the journal on a regular basis some months after it began running adverts for films, and printing a semi-regular column on *Filmī Khabareñ* (Film News), in November 1941 suggests both that film adverts represented a significant source of revenue, and also that they were being proactively marketed to an audience that was self-consciously literary. That such an audience was interested in consuming films does not directly contradict Lelyveld’s assertion that it was the language of radio that was of greatest concern to the literati, but it does serve as an important reminder that films were not targeted at an exclusively ‘low-brow’ audience.³⁰ Furthermore, in addition to the broad coverage of historical and contemporary literature and augmenting the somewhat unvarying lithographed Urdu, relatively high resolution film stills appeared regularly on the inside front, and sometimes back, covers of *Adeeb*. From the outset then, the relationship between the apparently divergent worlds of films and literary journals could be a mutually beneficial one: film producers gained a vehicle for publicity; an attendant commentary began to appear in close proximity to the adverts (in the case of *Adeeb*, this was almost always at the very back of the

²⁹ Issues consulted here were published between 1941-45.

³⁰ Lelyveld, ‘Talking the National Language’.

journal); and an otherwise visually quite drab publication could allow some of the glamour of film to rub off on its pages.

The majority of film advertisements in this Urdu journal were, like that for Shaukat Hussain Rizvi's *Khandaan* (1942) in Figure 4.7, solely textual in nature, and entirely in Nastaliq. However, this was far from the only format. Other adverts varied greatly in terms of their complexity and visual impact, including variously: extremely detailed (if not verbose) descriptions of the plot (as in the case of an advert for Sohrab Modi's 1941 film *Sikandar*); lithographed, stylised images of the characters (see the advert for Vijay Bhatt's 1943 film *Ram Rajya* in Figure 4.10); and recognisable, relatively high definition photographs of the stars (see Figures 4.8 and 4.9). This plurality of Urdu-language adverts in an Urdu journal is, of course, unremarkable. Moreover, the variation in the composition of the adverts as regards images corresponds with a similar variation among adverts for other products in the same journal's pages, and in a similar proportion (though it seems only film adverts went so far as to include photographic images, stylised images were abundant). However, the inclusion of images of whatever format was only one method through which their producers heightened the adverts' visual impact. An alternative approach, which appeared regularly in the pages of *Adeeb*, was the use of other scripts, and there are several examples in which Nastaliq text was supplemented by, or in some instances almost entirely substituted with, Nagari and/or Roman text. Once again, text intruded into this predominantly oral media (film) through the films' paratextual elements, and thereby reintroduced the potential for exclusion based on script that films, as oral media, were at least theoretically supposed to be able to transcend.

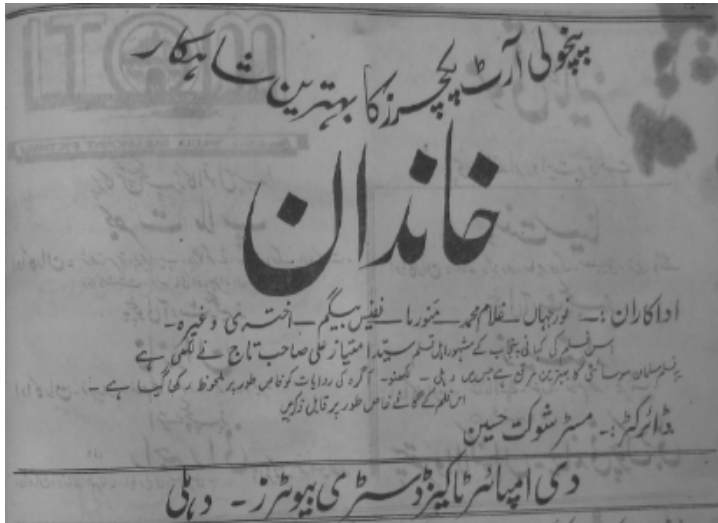


Figure 4.7 Advertisement for *Khandaan* (1942)

Figure 4.8 Advertisement for *Khandaan*

Figure 4.9 Advertisement for *Kisise Na Kehna* (1942)





Figure 4.10 Advertisements for Ram Rajya (1943) and Mahatma Vidur (1943)

