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The Erotic Conceit:

History, Sexuality and the Urdu ghazal

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in Comparative Literature

by

Shad Naved

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Aamir R. Mufti, Chair

This dissertation pursues the literary-historical tracks of the image repertoire of "boy-love" (*amradparasti*) versified for over two centuries in the Urdu ghazal. It critically engages with key positions in sexuality studies and ghazal criticism that have reduced this theme to visible sexuality, submerging its historical narrative elements. It is a part of my argument to show *why* the ghazal (as genre and predominant form of poetry) matters to the study of modern South Asian identities (sexual and political) and what historical forces have operated through its aesthetic lineaments to give it the illusion of traditional cultural continuity.

The dissertation is divided into two parts presenting the concentric circles of a historical problematic including poetry, sexual representation, the colonial archive and historiography. In Chapter One, I broadly describe colonial reformism in which sexuality emerged as a category of social and intimate experience. My aim is to show that modern sexual identities (e.g.

homosexual) belong to a nationalist problematic whose assumptions are still with us in our postcolonial, 'sexually liberated' era. Chapter Two narrows the genealogical focus on "boy-love" as a distinct historical-narrative element in the ghazal as well as in literary-historical recountings of its tradition. This chapter mirrors the larger argument as it places reformist (Hali), postcolonial (Firaq) and premodern (Yaqin) meditations on the image of the beautiful boy in the same argument.

In Part Two, I cross the threshold of the premodern into the South-Asian eighteenth century but not before delineating, in Chapter Three, the historiographic roadblocks in transitioning from categories of modern analysis (the state, family, subjectivity, identity) into the pre-existing social unities of premodern life. I make a critique of revisionist historiography to argue against a naively mimetic and sentimental understanding of literary objects from the past and posit the condensation of an *erotic* terrain in the rhetorical and vignette-like patterns of 'classical' ghazal poetry. To highlight the operation of this terrain I study the formation of the boy-love image repertoire as part of the vernacularizing process from which elements of later "Urdu" first emerged. The exemplary figures here include the satiric–obscene verse of Jaʿfar Zatalli and the *iham* set of poets (Abru and Naji in particular)

Finally, Chapter Four presents the case of Mir Taqi Mir and through the canonized stability of his oeuvre I draw the outer form of its erotic content as a social value form in whose *negative* relation with social conditions, a historical expanse becomes possible to imagine. In the final turn to Mir, I demonstrate that it is possible to read historical forms of subjectivity in the heavily routinized idiom of the ghazal, and not settle for a depoliticized history of surfaces (images, representations, typologies) which has been the fate of the ghazal and several other expressive practices in the postcolonial world.

The dissertation of Shad Naved is approved.

Michael David Cooperson

Nouri Gana

Gil Hochberg

Aamir R. Mufti, Committee Chair

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Table of Contents

Note on transliteration and translation

I have followed the transliteration scheme established by the *Annual of Urdu Studies*, with the following exceptions:

1. *ḳh* instead of *kh* for the letter *ḳhē*
2. *ġh* instead of *gh* for the letter *ġhain*
3. *a* or *i* instead of the short vowel *e*
4. The *v* of conjunction is written without hyphenation
5. The *hamza* sign in Arabic compounds is dropped (e.g. *Siḥr ul-bayān* not *Siḥruʾl-bayān*)

All words and names from Persian (Hāfiẓ instead of Hāfeẓ) and Hindi (*pardēsh* instead of *pradēsh*) are transliterated as they would be pronounced in Urdu. Though very few, Arabic words and names are written using the Urdu transliteration scheme as well (except Abu Nuwas, not Abū Nuvās).

People's names are transliterated only at their first appearance in each chapter's main text. All the Urdu, Arabic, Persian and Hindi names are transliterated in their respective entries in the bibliography. Indic place names are only transliterated when they appear as the place of publication of non-English works in the footnotes. Other words and terms (except "ghazal" which is now a recognizable genre of English poetry) are transliterated throughout the main text and footnotes.

All translations of Urdu and Persian verse and prose extracts are my own, except where indicated otherwise.

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Publications and Presentations

Naved, Shad. "Gayatri Spivak's Critique of Marxist Value(s)," *Social Scientist*, Vol. 35, Nos 1–2, January–February 2007: 76–88.

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Introduction

… ṭiflāñ kī tō kuchh taqṣīr na thī
ham āp hī thē yūñ ḳhud-rafta…[1]
[The children weren't really to blame.
It was I who was beside myself.]

Matters relating to sexuality (particularly in its non-normative appearances, e.g. homosexuality) are assumed to be *visible*, only if we looked hard enough. Indeed a major part of the historical and hermeneutic efforts of sexuality studies is based on a pictorial conception of the problematic of queer or non-normative sexualities. In the context of South Asia, LGBT activism first gained ground after its intervention in the debate about the film *Fire* (released in India in 1998) arguing for the legitimacy of lesbian representation in the public discourse of cinema when film screenings were disrupted by the Hindu right.[2] This trend was further consolidated by the production of alternate/queer readings of such mainstream hegemonic visual media as the Hindi cinematic melodrama, popular art, music videos and performance art. The apparent pliability of visual signifiers has given rise to radical faith in the critical reorientation of the spectatorial gaze which could skew hegemonic representations in order to retrieve politically liberatory LGBT/queer representations.[3] Little thought or effort has been spent on understanding the durability of modes and discourses of the visual which continue to strategically enlist 'alternate' life-worlds as part of the filmic or televisual spectacle for mass consumption. This neglect has

[1] Fahmīda Riyāẓ, "Ṭiflāñ kī tō kuchh taqṣīr na thī," in idem, *Sab laʿl o guhar: kulliyāt (1967–2000)* (Lāhaur: Sang-e mīl pablīkēshanz, 2011), 318–19.

[2] See the by now milestone *Fire* debate in the pages of the *Economic and Political Weekly* with contributions from Carol Upadhya, Tejaswini Niranjana and Mary John, and its spilling over into other venues and journals such as *Manushi* (Madhu Kishwar) and the *Feminist Review* (Ratna Kapur). A helpful dossier with extracts from various articles in the debate appeared in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, Nos. 2 and 3 (2000): 371–74, 519–26.

[3] See one among several such queer reading proposals: Shohini Ghosh, "Queer Pleasures for Queer People: Film, Television and Queer Sexuality in India," in Ruth Vanita, ed. *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

meant the virtualization of history and within it discourses of gender and representation as nothing more than the semiotic coding of visual representation. In the meanwhile, more and more conservative and reductive spectacles (visual and verbal) of same-sex love are being put up for LGBT consumption by both normative and queer-inflected authors and producers.

In this dissertation I want to question the dominance of this pictorialism in the study of non-western sexualities. The vocabularies of "coming out", 'positive' representations, claims to visual space, collection of visual and verbal representations form the 'past' have frozen enquiry in the historical formation of present sociological features of homosexual and other dissident cultural forms into the binary of visibility and invisibility. It would appear that either "we" are fully embodied in our selves for the world to see or we still need to catch up with sexuality's evolution whose terms, rituals, rites of passage and logics of community formation are predominantly drawn from Euro–American contexts, turning the histories of struggle and survival both 'there' and 'here' invisible. In the spirit of these globalized solidarities, and the idiom of solidarity is fast acquiring a homogenizing function, I want to begin by revisiting a historical picture in which the lineaments of non-western sexuality are 'outed' in a gesture of fierce recognition following a not-so-different logic of thinking about the globalized connectedness of the world.

Johan Zoffany's painting *Colonel Mordaunt's Cock Match* (*c*. 1784–86) is often cited as a contemporary visual account of that "still opaque" eighteenth century, dramatizing the runes of archival history as a vivid spectacle of the social vista of late-eighteenth-century Awadh, one of the last 'traditional' societies in precolonial north India. The painting was commissioned by Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of the East India Company's colonial conquests in India, and painted by Zoffany, an artist–adventurer who happened to land in Lucknow, the seat

of the Awadh court, because another venture (James Cook's voyage) in another area of colonial adventure (the "South Seas") fell apart. Thus the painting comes to us from the heart of the circulatory system of the enterprise that would coherently be called colonialism in decades after the painting was completed. This story is well documented by art historians and critics, and it only forms the necessarily sketchy background for my particular interest in one of the painting's visual panels.

It is a sprawling picture of a social vista centring on a symbolically powerful cultural activity, the cockfight. The foreground highlights this as the eponymous Colonel Mordaunt, the head of the British-appointed bodyguard, appears to respond to his heavily gesticulating employer, Navāb Āṣaf ud-Daula. Although picturing a swirling social scene, as Griselda Pollock notes, its visual arrangement enacts a racial, sexual and cultural separation between Indian and British inhabitants of its visual space.[4] Thus the painting presumes its divisibility into panels where micro-scenes are staged as indexical commentary on the main scene's symbolically protruding action of the cockfight. Peering from behind the slightly ridiculous figure of the Navab is one such micro-scene depicting what looks like a delicate young figure (its gender is not clear but it has a soft, shimmering appearance) being cradled by a rough-looking elder man whose drugged facial expression contrasts with the half-smile on the youth's face. The drama is heightened by two gazes hitting this twinned figure from opposing sides – a sharply enunciated finger of disapprobation points at it belonging to a rich-looking 'Hindu' figure, who is either being interrupted or egged on by a man next to him. The other gaze emanates from an English officer, attired in army-red and a wig, standing at an elevation looking askance at the scene as if

[4] Griselda Pollock, "Cockfights and Other Parades: Gesture, Difference and the *Staging* of Meaning in Three Paintings by Zoffany, Pollock, and Krasner," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2003): 158–59.

his eye accidentally caught a glimpse but did not entirely like what it saw. The panel appears complete with its own centred action 'interpreted' by two 'external' observers.

Despite this visual completeness, commentarial writings on the painting read this panel in remarkably divergent ways. Mary Webster reads the youth as "deformed or disabled" being carefuly "supported" by an "older Indian man."[5] She cites an external dramatis personae key identifying the boy as one of the Navab's younger brothers, known to have been disabled. She does not bother to factor in the two dramatic gazes 'interpreting' the scene. Other critics have read the extreme disapprobation of the external gazes as responding to the indecency in the man's cradling the boy.[6] This view is strengthened by the implicit joke in the painting's depiction of the central protagonist, the Navab, with an unnatural swirl of clothing around his groin. It is known that the Navab was childless and was probably impotent. This visual joke about impotent Oriental masculinity is visually elaborated and discursively supplemented by the clear view of the practice of *amradparastī* – the pederastic cult of soliciting, grooming and patronizing boys before they reached the socially prescribed age of adulthood. The boy's delicate features, stylized posture and gender-ambiguous attire are typologies the painter uses to flatten the social correlates of these figures and their acions into the empanelled reflection of a reality outside the picture. The 'external' responses to this iconized image tightly frame its reading in terms of, on one edge, the native's excessively pronounced response (it is not clear if his angry response is 'homophobic' or arising from some other complex of motivations), and which is subordinated, on the other edge, along with the iconized image of the man and the boy, to the elevated disdain of the civilized foreigner. It is this civilizing figure which orientates the reading

[5] Mary Webster, *Johan Zoffany: 1733–1810* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 504.

[6] G. Pollock does not specifically address this micro-scene but acknowledges the sexuality of the images surrounding the central action.

of the scene in the 'correct' way as it is from his position that we, the viewers, spectate, looking at the internal spectator spectating, and thus enjoy both the scene's exotic otherness and mark our distance from its social reality.

In her reading of the painting, Pollock argues that the visual image, which seductively presents itself as an innocent record of pre-existing reality, creates a subjectivity in which the viewers are invited, in the seamless act of viewing, to recognize their own selves. An *oppositional* reading to the self-evidence of the visual image therefore must require us not to identify ourselves with some inchoate, half-stated, insurgent space in which representational logic magically breaks down, but instead to identify the point where the image appears to hold a mirror to reality. Such a moment is offered in Zoffany's panel about boy-love where the obviousness of its sexual connotations alerts us to the larger framing logic of the painting: the spectacle of Oriental life is divisible into typical practices with no symbolism or social relevance except their representativeness for the unvarying essence, which is nothing but the ontological difference between the colonizer and his subjects, of indigenous society. Readings which miss this obviousness may not be completely wrong but they attest to the sanctioned ignorance of western academic discourse for which it is sufficient to authenticate non-western cultural objects through textual or selective native informant databases. Furthermore, this reading variation points to the broken machinery of precolonial/early colonial cultural practices which cannot be mended simply by learning the languages better or anthropologically filling in the back story through lived practices in the past and the present. Zoffany's boy, so vivid and authentic in his visual proximity, survives in only one version of the painting (at least two versions of the painting were made: one for Hastings, which has survived; and another for the Navab which has not) because it entered the world-cultural system of museums and the continuous tradition of

western art. The version painted for Asaf ud-Daula is lost (a copy of this version, called the Daylesford version, has indeed survived), and so are several copies made at Lucknow under Vajid Ali Shah.[7] Such enthusiasm for the painting clearly shows the trompe l'œil effect of the Oriental spectacle which could provide the colonized with an adequate art-historical record of their past. Or perhaps the copies were subversive reworkings, queering the expansive pitch of Zoffany's composite social vista. We may never know.

This dissertation pursues the literary-historical tracks of the sexual cult/ practice/ image captured by Zoffany in its iconic pose of sexual excess, social scandal and public spectacle. But my archive is not visual. It is the poetic tradition of the Urdu ghazal, in whose image-repertoire "boy-love" (*amradparastī*) holds an iconic presence. While no closeted secret to Urdu readers and critics, recent LGBT textual archaeology has drawn this theme and its recurrent images in the swirl of historical pasts for the purpose of activism and retrieving forgotten pasts useful for the present. Although its emancipatory intentions are clear, there appears to be great confusion about what constitutes an authentic LGBT past; indeed what past sexuality has as a concept and social fact. In the following section I will describe the archaeological efforts of LGBT criticism, with an emphasis on its silences and blindness to the hegemonic forces of nationalism, communalism and patriarchy as these shape the object we have come to instantly recognize as queer/ homosexual/ sexually dissident. I will also attempt to contextualize the particular case of Urdu literary history and the larger question of South Asian identity politics based on religious and sectarian divides, within which the question of the ghazal and its sexuality needs to be inevitably posed.

Same-sex sexuality: A nationalist legacy?

[7] M. Webster, *Johan Zoffany*, 504.

A familiar starting point in the study of non-western sexualities has been the collection of suitable terms for sexual behaviours, identities and practices seen as 'indigenous' to a society. However, the concept of sexuality itself, in non-western contexts, is not translated into a suitably 'indigenous' term or defined indigenously. In Urdu the neologism *jinsiyyat* and its adjectival form *jinsī* have been used to refer to matters of sex and sexuality since the 1890s.[8] These terms appear in the writings of reformist intellectuals of the late nineteenth-century in South Asia.

The ideas of Urdu literary and social reformers have invited deeply divided reactions in contemporary historiography. Seen in the light of sexuality studies, which do not bother to read colonial texts or authors and foreclose any discussion of colonial society under the blanket accusation of "colonial homophobia", these writers are briskly dismissed as Victorian moralists. Critical of this dominant model, Ashley Tellis shows how contemporary same-sex politics in India are immured in a present when three distinct historical periods co-exist as common tradition: precolonial, colonial and postcolonial. The colonial period is particularly important for this politics because it is the counter-point to a tradition of tolerance in precolonial society.[9]

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[8] But this usage is not the only meaning of "*jinsiyyat*." The *Urdū luġhat* reflects its two primary but divergent senses: (i) belonging to the same genus/kind/stock/breed (c. 1890); and (ii) sexual feelings; sexual intercourse (between man and woman); awareness about intercourse (c. 1897). The first sense signals the lack of fit between "sexuality" (as sexual desire and sexual intercourse) and *jinsiyyat*. The sense of belonging to the *same* species underlies the assumption that creatures of like form *naturally* fall in love. Etymologically, the Urdu term bears within itself the connotations of *both* homogeneity and homosexuality (as sexual attraction between the same, from the Greek prefix *homo*). The Urdu calque for "homosexuality" proper (*ham-jinsiyyat*) is, semantically speaking, a tautology ("same sameness"). The sense of *jinsiyyat* as sexuality (as heterosexual intercourse leading to reproduction) may also have an alternative descent through the base word *jins* which has similar connotations as "genus" (kind/ breed/ race) but also refers to grain, harvest, victuals. Through this agricultural cluster, *jins* can also mean movable property and commodities sold on the market. This last sense is the oldest usage cited from the fifteenth century. It is through the nuances of common race, agricultural produce, property and the knowledge of sameness as cause of attraction that *jinsiyyat* enters the orbit of modern "sexuality." But it can escape it almost as easily: compare *jinsī taṭābuq* (sexual compatibility) and *jinsī musāvāt* (gender equality). Finally, almost all the "sexual" and gender connotations come from twentieth-century sources, and the vagueness of their referents (gender, sex, sexuality, sexual attraction, sexual intercourse) reveals the torsions in the word's history as a concept. *Urdū luġhat: tārīḳhī uṣūl par, jild shashum*, eds. Abul Laiṡ Ṣiddīqī and Nasīm Amrōhvī (Karāčī: Taraqqī Urdū Bōrḍ, 1984), 813–17.

[9] Ashley Tellis, "Postcolonial Same-Sex Relations in India: A Theoretical Framework," *Enreca Occasional Papers*, No. 6, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences (2003), 222, 223.

Within this imagined tradition, disrupted by colonialism, it is not surprising that colonial intellectuals appear as colonized Victorians, ashamed of their past and trying to efface it in the name of reform. In this imagination, "colonial homophobia" is not so much an apparatus of intolerance as a deligitimizing label for any knowledge about sexuality in colonial times which did not affirm same-sex identities. South Asian sexuality studies, in this respect, endorse and reassert the nationalist construction of the past which, as Sudipta Kaviraj notes, is "ideological" precisely because "there seems to be no other reasonable way of writing the history of these historical objects."[10] Sexuality studies have claimed to re-discover historical objects from the unity of a national past and which authenticate contemporary sexual subjectivities. But in this the discipline is far from a pioneer. Innumerable retrievalist projects in vernacular literatures, music and dance have attempted nothing but this since the late ninteenth century to claim different sorts of authenticity.[11] The charge of homophobia neatly produces a history of tolerance based on sexual practices assumed to be eternal. It also makes it impossible to argue for any other arrangement of sexual desire and "love" in society apart from the (sexual) identitarian. Those who do not show awareness of sexual identities, or show resistance to them, can be dismissed as "homophobic." The Urdu reformist writers stand convicted, even more so because they found the poetic tradition of *amrad-parastī* or the taste for young boys deeply objectionable.