The criteria for the use of Nagari are not, however, immediately discernible. The advert for P.Y. Altekar's 1943 film *Mahatma Vidur* (see Figure 4.10) indicates one possible situation; the mythological story of Vidur, half-brother of Dhritarashtra and Pandu in the *Mahābhārata*, perhaps called for an element of Nagari as a denominator of Hindu identity to be introduced into the composition. In such an analysis, the brief instance of Nagari/Hindi in an otherwise and overwhelmingly Nastaliq/Urdu advert is no more intrusive or alienating than the exceptionally brief albeit indicative peritextual Arabic featured in *Nek Pervin*, though it retains a symbolic and communal significance, creating for the Nagari reader a limited privileged space and perhaps drawing the eye of the Hindu reader to the script of his scripture on which the film was based. However, other counterexamples

indicate that the use of Nagari in adverts placed in an Urdu journal did not correspond to such a clear-cut (and possibly over-determined) schema. Consider, for instance, the advert for Bhatt's *Ram Rajya* (see figure 4.10): this big budget and popular *Ramāyaṇa*-based mythological, with its national allegorical elements, would have been an obvious contender for a Nagari/Hindi title in the above formulation, yet the only addition to the Nastaliq/Urdu advert comes in Roman script. Other adverts for Hindu devotional or mythological films – Chaturbhuj Doshi's *Bhagat Surdas/Bhakta Surdas* (1942) or V. Shantaram's long-running and hugely successful *Shakuntala* (1943) – appeared devoid not only of Nagari, but also of images (though, it should be noted, both ran as full-page adverts similar to that for *Ram Rajya*). Clearly then, Hindu subject matter did not mandate the use of Nagari in any consistent fashion in an Urdu publication context. This Hindu subject matter had to be written down in Urdu for this publication, though the occasional inclusion of Nagari in adverts that were obviously specifically formulated for an Urdu-language/Nastaliq-script publication remains significant. Further counter-examples come in the form of adverts such as that for *Kisise Na Kehna* (1942): here, while Nastaliq certainly predominates, it is mingled with both Nagari and Roman scripts, producing an effect similar in some ways to the standard multi-script title peritexts discussed above. However, two elements mark this epitext apart from such titles. Firstly, the real majority of the information regarding the film is imparted through Nastaliq and Urdu; the only elements that are not available through this script are rather banal elements, including the somewhat mystifying “They salute the show world!”. Secondly, the Nagari rendering of the film's name borders on the illiterate: the correct, and correct in Nastaliq, “*kisī se na kahnā*” has been corrupted to the bizarre or perhaps simply

careless *kīsīse na kahenā*. Perhaps indicative of a faulty transmission via Roman, of unfamiliarity with Nagari on the part of the producers of the advert, or of simple carelessness, this certainly suggests that the inclusion of Nagari in such a context was, at the most, of secondary importance. Finally, its use in a romantic, rather than mythological, context demonstrates the almost random way in which Nagari could, did or did not feature in film adverts in this otherwise Urdu journal.

Of course, the very existence of these adverts for Hindu-themed films – *Ram Rajya*, *Mahatma Vidur*, *Shakuntala* and *Bhagat Surdas* being only a selection of the most prominent – in the pages of an Urdu journal, and alongside communally non-specific genres such as romance, not only testifies to the communally-neutral or at least inclusive aspects of *Adeeb* as an Urdu literary publication, but also suggests an inclusive and broad marketing strategy on the part of film producers and exhibitors.³¹ Whether these adverts were placed by distributors or exhibitors, however, the fact remains that an Urdu journal was considered a reasonable space in which to advertise Hindu-themed mythologicals. Nevertheless, print advertising necessitated (it goes without saying) the use of script: at this point of interface with the consuming public, the limits of filmic orality become starkly apparent. Such limits run counter to the abstracting, or depersonalising, aspects of textuality that Jack Goody identified as critical to the very function of writing, and whose formulation scholars of

³¹ It also adds weight to Heidi Pauwels' contention that devotional films should not be dismissed as either "simple expressions of popular devotion" or as "manipulation of presumably illiterate masses"; rather, these were commercial products like any other. See Heidi Pauwels, 'Bhakti songs recast: Gulzar's *Meera* movie' in Heidi Pauwels ed. *Indian Literature and Popular Cinema: Recasting classics* (London: Routledge, 2007) 99-120.

advertising have since effectively employed at least in monolingual contexts.³² The process of tying an utterance not so much to the written form in the abstract, but to a specific script or set of signs in the specific, necessarily restricted the potential audience in this multi-lingual context, and framed the oral film in concrete, grounded, textual terms.³³