Neville Hoad's study *African Intimacies* brings together a similar gallery of historical moments from the history of modern Africa concerning same-sex politics. Hoad shows how each

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[10] Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India," in *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), 184.

[11] This process is most visible in the formation of "classical" art forms that shore up dominant class and caste interests, such as the South-Indian *Bharatanatyam* dance form and Carnatic and Hindustani music traditions. Initial frameworks for studying this process in these areas respectively have been proposed by Davesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadāsīs, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Lakshmi Subramanian, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy: A Social History of Music in South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005).

of these moments is constructed by the ideological force of the concept of "sexuality" in tune with other historical factors. For the colonial period he describes how certain intimate relations between human bodies get coded as "sex". These sexual codes, in turn, perform "ideological labor" by masking relations between "more volatile social abstractions" such as capital, race and gender.[12] In her essay on the *Kamasutra* (AD 100–400), Kumkum Roy provides an example of such ideological labour performed in the colonial redescription of a classic text on 'sexuality.' She describes how Richard Burton's 1883 translation from the Sanskrit redefined the *sutra* (prescriptive) text into a "work on love."[13] It was presented as an erotic manual of universal significance. This meant sidestepping its particular prescriptive and normative contexts. For extracting this universal message, Roy writes, Burton relied on a generalized reading of the text's fundamental conception of desire as a means of social control. E.g. the courtesan, a particular figure in the post-Mauryan cityscape and recurrent in the text, appeared to him as a misogynistic, trans-historical protoype of feckless femininity. He reads the prescriptive passages as quasi-scientific descriptions of universal sexuality.[14] Roy goes on to demonstrate how this reading of the *Kamasutra* became the unquestionable basis of all subsequent translations and readings. Popular translations in India today praise the text's proto-modernity because it speaks of sex openly and dredge up its techniques to secure procreation (she notes that the Sanskrit text makes no mention of procreative desires). The modern *Kamasutra*, she concludes, based as it is on a

[12] Neville Hoad, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1.

[13] Kumkum Roy, "Unravelling the *Kamasutra*," in Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, eds. *A Question of Silence?: The Sexual Economies of Modern India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 52–76.

[14] Joseph Massad characterizes Richard Burton's Arabic translation project in similar terms. However he argues that Burton's universalist view of sexuality is somehow better than its contemporary "mainstream" Orientalist identification of whole cultures with racial-sexual types on an evolutionary scale. Burton's reliance on texts from antiquity shows the abbreviation of that evolutionary scale in the perceived antiquity of such culturally specific texts. It is precisely on this condition that works like the *Kamasutra* still retain their widespread popularity as individual works of ancient wisdom, not confined to particular languages, historical periods or cultural attitudes. Massad, "Introduction," *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 10.

universal, context-free sexuality, has attained a prescriptive quality never available to the text in its history. The notion of sexual identities performs similar ideological labour for sexuality studies today by masking the historical contestations around meanings of sexual desire, during the crucial colonial period, in order to validate contemporary same-sex politics.[15]

Like several other insights arising from research in colonial history in the last three decades, the interventions of feminist historiography of South Asia have mostly passed by sexuality studies. In *Recasting Women*, the path-breaking anthology of essays on colonial history, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid argue how colonial state practices and anti-colonial nationalist movements put in place a framework of enquiry into social marginalization that continues today under the names of (nationalist) reform and development.[16] Thus reformism in its own formulations, and in the later nationalist use of it, appears as a saviour of women from bad patriarchal practices where both "women" and "patriarchy" are seen as stable features of an eternal structure of society. Reformist goals are restated in terms of civilizational upheaval where western ideas re-work hitherto "traditional" lives of the colonized. Both these self-descriptions of reformism, or cultural nationalism, Sangari and Vaid write, obscure the fact that these projects aimed for the "reconstitution of patriarchies" and a re-description of women stratified along class and caste lines.[17] This feminist point, however, has been regularly overshadowed and subsumed

[15] Massad calls the force behind this sexual-ideological project of late twentieth century geopolitics "Gay International" which aims to import western sexual anti-norms (i.e. non-normative sexual identities) to societies where other sexual arrangements have existed. Massad characterizes this project as the ideological basis of US-based LGBT academic work on the Middle East. The strength of this argument is however compromised by its insistence on the *cultural* difference of Arab sexualities. The sexual classification of whole cultural complexes, even when characterized as fluid and polymorphous, belongs to the same epistemology that Massad so passionately counters. Massad, "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," in ibid.

[16] Sangari and Vaid, eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), 2.

[17] Ibid., 9.

under Partha Chatterjee's influential account, included in the same volume, of the resolution of the woman question in nationalist thought.

Chatterjee has developed this account in his later works such as *The Nation and Its Fragments*. He argues there that the division of social institutions and practices in nationalist thought into material and spiritual domains resolved the debate about women's value for the nation by placing them squarely within the latter domain, i.e. the realm which never accepted colonial domination. This ideological point was finessed by its appeal to the dichotomy between the home and the world. Women's subjectivities were important only to the extent that they predicated the inviolability of a sovereign, private realm. The woman question was thus a mode of political negotiation between various indigenous patriarchies and the colonial state. There was no possibility of autonomy for women's subjectivity within the terms of nationalist discourse.[18]

Two feminist responses to Chatterjee's theorization are crucial to understanding the status of sexuality in colonial reformist discourse. Susie Tharu questions Chatterjee's theoretical framework for not fulfilling the promise of a Gramscian analysis of the nationalist elite's rise to hegemony. While Chatterjee notes that in the inner spiritual realm social agency was not related to individual actors, in his description of the political realm, she points out, the process of ascendance of the nationalist bourgeoisie is presented in teleological stages "each accomplished by an authorial agent." This dilutes the conceptual strength of the idea of hegemony, which, in contrast with Chatterjee's treatment of the woman question, could have enabled the study of women's consciousness in relation to its ideological emblematization. Tharu points out that this

[18] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 116–157.

focus on women's ideological role in nationalist discourse "solidifies" gender "into women and it is difficult to regard this entity… as anything but strictly functional and essentially univocal."[19]

Uma Chakrvarti's indirect response to Chatterjee's thesis, included in *Recasting Women* and also regularly clubbed with his argument, connects the ideological justification for the emblematization of women to the history of nineteenth-century Orientalist historiography. She locates the big shift in colonial historiography with Max Mueller's turn to cultural-racial authenticity enshrined in Vedic texts. The axis on which the continuity of this golden age turned was the upper-caste Hindu woman. It was an eminently rhetorical dimension of the epistemological projects of Orientalism and cultural nationalism that coded historical truth and authenticity in real women's lives.[20] This coding brought with it a particular racial-sexual typology according to which the whole of colonized society could be divided along authenticating logics of national representativeness. Thus nationalist masculinity was coded as "Aryan" and enshrined in those "races" (particularly the Sikhs, Marathas and Rajputs) that had historically resisted Muslim political domination.[21] The masculine self was however not a stable entity, nor evolving towards a singular ideal. For Bankim, an exemplary voice, the *kshatriya* Aryan was warlike and aided by a femininity which curbed its sexual attractiveness to support the project of national self-regeneration.[22] In contrast, Swami Dayananda's Arya Samaj programme uniquely argued for the harnessing of sexual energies of upper-caste women. For instance, unlike the usual reformist anxiety about the sexuality of the young Hindu widow (a

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[19] Susie Tharu, "Thinking the Nation Out: Some Reflections on Nationalism and Theory," *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, No. 17–18 (June 1989), 88.

[20] Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?: Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past," in Sangari and Vaid, eds *Recasting Women*, 28.

[21] Ibid., 47.

[22] Ibid., 53.

major reason for the backlash against widow remarriage legislation), Dayananda revived "Aryan" notions of levirate marriage which would allow women to be sexually active legitimately and reproduce, preferably sons, for the national community.[23]

It was this racial–sexual typology for social and domestic behaviour that paved the way for strident feminist challenge to the ideological emblematization of women. Pandita Ramabai caused a furore in polite Brahman society in late-ninteenth century Maharashtra by converting to Christianity after having lived the unusual though exemplary life of a widow and Sanskrit scholar and then producing in writings such as the *High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) a public denunciation of the self-image of reformism as direct inheritor of a Vedic golden age. This early feminist critique of reformism combatted reformist ideology at the level of its representations. It argued that a golden past was a political tool for wresting control over women's sexuality. Chakravarti concludes that Ramabai's polemic against liberal reformers turned the ideological basis for women's predication of national self-identity on its head: Ramabai demonstrated that the woman question was not merely an ideological battle between the colonial state and the reformist elite, but rather a pact between two patriarchies to wrest control over women's sexuality. Thus the so-called resolution of the woman question was a strategic pact with the colonial state that allowed indigenous patriarchies to govern women's sexuality as part of their national resurgence.

The bourgeois woman question was not the only modality through which Indian nationalism hegemonically resolved the question of tradition in the lives of its elite women. Sexual typologies, derived from Orientalist historiography, were decisive in producing the ideological dominance of an upper-caste Hindu elite and reveal the very public discussion of questions of sexual typification and women's desire. The figures of the sexually active upper-

[23] Ibid., 60.

caste widow, the child-bride (the subject of acrimonious Age of Consent Bill debates), the "consenting" self-immolating Hindu widow, along with the new discoveries of colonialist anthropology such as the hijra[24] – all form part of an emergent language of sexual specification. But here too we would be producing a modular view of sexual identity politics if we view these figures as bearers of "traditional" identities who stand outside their definition in debates and contestations about sexual desire, erotic attachments and bodily intimacies.

Seekers of 'traditional' sexual arrangements have bypassed these key ideological figures (the widow, the child-bride, the *hijṛā*) of sexual control in their search for fluid, unrepressed same-sex identifications that somehow escaped colonial ideology. Writing about this period, Partha Chatterjee argues that elite women's voices (the "new woman") lack autonomous subjectivity in nationalist thinking because they were flatly identified with an inner realm of spiritual sovereignty. In his study of actual women's responses to this situation, he gives the example of the new genre of Bengali literary writing, *smritikatha* or women's memoirs: "what held these stories [of women's memoirs] into a single narrative was not the life history of the narrator or the development of her 'self' but rather the social history of the 'times'."[25] To support this he provides extracts from five women's memoirs from the ninteenth century. In one of the readings, a passage from Prasannamayi Debi's (1857–1939) memoirs, Chatterjee notes the evanescent reference to an exceptionally intimate domain within the otherwise socially overwritten narrative. Born in a reformist family and in childhood married to a mentally ill man, Prasannamayi Debi speaks of her intimate friendship with Indumati, the widowed daughter of another reformist family. While the reference is brief and rhetorically limned as a reverie, it

[24] The redefinition of the *hijra* community's fictive kinship and care networks by colonial inheritance laws is discussed by Lawrence Preston in "A Right to Exist: Eunuchs and the State in Nineteenth-Century India," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1987): 371–87. See also, Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[25] Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 139.

stands out in the voice of the non-individuated new woman, that natural complement to masculinity in nationalist heterosexual conjugality. Chatterjee leaves the "same-sex" context uncommented. But brief attention to the formulations of this intimate space gives us a fragment which neither fits in the logic of nationalist self-formation nor justifiable by the usual ideological sanctions of cultural nationalism.

The agency of *same-sex* friendship produces the occasion for intimacy ("It was only the *dream*-like imagination and the *pain* of *unfulfilled* desire of two people *inexperienced* in the ways of the world," she writes) for someone whose existence was also the symbol of national self-identification ("how wonderful it was to *forget* ourselves completely"). This agency is however not individuated according to a sexual identity, nor is it free of reformist ideology ("we would talk… This was no *political* conspiracy, nor was it a discussion on some *scientific* problem…").[26] This private moment differentiated within an already demarcated realm of domesticity, and part of a declarative public text, includes the idea of forgetting oneself, unfulfilled desire, lack of knowledge about the world, imaginary worlds, fantasy and inexperience. Chatterjee locates this intimate realm within the logic of the home versus the world, according to which a significant element of personal life cannot be revealed even under the generalizing cloak of spiritual associations of the culturally sovereign "home". This is one reason why such intimations of the same-sexual (particularly between women), valorized in recent LGBT scholarship as signs of positive female erotic expression, cannot be explained by the tolerant expressiveness of premodern erotic styles. In this example from the new woman's inner life, the zone of intimacy emerges as discontinuous with dominant languages of sexual

[26] Excerpted and translated from Prasannamayi Debi's memoirs *Purba katha* in Chatterjee's *Nation and its Fragments*, 150. The emphases are mine.

desire (both women are marked by widowhood, a state of ritual self-denial) which, as we have seen, had a range of ideological sanctions.

From the singularity of this example in Chatterjee's argument, I want to suggest that in colonial South Asia, modern same-sexual experience was ideologically produced as an exceptional space of retreat, reflection and fantasy in which the epistemology of the world and the home was (apparently) absent. The precarious articulation of this space, precarious not simply because of homophobic prohibition, attests that these epistemologies were operative even outside their properly designated terrains (compulsory heterosexual domesticity and public defence of national cultural sovereignty). This can explain the valorized silences and ambiguities of same-sex terrains in postcolonial India (the terrains of *yārāna* ["buddyship"], *dōstī* [friendship] and female homoeroticism in domestic spaces[27]), celebrated in LGBT studies as reflective of some inner, tolerant spirituality, to be a *modern*, *nationalist* construct which presumes nationalist gender roles and ideologies. For Prasannamayi Debi, however, Chatterjee's conclusion is not as straightforwardly conclusive: "her struggle has been completely encapsulated in the project to produce the nation – everything else is erased from public memory."[28] The exceptionality of intimacy, which is half articulated but articulated all the same, can be joined to several such inchoate moments in women's writing to produce a genealogy of intimacy for modern India: a space which is coextensive with desire for same-sex (but *not* necessarily anti-normative, identitarian, or even sexual) intimacies. I reiterate that these instances of same-sex intimacy are produced within the logic of nationalist self-formation and do not have to be surmised from truly "private" narratives of authentically "autonomous" subjectivities. For a

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[27] This is the underlying rationale of such early pioneering efforts at collecting LGBT writing in South Asia as Hoshang Merchant, ed. *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999) and Ashwini Sukthankar, ed. *Facing the Mirror: Lesbian Writing from India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999).

[28] Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 151.

feminist politics, same-sexual intimacy as an ingredient of national self-formation offers a way "to disperse what is presented as a unity into the discourses and the practices which constitute it; to tease out of each strand its history and out of the structure as a whole, its repressed."[29]

If nationalist thought has turned the gender question into a functional and univocal constitutent of its ideological programme, sexuality has been imagined to be lying outside its institutions and ideology. In the work of such prominent historians and theorists of South Asian sexualities as Ruth Vanita, Nivedita Menon and Gayatri Gopinath the category of sexuality produces a counter-tradition to colonialism and nationalism. Thus Nivedita Menon asserts that the sexual can never be part of the heritage of the nation as imagined by elite cultural nationalists because the latter, spurred by western modernity, disciplined and homogenized the multivocal and fluid arrangements of premodern, precolonial sexualities.[30] For this theorist, the critical role played by discourses of sexual control and governance (some of which I have described previously) was the object of study of an earlier brand of Indian feminism ("the second wave") for which sexuality was predominantly a mode of patriarchal *control* over women's bodies and subjectivities.[31] In the present moment, she claims, the new notion of "desire" informs feminist theorization of sexuality. This moment is however most effectively developed in the "political assertions" of a "counter-heteronormative" "movement" which is acquiring a "sense of autobiography" through modes of "modern history writing."[32] The break with the second-wave feminist paradigm occurs when a social category (defined by its opposition to heteronormativity)

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[29] Tharu, "Thinking the Nation Out," 88.

[30] Nivedita Menon, "Introduction," to Menon, ed. *Sexualities* (*Issues in Contemporary Feminism*) (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2007), xxv.

[31] Menon, "Introduction," xiii.

[32] Menon, "Outing Heteronormativity: Nation, Citizen, Feminist Disruptions," in idem, ed. *Sexualities*, 3.

demands its place in a history that has excluded it. Historiography produced from the social location marked by this category is governed by "desire" and not "control."

This emphasis on "desire" in the new historiography of marginalized sexual identities looks for a historical tradition undiminished by colonial contact. In Ruth Vanita's view, particular cultural *terms* can still be interred from premodern literary and scriptural traditions designating "long-term same-sex relations as significant markers of identity and personality."[33] The epistemological ground for this project for the recovery of terms (represented by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai), Nivedita Menon informs us, is not "cultural" but "temporal."[34] Temporal continuity of temporarily occluded premodern, fluid and multivocal traditions of sexual expression is proven and secured by the retrievalist project of LGBT historians. In this neat circle of premodern expressiveness, colonial occultation and postcolonial recovery no particular cultural identity or idiom, we are told, is at stake. The continuities of (same-sex) desire are supra-historical, supra-cultural and supra-national. It sounds almost naive, if not politically oppositional, to question this project of LGBT historical recovery on culturalist or historical grounds.

Yet this project, arising out of a contemporary moment in the long history of several identity politics in the subcontinent, needs the histories and idioms it seeks to repudiate and move beyond. Vanita points to three socio-cultural events in the colonial period in which the suppression of premodern sexual frameworks was institutionalized: "the heterosexualization of the ghazal, the suppression of Rekhti (ghazal written in the female voice, often light-hearted in

[33] Ruth Vanita, "Introduction," to idem, ed. *Queering India*, 1.