We are left with a picture that suggests a somewhat haphazard, or perhaps merely relaxed, approach to the use of script in the paratextual elements associated with films. We can point with some confidence to the multiplicity, even in our relatively small sampling, of linguistic and script-based strategies which, on the whole, demonstrate the lack of anything approaching a positive correlation between the subject matter of a film and the language or script in which it was framed. The prevalent defaults – to Roman script in film titles and credits, and to the language and script of the publication in which adverts ran – suggest, if not a determined effort to avoid the issue of Nagari versus Nastaliq, at least a recognition of the potentially alienating effect that either script may have had. Exceptions to this rule serve to prove it, and Genette reminds us of the inevitable specificities and subtleties that inhere to the “effects that result from the composition around a text of the whole of its paratext”, and the possibilities of individual analyses.³⁴ So, while this discussion focuses on the broad sweep of interactions between script, language and genre, it remains sensible of

³² Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977) 44; Michael Schudson, ‘Advertising as Capitalist Realism’ in Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) 209-33.

³³ The inclusion in several of the adverts discussed of the names of specific cinema halls suggests the involvement of exhibitors in at least some of the film marketing, and opens up the possibility of examining region-specific approaches to advertising. The dynamics of such variations are, regrettably, outside the scope of this discussion. However, it seem likely that fruitful insights could be gained through an examination of the languages of advertising in other urban settings, such as Bombay, Calcutta and Lahore, in particular.

³⁴ Genette, *Paratexts*, 10.

the ways in which, in individual cases, paratextual elements *could* function as markers of difference. Whether as a flash of Arabic at the close of *Nek Pervin*, or the slightly jarring visual of Nagari in an Urdu-script advert for *Mahatma Vidur*, these paratexts certainly acted to differentiate their associated filmic texts from other, emphatically neutral productions. However, in this most commercial of media, such instances of differentiation appear to have been occasional, rather than the norm; added bonuses for those with access, or small privileged spaces of interaction created for a particular segment of the audience, these limited moments worked to draw that segment closer to the product, without alienating the wider film-going consumer base.

4.IV SOME CONCLUSIONS

In her study of the reception of empire cinema in the colonial context, Prem Chowdhry presents a compelling chronology, highlighting the significance of films produced in the late '30s and early '40s. Noting the transformative impact of the 1935 Government of India Act, she recognises the significance of new, legally recognised and sanctioned forms of and arenas for public debate, and of the cultural products produced in its wake:

Thus, an analysis of the films released during these crucial years has special significance. It brings emerging oppositions to the fore: between imperialism and the nationalist agenda; within imperialism; and within nationalism. Centring around issues of culture, identity and self representation the reaction to the empire cinema became fraught with the social and political tensions of the immediate historical moment of reception.³⁵

Of course, the object of analysis in this chapter has been Indian films, rather than empire films featuring Indians. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that Chowdhry's

³⁵ Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India*, 6-7.

formulation, wholly applicable to empire cinema, can and should also be extended to the wider body of Indian cinematic products of the period. The Hindi-Urdu debate, the issue at the heart of this study, central to the communal confrontations that had intensified consistently throughout the late colonial period, was hardly new. Questions of language were, however, now and for the first time being worked out in a novel media setting: that of talking films. The new arenas devoted to the articulation of discussion and dissent provided by the Government of India act, and the opening up of a field of public debate, were mirrored by the almost simultaneous development of a vast and substantively different extension to the parameters of the field of cultural production. This extension was both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the institutional and established realm of formal literary-cultural production: broad in scale and popularity; oral in nature, and aurally and visually consumed; and, fundamentally, more informal and unregulated by elite cultural bodies and organisations. As such, the films of this period require special attention as we seek to understand the evolution of the language of Hindustani film.

This oral extension was, as we have seen, inextricably linked to the pre-existing textual aspects of the public sphere through advertising and other forms of publicity. The orality of films was not – and indeed is not – complete and all-encompassing. The intersections between films and their printed paratexts reveal much about the attitudes of producers, marketers and, by induction and to a certain degree, consumers. Moreover, the diversity or heterogeneity of practices that we have seen in even this brief study demonstrates the fluidity of expectations that existed among members of the aforementioned groups, regarding the language and particularly script of presentation and

consumption as manifested on the printed page or in film credits. The trends towards inclusivity and accessibility are undoubtedly indicative of the inescapably commercial nature of the filmmaking enterprise and, as I have suggested, exceptions to the rule serve to prove it.