[34] Menon, "Introduction," xlv. She is referring to Vanita and Kidwai's influential history of South Asian same-sex desire in *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2001).

effect), and the introduction of the antisodomy law."[35] The placeholders, as the first two examples turn out to be, for the immanent continuity of sexual traditions are two literary forms, both marked by their implication in the larger cultural politics of Urdu in colonial India. However, Vanita does not dwell on the 'Islamicate' provenance of these literary forms. On the contrary her inclusion of Urdu poetic forms within the shared heritage of *Indian* erotic traditions goes against nationalist literary historiography which refuses to include Urdu literature in its *dēsī–mārga* formula for authenticating "Indian" literatures. The conviction here is that Urdu poetry's "heterosexualization" is an example of colonial misreading of a premodern erotic tradition in order to normalize it. But the related assumption is also that the colonial misreading is based on a correct identification of these literary traditions as erotic or sexual. The archive of precolonial sexuality, in this instance, is crucially dependent on colonialist formulation of what constitutes sexuality. Furthermore the representational strategies of particular literary forms are assumed to be shed along the way to their self-objectification in sexual identity categories. Ostensibly contesting the unicultural ("communal") basis of Indian nationalism, this emptying of differentials of language, community, caste and class and their ambient representational frames preserves the very logic that ejects forms of Muslimness, one among several disavowed social formations of the emergent nation, from elite nationalist historiography. It is then not simply a matter of inclusion of "Muslim" cultural forms or juxtaposition of "Hindu" (symbolized by the high Sanskrit tradition) and "Muslim" (also symbolized by 'high' north-Indian, Persianate forms) texts. Both gestures assume and reproduce the prior unity of "Indian" cultural/sexual traditions.[36]

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[35] Vanita, "Introduction," 4.

[36] The intersection of cultural nationalist thinking and erotic pasts is not unique to same-sex historiography. A recent anthology of only erotic (read heterosexual) writings in India confines itself to Sanskrit and *bẖāshā* sources even for the medieval period (it has no excerpts from Persian sources) and announces: "In India today, the philosophical acceptance of desire and the erotic sentiment has been asphyxiated by a hypocritical morality that has for much too long equated sex with sin and desire with guilt." The anthology is expected to provide an "alternative vision" of

What is secured through the inclusiveness and retrievalism of this queer historiography is therefore the principle of cultural differentism that constructs a premodern federation of individuated cultural traditions, each of whose constituents can stand in for the modern sexual object, while emptying their distinct histories and interrelations of any interpretative value. This queer retrievalist gesture is most emphatically a discourse of "Place" troped as empty temporal units ("Time") which, at the same time, functions as "modern histories, following the codes and protocols of historiography."[37] Majoritarian (Hindu) nationalism, as Partha Chatterjee reminds us, is based centrally on the historiographic principle of origins (Hindus best represent the Indian nation because they originally belong to it) and not on some religiously susbtantive essence of Hinduism.[38] So if cultural nationalism is a secular project upholding the idea of the sovereign state form, this queer historiography moves closer to a trans-historical essence of a peculiarly religious kind through otherwise secular historiographic means. Normative and prescriptive texts of Vedic religion are routinely invoked in it to mark the origins of both Indian civilization and queer sexuality.[39]

Vanita accuses western queer theorists like David Halperin and Eve Sedgwick of suffering from an authenticity fetish,[40] while she claims to use universal, modern notions of sexuality and sexual identity (such as "gay") to recover historical terms for South Asian same-sex relations. The model for her own project is a form of "reading", a queer reading, which

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"our" ancestors. Indeed this forces us to ask: what is "queer" about queer historiography? Varma and Mulchandani, eds. *Love and Lust: An Anthology of Erotic Literature From Ancient and Medieval India* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2004), 21.

[37] This forms Menon's defence of Vanita and Kidwai's project against the charge of indigenism. Menon, "Outing Heteronormativity," 14.

[38] Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 110.

[39] Giti Thadani's research on ancient Indian female homoeroticism is the clearest example of this tendency. Thadani, *Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India* (London: Cassell, 1996).

[40] I don't have occasion here to unpick this perverse accusation. See Vanita, "Introduction," 4, 10 (fn. 1).

asserts that while it can never know the authentic, intentional meanings behind historic terms of sexuality, it is able to recover something from those forgotten terms to affirm contemporary same-sex intentionality. This sounds like a description of the charmed hermeneutic circle in which the self reads the signs of its own becoming across vast historical distances. In this sense, it is another name for that central category of nationalist–reformist thought: tradition.[41]

The unity of tradition is tethered to a contemporary social landscape in which queerness towers above class, caste, gender stratifications and prejudices in order to "read" its "own" tradition from what look like very dominant (nationalist hegemonic) literary historical means. The nostalgic reference to multivocality of premodern sexuality in this queer historiography rests on the unexamined assertion of civilizational unity where individual traditions are valued through contemporary expectations of what same-sex relations should look like. While any historiography constructs its object through such synthetic, retrievalist means, queer historiography hides its contemporary stakes in nationalist politics, nativism, gender hierarchization, class hegemony and reproduction of sexual ideologies (of romance/ "love" and matrimonial conjugality) by pressing for an object which is both lost and never fully lost. Whatever is found through this research is cleansed of traces of historical existence (because we already know the discovered object's political worth and signifying value) and therefore also of

[41] This reading practice is by no means confined to those identifying with 'home', nation or the non-west. Gayatri Gopinath proposes in her programme for "queer diaspora critique" a radical questioning of nationalist and religious fundamentalisms (11). This is however accomplished only after accusing almost the whole South Asian women's movement and their undertheorization of gender oppression (except Vanita and Thadani, of course) in relation to "heterosexuality" (136). Her proposed reading practice relies on the performativity of queerness within texts whose activation needs only a queer reader universally locatable under conditions of globalization (12). In this view queerness itself has no history, but only performativity, which enables it to become the antagonist of forces of nationalism and globalization. This mode of seeing/reading can make even "traditional" spaces like the home appear revolutionary for queers: "the heteronormative home, in these [queer South Asian diasporic] texts, unwittingly generates homoeroticism" (14). In a further elaboration of the charmed heremeneutic circle of queerness, radical social agency is posited *inside* literary and cinematic representations which performatively undo embedded ideological functions of such deeply anti-feminist discourses as the home and domesticity ("Queerness in this case references an alternative hermeneutic, the particular interpretive strategies that are available to those who are deemed 'impossible' within hegemonic nationalist and diasporic discourses" 22). Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

the much vaunted continuities, which only appear as the persistence of trans-historical same-sex desires in it. The task of history, in this view, is to fortify present (postcolonial) social (queer) consciousness as the consummation of a history that has come to an end in it.

On the other hand, an emancipatory (anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, anti-sexist) consciousness is an immanent feature of the feminist women's movement in South Asia. It is this body of knowledge that has taken the lead in dispersing the solidity of gender ideologies serving the nation, patriarchies and the home. As I have shown through the example of feminist research in colonialism and cultural nationalism, sexual categories and typologies perform ideological labour in the service of national myths and self-definition of communities. Sexuality, heterosexual and otherwise, becomes a national/ civilizational issue through the debates around the woman question in late nineteenth century and the dynamics of this moment cannot be unearthed by looking for particular terms for 'alternative' sexual practices or self-designations uncontaminated by nationalist–reformist rewriting. The assumed fluidity of premodern cultures may appear to counter colonial–nationalist ideology but, as I suggested through the example from Prasannamayi Devi's memoirs, the durability and fluid definition of same-sex desire may well be the product of the same ideology. Thus, painting the reformist generation with the brushstroke of "colonial homophobia" forecloses the debate around sexuality as a category of social experience which is far from finessed either in the writings of reformist intellectuals or in the more confident, contemporary descriptions of LGBT theory and historiography. If we are to learn anything from the violent failures of nation-thinking in the subcontinent, an emancipatory LGBT consciousness cannot be willed into existence by securing authenticating terms of self-nomination when the struggle is against these very logics that create authenticated insiders and delegitimized outsiders.

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This dissertation is divided into two parts, with two chapters each, presenting the concentric circles of a historical problematic including poetry, sexual representation, the colonial archive and historiography. The argument is arranged neither strictly chronologically nor thematically in order to emphasize the concentric imbrication of modern reading practices and interpretive desires in premodern textual artefacts. This is important for any argument interested in presenting a genealogical view of premodern pasts as a counter to the fetishising moves of traditional tools of recovering and preserving aesthetic–cultural essences. Thus, the two part-format does not posit a chronological divide between the modern and premodern periods but illustrates the repeated implication of modern categories in premodern perspectives and prejudices and vice versa, in whichever literary period we choose to lay down our interpretive, political baggage. The body of the 'classical' Urdu ghazal insinuates itself as much in colonial reformist debates and postcolonial criticism as in the socio-historical specificity of its own time (only if we assume its time to be a singular, stable decade or century). It is thus a part of my argument to show *why* the ghazal (as genre and predominant form of poetry) matters to the study of modern identities (sexual and political) and what historical forces have operated through its aesthetic lineaments to give it the illusion of traditional cultural continuity.

My specific interest in the formation of an erotic repertoire for the ghazal around the themes and vignettes of pederastic, boy-love (*amradparastī*) forms the backbone of the argument. In Chapter One, I broadly describe the historical moment of colonial reformism in which sexuality emerged as a category of social and intimate experience. My aim is to show that what we blandly recognize as modern sexual identities (e.g. homosexual), then viewed as either a western import or part of indigenous life-worlds, or as a matter of morality or one of private

experience, belongs to a historical problematic whose terms still matter to us in our postcolonial, 'sexually liberated' period. I introduce in this chapter the long shadow of reformist thought that lies on these discussions, exemplified in the writings of Ḥālī, Āzād and Naẕīr Aḥmad.

Chapter Two narrows the genealogical focus on the theme/image/practice of *amradparastī* as a distinct historical-narrative element in the ghazal as well as in literary-historical recountings of its tradition. This chapter mirrors the larger arrangement of the dissertation as it places reformist (Hali), postcolonial (Firāq) and premodern (Yaqīn) meditations on the image of the beautiful boy in the same argument. This comparative analysis helps animate and demonstrate a historical reflexivity that operates in the ghazal's supposedly conventional evocation of idealized romantic objects which affects the writing, self-definition and social relevance of poetry in disparate historical moments and gives a lie to its atavistic continuity as a single poetic form and tradition. Through the example of at least two sexually ambiguous figures in this chapter, Firaq and Yaqin, I also illustrate the precipitated violence that hides behind the seeming continuity of literary tradition and through which power and heteronormative coercion can be shown to have a direct bearing on the erotic mood of the ghazal. It is in this context that I provide a short discussion of the Sufi problematic of transcendence and physicality as it is enfolded in the poetic image of the boy-beloved.

In Part Two, I cross the threshold of the premodern into the South-Asian eighteenth century but not before delineating, in Chapter Three, the historiographic roadblocks in transitioning from categories of modern analysis (the state, family, subjectivity, identity) into the pre-existing social unities of premodern life. I give an account of the revisionist turn in the historiography of South Asia in the 1980s whose culturalist prefabrication of categories of analysis have exchanged a study in relations of power and hierarchization for a 'realist'

description of simple, premodern social symmetries. I use this critique of the revisionist historian to argue against a naively mimetic and sentimental understanding of literary objects from the past and posit the condensation of an *erotic* terrain in the rhetorical and vignette-like patterns of 'classical' ghazal poetry. To highlight the operation of this terrain in a concrete historical context I study the formation of the boy-love image repertoire from the example of two "early Urdu" poetic corpuses: the satiric–obscene verse of Jaʿfar Zaṭallī and the *īhām* set of poets (Ābrū and Nājī in particular) known and maligned for their intricate wordsmithery. I exemplify these poets' work as staging the energies and social anxieties of the process of vernacularization in their fusion of sexual (largely homoerotic) and linguistic play. For the image repertoire of boy-love I make the claim that as a vernacularizing element it opens a unique window for the observation and refraction of social faultlines and, by being consolidated as a repertoire of images, becomes a ubiquitous element in later elaborations of poetic form and its erotic themes.

Finally, Chapter Four presents the case of Muḥammad Taqī "Mīr," the poet laureate of the eighteenth-century ghazal, known to be a master versifier of the boy-theme. Through the canonized stability of his oeuvre I draw the outer form of its erotic content as a social value form in whose *negative* relation with social conditions, a historical expanse becomes possible to imagine. In the final turn to Mir, I demonstrate that it is possible to read historical forms of subjectivity in the heavily routinized idiom of the ghazal, and not settle for a depoliticized history of surfaces (images, representations, typologies) which has been the fate of the ghazal and several other expressive practices in the postcolonial world.

PART I

Chapter One

Literature, women and reform: The making of Urdu's sexuality question

The notion of an erotic tradition, characterised by an uninhibited treatment of sexual themes, and disrupted/reformed by colonial Victorian ideology, has resulted in the deeper aestheticization of the genre of Urdu poetry known as the ghazal. The less categorical sounding conception of the "erotic" combines within itself judgements about premodern freethinking on sexual matters, a codified language of literary expression revealed only to the most adept scholars of religion and indigenous philosophy, and even the inchoate outlines of the modern discourse of sexual identities. The continuity of literary tradition becomes the ground of positing this far-reaching and internally unstable notion of an erotic tradition. But continuity of the ghazal in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and several other South Asian literary cultures has also made it possible to speak about a literary-cultural zone ("Islamicate", "Persianate" or "Perso-Arabic"). Under the force of these long-duration structuring logics based on continuity of form (ghazal) and content (eroticism), the vagaries of writing practices and histories of readership and criticism have been either squared with unchanging essences of tradition or simply left out of discussions about the social relevance of aesthetic rules and forms. In the context of the ghazal, it does not appear necessary even to ask why the ghazal versifies states of amorous passion or indeed whether this was its identification mark for readers in the past. The aura of the erotic presses these questions out of the artistically worked symmetry of the poetic utterance.

As I will show in this chapter, the coding of Urdu's poetic (*ġhazal*) tradition as sexual appeared first in the modern period and involved the simultaneous specification of norms of sexual practice and invention of a body of writing understood as literary (*adab*). I will argue that

this nineteenth-century sexual coding, widely understood as a singular moment and condemned as the handiwork of misguided colonial intellectuals, organizes the history of Urdu poetry as objectified tradition for its writers, critics and readers. The evaluative classifications of this coding cannot be isolated culturally along lines of western influence (heterosexualization) and indigenous tradition (sexual fluidity) because no term within it is free from the imperatives of sexual ordering based on colonial systems of signifying difference. There are indeed erotic practices in the past that do not align with modern sexual identities but this cannot be taken as proof of their radical originality. It may very well be, and I will be arguing precisely this throughout this dissertation, that such indigenous arrangements of sexuality have their own mechanisms for social control, exclusion and reproduction which are carried forward in the new apparatus of colonial sexuality because they symbolize nativeness in both colonial and nationalist discourses. Responding to performative accounts of sexuality that mark their distance from originary and fixed gender positions, Judith Butler writes: "Although we may posit the heuristic possibility of a world in which acts and identities would be fully separable, it still remains for us to describe what it might mean to live that very separation."[42] In this chapter I will describe one instance of this separation from late nineteenth-century Urdu literary criticism in which the figural function of sexuality has not yet been saturated with subjective identifications.

But before approaching the sexual configurations of Urdu reformist thought I will dwell on the vocabulary of ghazal criticism in representative scholars from the twentieth century. The point of this exercise is to show the extent of the shadow of reformist thought that pervades the most independent-minded, anti-colonial positions in Urdu criticism. This would help us understand the impact of the colonial moment of reorientation of the basic categories of social

[42] Judith Butler, "Against Proper Objects," in Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor, eds. *Feminism Meets Queer Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 3.

and literary analysis whose undertow is felt in contemporary debates about identity (national, linguistic, sexual) although it is ritually denied by all shades of political opinion. I will then approach the reformist period not as a singular ideological complex but an uneven distribution of sexual-ideological stresses visible in its heterogeneous choice of genres: the exemplary biography, the didactic poem and the pedagogical novel. I will show the making of a sexual ideology through the uneven interstices of modern genres of writing (particularly the sharp distinction between rational prose and imaginative poetry) in which old prejudices are reshaped and reinflected to fashion intimate selves and realms of private experience as part of the colonial-nationalist reordering of society in terms of externally visible essences.

Primordial sexuality in Urdu literary criticism

While the colonial period is one discrete, albeit ideologically central, moment in the imagined tradition of LGBT history in South Asia, the dominance of reformism in the colonial period is an obsessive point of return for twntieth-century, colonial and postcolonial, Urdu criticism. Responses to reformism crucially hinge on two conceptions of it: a) it is solely based on *western* influences on indigenous cultural practices; and b) it is a *psychological* response to colonialism (it tried to alleviate the misery of social chaos caused by the cultural decline of the north-Indian Urdu-speaking elite). Both these conceptions come together in this body of criticism around assessments of the reformist views on literary/poetic representation of sexual desire.

The double charge of imperial prudery and colonialist self-hatred against reformism implictly assumes an epistemological breaking-point in an otherwise continuous tradition of cultural forms and practices. Writing about the history of *bẖāshā* or 'vernacular' criticism in

South Asia, G.N. Devy has influentially argued that the colonial period represents "amnesia" for the readers and practitioners of the vernacular languages.[43] His emphasis is on pre-colonial traditions of literary criticism that were simply forgotten in favour of western colonial categories of literature and criticism:

> The most damaging effect of this phenomenon [the seepage of English ideas into the *bẖāshā*s] has been a cultural amnesia, which makes the average Indian intellectual incapable of tracing his tradition backwards beyond the mid-19th century.[44]

This problematic of colonial amnesia is common to both literary (including English) and sexuality studies in the terms used by Devy. The work of LGBT historians such as Ruth Vanita, Saleem Kidwai and Giti Thadani, as we saw in the previous section, presents the colonial reformulation of same-sex desire and its representation as a Victorian curtain drawn over traditional, multivocal sexual desires.[45] Devy's formulation also rests on sexual metaphors to describe the loss incurred by the *bẖāshā*s in their interaction with western epistemology. He illustrates the crisis of contemporary *bẖāshā* criticism in terms of a disembodied celebration of "platonic love" in Indian literary and cultural writing.[46] He cites the work of psychologist and cultural historian Ashis Nandy to highlight the "impotence" of the Indian critic, enervated by the wholesale adoption of western categories and assumptions about literature. Although Devy makes it a point to debunk both the "west" and Sanskrit as models for *bẖāshā* criticism, his framework of "foreign influences" rehearses an indigenist, primevalist account of the original Sanskritic core of Indian culture. The invocation of the stumbling block of colonialism ("which

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[43] G.N. Devy, *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1992).

[44] Ibid., 10.

[45] Vanita and Kidwai, eds. *Same-Sex Love in India*; Thadani, *Sakhiyani*.