I addressed the issue of the Bombay film industry's nomenclature at the outset of this chapter, and remain convinced that, from a linguistic perspective at least, the term "Hindi film" remains somewhat unhelpful as an identifier; moreover, I believe that Hindustani film is profoundly more appropriate, especially for the period under consideration. However, I do not intend to become overly concerned with issues that, perhaps rightly, could be dismissed as mere semantics. With regard to the language spoken, and sung, in the films themselves, we have seen how the oral nature of the medium enabled what I have described as the crystallisation of Hindustani – perhaps even the codification of a broader cultural heterogeneity – as the medium of communication. This was an industry at a remove from the cultural and institutional politics that permeated the question of Hindi-Urdu in the heartland of the United Provinces. As such, and free from both institutional interference and indeed from the serious interest of much of the literary and cultural elite, Hindustani was allowed to quite naturally occupy the linguistic space opened up by the advent of sound in film. This was by no means a foreordained process, and we have seen the significant exceptions: homogeneous registers of differentiation that exclude and mark various linguistic (and implicitly religious) identities. Nevertheless, the inclusive potential of orality has been demonstrated, and we have seen how various directors, scriptwriters and lyricists ranged across the full expanse of the Hindi-Urdu-

Hindustani spectrum in search of the optimum register and mode of expression. We have seen indications of a general inclusivity regarding words of both Sanskrit and Persian or Arabic derivation in the context of film dialogues, the peculiarity of the use of particularly “high” language moments within the oral/aural medium, and the interplay of linguistic and poetic utterances with aesthetic elements within the aural/visual texture of the films; all of which, I have argued, serve to complicate both the communal and linguistic binaries of the Hindi-Urdu debate, and the linguistic classification of the films themselves. The thematics of certain films suggest that this inclusivity may well have been a very deliberate strategy: the inclusive, harmonious past envisioned in Mehboob’s *Humayun*, for instance, would hardly have been suited to a sharp demarcation of religious identities through differences in language or register, and the class-based struggles that formed the heart of Anand’s *Neecha Nagar* was its own brand of contemporary idealism, in which religious differences counted as naught against the differences in power, wealth and social position, that admitted no distinction between variants of Hindustani. Less conscious, perhaps, was the seemingly organic inclusivity of films such as Sunny’s *Mela*, in which the full semantic range of Hindi-Urdu and its associated historical literary traditions were effortlessly integrated into a cohesive, inclusive and entertaining whole. In essence, Hindustani film came to include and contain all the various registers of Hindi-Urdu, at a time when the dominant public discourse emanating from literary and political institutions and elites was focussed on choosing between them.

Quite some scholarly attention has been paid to the various “cultural imaginaries” embodied in Indian cinema: most often the national,³⁶ and, in a notable extension, the religious or “secular”.³⁷ What I have tried to show is that, within the Hindustani film context and alongside such conceptual imaginaries, *language itself* played a key and indeed intrinsic role. The key characteristic of this filmic common ground is its diversity. The film world had space for a variety of approaches to language and, while it did not entirely escape the attention of critical commentators, the language of film was allowed to develop largely unencumbered by the debates that wracked the literary world of particularly north India and of All India Radio. The “eloquent language of gesture” was now being accompanied by spoken language at a time of intense demarcation and debate: however, it was undoubtedly the relative freedom of that same language from visual signifiers of language that enabled this eloquent, expansive Hindustani to crystallise on the screen.

³⁶ See, for example, Sanjay Srivastava, *Passionate Modernity: Sexuality, Class, and Consumption in India* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2007); Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘The Culture of Representative Democracy’ in Partha Chatterjee ed. *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State* (Delhi: OUP, 1998) and others.