[46] Devy, *After Amnesia*, 26.

makes the average Indian intellectual incapable of tracing his tradition backwards") as a problematic based in the body and sexuality of the critic alerts us to the displacement of cultural identity on to ahistorical, naturalized bodies. Devy's critique can be re-stated then as arguing for the re-orientation of literary critical desires away from the west as an object of unconditional love towards a fully embodied indigenous wholeness found in the vernacular, non-classical traditions of the subcontinent. While acknowledging the epistemic disruption by colonialism of South Asian knowledge practices, Devy returns us to the possibility of cultural wholeness symbolized, if not in a high textual tradition, in the body and its desires.

A variety of critical positions in Urdu literary criticism level the same charge of attenuation of the sexual element of social life against colonial reformism. Like Devy's sexualized metaphor about the relationship between *bẖāshā* and western epistemologies, Urdu critical positions ranging from *jadīdīyat* (modernism) to *taraqqī-pasandī* (progressivism), despite their political differences, posit a particularly sexualized conception of colonial reformism. However, unlike Devy's repudiation of both classical and "western" domains of literary influence (that have choked the river of authentic, indigenous *bẖāshās*), Urdu literary criticism presents its pre-colonial classical poetry as a constitutive presence, whether rejecting it or arguing for its transcoding into modern genres and sensibilities, which simply cannot be ignored. The distinction between Devy's indigenist critique and Urdu criticism's imagination of its internal coherence reveals the troubled and troubling presence of Urdu literary studies within the complex of "Indian" literary criticism. Urdu signifies an intrusive presence, not simply as an alien 'Perso-Arabic' historical precipitate, but a sensuous tradition (symbolized by the ghazal) which is continuous, not with actual traditions of classical writing in the "Indian" complex such as Sanskrit and Indo-Persian, but with the idea of the non-modern as symbolizing timeless erotic

writing.[47] This belief in the continuity of a sensuous tradition through various imaginary associations of the history of Urdu (the language of the imperial marketplace, of refinement, chivalric romance and urban etiquette) forms the horizon of interpretation, not just for the historian of the *bẖāshās*, but equally for the Urdu critic trying to trace his tradition backwards beyond the mid-nineteenth century.

Devy's critique, therefore, with its emphasis on sexual wholeness, can very well be accommodated in the LGBT question of how to define premodernity as both a historical formation and part of a timeless tradition; as both a lost object and an object never fully lost. In the same way, generations of twentieth-century Urdu critics, who obsessively return to the reformist writings of Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥālī and Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, are not simply contesting colonialist distortions produced by these figures but using that critique to refocus a true picture of the 'tradition' in which sexuality and the aesthetic order cohere to symbolize unbroken, national-cultural life.

The critical school in Urdu known as *jadīdīyat* (modernism) does not deny the difficulties in recuperating a tradition lost to the ascendancy of colonialism (military power, scientific inventions) and western colonial epistemology. In the writings of Muḥammad Ḥasan Askarī we find a recurring melancholia about this loss. Yet true to his reliance on Freudian ideas (especially in his early writings from the 1950s) Askari wants to work through the constitutive terms of the

[47] Sketching a genealogy of romantic love in the context of the Hindi film, Madhava Prasad situates the Urdu love lyric as the dominant idiom for romantic love in popular film, particularly in songs. According to his larger argument about postcolonial Hindi film's unstated prohibition against kissing, the song sequence tempers the eruption of private intimacy in the public cinematic spectacle precisely by using the idiom of the Urdu ghazal assumed to be "soulful" and "other-worldly" due to its aristocratic Muslim identity, i.e. detached from social discourse and incompatible with everyday reality. The later eruption of the English "I love you" phrase in dialogues and songs, he argues, offers the chance of "inhabiting" romantic love that, by implication, is not available in the ghazal-based idiom. The ghazal erotic within the logic of the national film form is thus not an offer to inhabit romantic love but to enjoy it from a spectatorial distance. M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111, 112.

processes of this loss in order to recover, contrary to Freud, the lost object.[48] His ideas are seductive for any postcolonial project aiming to persevere with the disruptiveness of western epistemology in colonial cultural practices in order to re-trace forgotten voices of the colonial period. But Askari's project aims to close the gash of colonialism in such a way that history comes to an end with that gesture.

In his project the end of history is manifested as the resurfacing of a strand of traditional knowledge that has been partially occluded by contact with western rationalist epistemologies. The symbol for this definitive end, which is the recovery of the earlier organic unity of mind and body, is the return of a repressed, corporeal, but, paradoxically, esoteric tradition of *tasavvuf* from Indo-Islamic history.[49] This resuscitation of cultural wholeness is not accomplished until Askari has taken us through the distortive stages of western philosophical enquiry imposed indiscriminately and imbibed equally unthinkingly by colonial intellectuals in South Asia. He turns to the distinction between *rūḥ* (spirit) and *jism* (body) in European rationalist philosophy as a false dichotomy that slowly drained *jismānīyat* (corporeality) from intellectual discussions

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[48] Askari's representative writing from this period include "Pairavī-e maġhribī kā anjām" (1954), "Istiʿārē kā ḳhauf" and "Dāḳhiliyyat-pasandī" (1954) collected in his *Majmūʿa-e Muḥammad Ḥasan Askarī* (Lāhaur: Sang-e mīl, 2000).

[49] The clearest exposition of this end of (west-centric) history can be found in Askari's last essay, published posthumously, "Jadīdīyat yā maġhribī gumrāhiyōñ kī tārīḳh kā ḳhāka" (1979), in *Majmūʿa-e Muḥammad Ḥasan Askarī* . The essay's reliance on the ideas of René Guenon, the modern founder of the anti-rationalist, esoteric, metaphysical movement, studied and christened by Mark Sedgwick as Traditionalism, reveals a key genealogy for Askari's search for the authentic pieces of "tradition." While he may not have been an initiated Traditionalist, Askari's attempts to remake the jigsaw puzzle of tradition by identifying the continuous authenticity of its constituent pieces follows Traditionalist patterns of looking for continuist traditions through: (i) Oriental and medieval European textualities (the Vedas, Taoism, Neoplatonism), (ii) ritualized practices (such as Sufism), and (iii) art (Ananda Coomaraswamy's attempt to read ancient South Asian art in its symbolic-religious contexts). Askari is certainly influenced by a distinctly aesthetic understanding of the ritualized practices of medieval Sufism. For an account of Guenon's work and Traditionalism, see Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

while only emphasizing ideas of bodily nurturance.[50] Prior to this Cartesian disembodiment of philosophy, Askari posits the loss of *bāṭinī ʿulūm* (internal knowledges) in western thought, largely due to Protestantism which collapsed the metaphysical notion of *rūḥ* (spirit) into *nafs* (carnal self).[51] These polarities (*rūḥ–jism* and *rūḥ–nafs*) are not substantive polarities since they control a host of other polarities such as *fikr–ʿamal* (thought–practice), *ʿaqlī dalīl–ḥissī mushāhadāt* (intellectual argument–sensory observations) that characterize the east–west problematic in Askari's argument.[52] Each of these binaries is to be reconciled in his argument, not through synthesis, but a dissolving of each through their supposed union in Islamic mystical practice or *tasavvuf*. Of interest here is the enclosure of corporeality (*jismānīyat*) in the realm of esoteric, mystical practice. This appears contradictory from the standpoint of western philosophical traditions, but, for Askari, this body is not the one resulting from the Cartesian mind–matter duality. It is instead similar to the idea of "*fārm*" (English "form" transliterated into Urdu) which, through Platonism, became a material, corporeal category and thus derailed Christian thought.[53] Thus for him, concepts such as the body, mind, form and thought have historically become material entities through intellectual theorization and have lost their esoteric values that used to be recognizable before the arrival of western modernity. In other words, the idea behind these material theorizations has been lost. For non-western intellectual traditions (not

[50] Askari, "*Jadīdīyat*," 1202.

[51] Ibid., 1192.

[52] Ibid., 1197.

[53] Ibid., 1194.

just Islam but all non-western religious traditions) all such theorizations, backed by western military power and scientific innovations, cause deviations (*gumrāhiyāñ*).[54]

This account of Askari's melancholic run through distortive western intellectual categories shows that the concept of the body, and by implication its desires, are not ejected from the field of modernist thought in Urdu. In fact, it is posited as one of the grounds on which the retrieval of the pre-colonial self will take place. Askari shows how this retrieval cannot happen without tracking the historical shifts in meaning and implications of philosophical concepts. These shifts and ambiguities are, however, never allowed to stray farther than the compass of esoteric knowledge in which all such modern concepts are preserved in their original, ideational simplicity. The idea of corporeality holds the place for this occluded knowledge as well as marks the point at which traditional practices and knowledge re-enter the present. It is in the nature of corporeality as form (particularly literary form) to function outside the logic of reification. This view presumes then a prior reification of bodily desires within which traditional values can be both found and resurrected. Any relationship with an authentic past, from this modernist position, requires the authenticating basis of (ungendered) corporeality and its (sexually undifferentiated) desires.