³⁷ Rachel Dwyer, *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

BETWEEN THE LINES, OR, “A REVOLUTION MADE BY POETS”

The breadth of this study – surveying literary institutions, poetry, short stories and films across Hindi and Urdu – has necessarily limited its depth: any one of those fields could be the subject of a full length study of its own. Yet I believe that this same breadth has particular merit. The underlying logic in the arrangement of the chapters in this thesis has been along a gradient of decreasing institutional and formal control: from the institutional efforts of the quasi-governmental Hindustani Academy; to the varieties of tastes and practices in the long-established and historically rooted genres of poetry; to the strident literary articulations of humanism in the then-new and profoundly interventionist form of the short story; to the inclusive and heterogeneous linguistic opportunities presented by the oral/visual medium of film. Such areas in no way constitute the entirety of the Hindi-Urdu field of cultural production – novels, pamphlet literature, education, and oral traditions more broadly are all obvious omissions – yet I believe they offer a well-rounded and expansive insight into key arenas in which a literary, linguistic and cultural common ground between Hindi and Urdu, Hindu and Muslim was being sought, created, and in some cases recovered during the late-colonial period.

It is precisely the simultaneous exploration of the formal and informal realms of cultural production that facilitates a proper and nuanced appreciation of the ways in which concerned or simply creative cultural producers were writing against literary and linguistic homogeneity or exclusivity and its socio-political corollaries. We have seen how the Hindustani Academy represented a desire for, and constituted a space for, a mode of literary and linguistic co-existence at a time when most literary institutions and voluntary organisations were devoted to advancing the literatures and agendas of quite narrowly defined languages. Its efforts – chiefly, to promote both Hindi and Urdu simultaneously, but also, as I have shown, to slow and reverse their differentiation and posit an understanding of Hindustani as an overarching and inclusive literary and linguistic space – demonstrate an understanding of literary progress in this multi-lingual environment that moves beyond parallelism towards the institutionalisation of a genuine common ground of shared language, literature and culture.

The contours of such commonality come into even sharper focus when we examine the most popular literary forms of poetry and prose across the nominal divide of language and script. Not only did a substantial section of the literati actively undermine exclusivist understandings and models of literary history and inheritance, but their insistence on diversity and heterogeneity, and their literary outputs and experimentalism ranging across the linguistic continuum of Hindi-Urdu demonstrate the vitality of inclusive literary tastes and creations. We have seen too how speaking either about religion or in a religiously infused idiom in no way *necessarily* resulted in division or alienation. In originating modern literary discourses of Indian secularism in both Hindi and Urdu, writers such as Premchand,

Urga and Chander demonstrated the inclusive potential of religion and religiosity in which their essential humanism was foregrounded. In drawing on local cultural resources, especially the ideals of “religion-as-faith” as developed in generations of *bhakti* and Sufi literature, these writers highlight not only a simultaneity (or parallel nature) of concerns in the literatures of both Hindi and Urdu, but once again show the commonality of literary endeavour to both literatures, and the potential of overlapping and intersecting literary and imaginative registers of Hindustani.

An inclusive and expansive Hindustani *imaginaire* emerged most prominently during this period in the context of cinema. It was here that an expansive and inclusive Hindustani could be employed and enjoyed, largely liberated from both the issue of script and also from direct intervention on the part of politicised literary and linguistic institutions. Even if commonly referred to as Hindi cinema, it is clear that the Hindi of film was not an exclusivist Hindi, but rather a Hindustani that embraced and revelled in the creative opportunities afforded by the full range of the Hindi-Urdu spectrum.

Ultimately, if Hindustani as a realm of Hindi-Urdu was created and consolidated, then this was a creative cultural process – a “revolution made by poets”¹ – rather than a formal institutional or political event.

However, while discrete definitions of “Hindi” or “Urdu” literature and linguistic culture have endured, I stand by the methodological point: that the Hindi and Urdu cultural sphere can only be properly understood by considering the cultural, literary and linguistic linkages and overlaps that endured in the face of attempts to eliminate them; and that, with

¹ Rai, ‘The Persistence of Hindustani’, 143.

proper scholarly collaboration and co-operation, we might eventually arrive at a much deeper understanding of the multilingual cultural field of South Asia. This comparative angle is fruitful not only for the present project. The fundamental motivation of this study has been to argue for a reorientation of our understandings of the literary and linguistic economy of India away from monolingual perspectives and towards a more comprehensive, inclusive, and at the same time subtly nuanced appreciation of the same. In this most important of regards, what I consider this study's most distinctive contribution is also a major limitation: its bilingualism. Fruitful comparisons and consequential insights could no doubt be gained through the use of other Indian-language archives – most applicably, in this case, Punjabi, Bengali and English (indisputably an Indian language in its own right) – however, the scope of this study is confined by the limitations of the author.

The time span of this study covers the high point of nationalist politics in British India. Exclusive nationalisms had already crystallised, and were to prove resilient in the face of co-operative and conciliatory efforts. Similarly, the political and rhetorical division between Hindi and Urdu as both languages and as signifiers of separate religious and cultural communities had reached a critical mass. Even Gandhi, who fervently desired that a unified Hindi-Hindustani should become the communally non-exclusive language of a unified independent India, was unable to satisfy the various constituencies who jealously guarded the position and privileges of “their” language. His terms and rhetoric evolved over time, and he presented his arguments in different ways to different groups, but ultimately his attachment to Hindustani as “simplification” gained little traction among the

literary and political classes driving the debate.² It is obvious that, in modern India and Pakistan, there certainly has not been anything resembling the formal institutionalisation of a Hindustani *saṃskāra* of the sort that Orsini's work charts with regard to Hindi. But something more informal, more fluid, has certainly endured: a habitus, or set of tastes and practices, that despite a lack of official recognition, or even of formal definition, persists in the lived linguistic experience of South Asia, and which in India sits alongside a certain romanticised nostalgia for the past, exemplified by Urdu and *navābī* culture, and evinced and evoked most clearly in the Islamicate genres of Hindi cinema.³

In the final assessment, we cannot escape the historical reality wherein Hindi and Urdu have come, in the main, to be considered, consumed, and indeed taught – in the West as in South Asia – as two largely distinct languages and literatures. Ultimately, the pressures and prejudices that dominated in the late-colonial political field weighed too heavily on those conciliatory, experimental or simply resistant activities in most of the cultural field investigated in this study.

Yet there both remained and remains space for ambiguity, fluidity, and the taking of multiple positions – even seemingly mutually contradictory ones – within this field. Dharendra Varma is a good historical example: active and indeed prominent in a variety of literary institutions, including simultaneously the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and the Hindustani Academy, he was a founding member of the Hindi department at Allahabad University, and a proponent of Hindi at the level of “official language”. However, he

² See Lelyveld, ‘Words as Deeds’.

³ See Mukul Kesavan, ‘Urdu, Awadh and the Tawaif: the Islamicate Roots of Hindi Cinema’ in Zoya Hasan ed. *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State* (Delhi: Kali, 1994) 244-57.

maintained his link with the Hindustani Academy, and refused to join the campaign for Hindi over Hindustani at the national level. His ability, or rather his determination, to straddle this divide points to both the persistence of his inclusive personal literary habitus – comprising an interest for the new alongside a taste for the old, and too expansive to permit exclusivist understandings of modern Hindi to prevail at the national level – as well as his political restraint in the face of such a communally divisive issue.

We could *speculate* on the broader endurance in this day and age of such mixed tastes and political restraint among the population of South Asia at large, though to do justice to such a project would require a separate study. We can trace elements of similarly inclusive position taking in the work of a modern Hindi scholar, Alok Rai. His lament on the loss of Hindustani as a playful, experimental, shared and inclusive range is poignant:

The de-legitimizing of this glorious linguistic domain – particularly in the pedagogical apparatuses of the State – chokes this play and renders the anxious victim-learners dull, pompous and pedestrian. Unbending, inhumane politics is the inevitable corollary. On the recoil from all this, Hindustani presents itself – on the ramparts, at the hour of the wolf – as a utopian symbol, a point of desire, something light, bright and distant from our sphere of sorrow.⁴

Rai's position is some distance from Gandhi's insistence on simple or demotic Hindustani: rather, his is a Hindustani that revels in the full range of Hindi-Urdu, with attention to effect and affect rather than concerns for purity or uniformity. And Rai represents not merely himself – an individual – but rather a broad trend which is invested in recovering such a shared past for the perceived benefits it would bring for the future. Rai's call for the re-emergence of Hindustani as “the natural vehicle of popular democracy as well as of

⁴ Rai, 'The Persistence of Hindustani', 142.

secularism”⁵ reminds us that, while Hindustani may not exist in a formal, recognised, institutional context, a taste for it certainly endures. As a concept, however flawed in or encumbered by its history and genealogy, it stands for that cultural and linguistic space of commonality, tolerance, and even secularism, wherein language can be delinked from the pernicious aspects of nationalism and religious communalism, and function instead as a site of communication, mutuality and almost boundless creativity – truly, as a common ground.

⁵ Ibid., 143.

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