Askari's ideas about the resuscitation of a corporeal tradition have been taken up with a masculinist swagger by his one-time disciple Salīm Aḥmad. The antagonists of Ahmad's polemic are the reformist intellectuals such as Hali and Sayyid Aḥmad Ḵẖāñ who inaugurated the period of deviations by accepting the humiliating conditions of colonialist thought. This was a particularly sexual humiliation, according to Ahmad, because the colonized came to be ashamed of bodily desire and its representation in poetry. The deviation from poetic tradition

[54] Askari, "*Jadīdīyat*", 1179–81.

appeared in particular as sexualization of this amorous poetic tradition. In several of his writings on the formation of modern poetry in Urdu, he invariably returns to this moment. This sexualization of the old-style of ghazal poetry, in Hali's critical writings for example, according to Ahmad, cannot be related to moralistic conservatism. It was a symptom of the reimagination of poetry as a social institution with a role to play in the political life of its linguistic community. This re-socialization of poetry disrupted and actively destroyed the organic role it played in the unity of precolonial Muslim community, thus effectively dissociating both desire and poetry from communal life. This resulted in almost two generations of disembodied, sentimental poetry that forgot poetry's basic function to unite the idea and reality, the motion and the act, the conception and the creation and quite literally, the desire and the spasm.

This incongruously strong belief in the social value of poetry, while stressing its independence from historical determination, is a striking feature of this ambitious plan for the bodily manifestation of the communal-national spirit in poetry. Ahmad champions such new (*jadīd*) poets as Mīrājī and Rāshid because their openly sexual expression is the resurfacing, for the first time since 1857, of that metaphysical machinery producing poetry of (bodily and sexual) completeness.[55] He positions these poets as the true innovators against the more socially aware poets such as Faiẓ, Sardār Jaʿfrī, Jaẕbī and Maḳhdūm who were therefore purveyors of the culturally disruptive reformist ideology.[56] He implies that Progressive poetry is a deviation from the organic tradition of poetic-sexual unity in communal life.

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[55] Salīm Aḥmad, "Naʾī shāʿirī aur pūrā ādmī," in *Naʾī naẓm aur pūrā ādmī* (Karāčī: Nafīs Ikaiḍamī, 1989), 33, 64. Also see Ahmad's apologia for new poetry and its bodily praxis as represented by Miraji and Rashed in: "Naʾī shāʿirī nāmaqbūl shāʿirī," in *Naʾī shāʿirī nāmaqbūl shāʿirī* (Karāčī: Nafīs Ikaiḍamī,1989), 95, 96, 120, 123.

[56]Ahmad, "Naʾī shāʿirī aur pūrā ādmī," 65.

The terms of periodization and categorization of poetics and poetry set up by Salim Ahmad are apparent in positions established much before his turn to a medley of European modernist primevalisms and existentialisms (T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, Oswald Spengler, P.D. Ouspensky, Jung, Freud, Reich, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir)[57] and the Oriental knowledge hoard (*taṣavvuf*, Vedanta and Perso-Urdu *adab*[58]). The Progressive–Marxist critic Aḳhtar Ḥusain Rāʾēpūrī (hereafter Raipuri) also considers the dissociation of poetry from society resulting from the demise of an already weakened feudal culture (*sāmantī tamaddun*) in the events of 1857.[59] Its patrons (i.e. the Muslim aristocracy) turned old (*qadīm*) poetry into a differentiated literary commodity (*jins*).[60] A mode of ghazal writing thus emerged, detached from popular life, confined to an urban milieu that obscured readers' awareness of their world. For Raipuri there is nothing essentially or internally anti-social about the ghazal. It is only its circulation in a feudal mode of production that causes its alienation from society. Its feudal examples devalue that vital element of social consciousness common to all historical periods: the body or its corporeality. He accuses the old ghazal aesthetic of setting up a struggle of the soul to escape corporeality ("jism kī qaid sē āzādī kē liʾē rūḥ kī bēkalī").[61] The old regime's feudal rejection of bodily experience is being re-examined and rejected in the new literature of the 1930s, the same period credited by Salim Ahmad as the birth of new (*jadīd*) poetry. Raipuri's examples of this sexual critique of the anti-corporeal tradition include the short-story collection *Añgārē* (1932) and Qāẓī ʿAbdul

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[57] Named references to and engagement with the ideas of Eliot can be found in: Ahmad, "Naʾī shāʿirī aur pūrā ādmī," 64; for Lawrence: ibid. 23 and "Ḥālī sē lā musāvī insān tak," 147; and De Beauvoir: "Naʾī shāʿirī aur pūrā ādmī," 22. The essays are collected in S. Ahmad, *Naʾī naẓm aur pūrā ādmī*.

[58] Ahmad, "Naʾī shāʿirī aur pūrā ādmī," 55.

[59] Aḳhtar Ḥusain Rāʾēpūrī, "Adab aur zindagī," (first pubd. 1935) in *Adab aur inqilāb* (Bambaʾī: National Information and Publications Ltd., n.d.), 26.

[60] Ibid., 33.

[61] Ibid., 34.

Ġhaffār's novelette *Lailā kē ḳhuṭūṭ* (1932).[62] But he finds these efforts premature and missing the mark of sexual emancipation because:

taʿalluqāt-e jinsī mēñ us vaqt tak tavāzun, istiḥkām va ṣiḥat kī gunjāʾish nahīñ jab tak zindagī kē dūsrē masāʾil sē ham usē alag kar kē dēkẖnē kī ʿādat na čẖōṛ dēñ aur tarġhībāt-e jinsī kō shaiṭān kā ġhalba nahīñ balki ēk fiṭrī jibillīyat (*instinct*) na samajẖnē lagēñ

[The sexual relationship will not have balance, strength and health till the time we don't give up the habit of viewing it separately from other issues of life and begin understanding sexual attraction not as the domain of Satan but as a natural instinct.][63]

Returning the sexualized body to the domain of literary representation is not enough until we change the ideological assumption about sexuality as an immoral, disruptive force in society. Raipuri uses a readymade understanding of sexual repression as socially disruptive in order to propose a return to the primally *instinctual* domain of sexuality through literary representation. While he does not quite posit sexuality as the symbol of precolonial, unfragmented consciousness, he gives sexuality the same redemptive force in the birth of a new literature (*adab*) reflective of social existence (*zindagī*).

We thus notice the same primordialist notion of sexuality in politically antagonistic positions on the social value of Urdu poetry. Whether conceived of as one of the primeval affects (akin to hunger/ *bẖūkẖ*[64]) or a primordial affect of the human psyche

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[62] Ibid., 65.

[63] Ibid., 67.

[64] Raipuri considers art's function to be the moulding of *jaẕbāt* (affective sensations) two of which are eternal: hunger and death. Ibid.,12. Saʿādat Ḥasan Manṭō, the short-story writer considered by Salim Ahmad as one of the rare "complete men" in the history of modern Urdu letters, echoes Raipuri's Progressivist credo in a lecture about the representation of sexual matters: the representation of sexuality is is the closest imitation of reality because it is a kind of *bẖūkẖ* or hunger that cannot be left unsatisfied. Manto, "Afsāna nigār aur jinsī masā'il (az *Savērā*)," in idem, *Laẕẕat-e sañg* (Lāhaur: Nayā idāra, 1956), 115.

(as an "instinct"[65]), sexuality is assumed to give literary writing social currency. But in both modernist and Progressivist accounts of this process the contents of sexuality are less at stake than its assumed primordiality. There is a strategic silence in both Ahmad and Raipuri about the constitutive patterns of erotic objectification in ghazal poetry, the homoerotic boy-love motif being its historically most salient example.[66] While Raipuri dismisses the old regime's erotic objectifications as "unnatural" (*fiṭrat kē ḳhilāf*) and bemoans its woman-obsession (*zan-parastī*),[67] Salim Ahmad barely even mentions this aspect of the ghazal. At one point in his essay on the demise of sentimentalism in the new poetry he remarks that the amorous couple in sentimental poetry appears to be chastely intimate like two girlfriends lying in bed![68] In this view, any possible significance of same-sex intimacy is already non-sexual. While it is in the norm of bourgeois

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[65] Salim Ahmad reproduces Raipuri's view of sexuality as a primal instinct (*jibilliyat*) quoted above, in his essay on the generation of 1936: the new poetry of this generation rebelled against the sentimentalism of reformist poetry in the distinct voice of the "man of instincts" (*jibillī insān*) whose predicates are sex (*jins*) and hunger (*bhūkẖ*). Ahmad, "Ḥālī sē lā musāvī insān tak," in *Naʾī naẓm aur pūrā ādmī* (Karāčī: Nafīs Ikaiḍamī, 1989), 139–40.
That this resistance to sexual specification is not a necessary precondition for trasncendental sexuality can be established through two exemplary critical views that do specify the ghazal's sexual orientation. ʿAndalīb Shādānī argues, in his "outing" of Mīr Taqī's particular style (*rañg*) of pederastic homoeroticism (*ʿishq-e sāda rūyāñ*), for a culling of such offensive topics; never the less adding it as a feather in the poet's cap for daring to represent socially abhorred desires. For Shadani, such references are a proof of the uniqueness of poetic genius in Mir which could reveal its interior states (*miz̤āj* and *ṭabīʿat*) using stylistic, not biographical, signatures such as the motif of puerile beauty.

In stark contrast, Ẓamīruddīn Aḥmad "outs" the beloved for the whole Urdu ghazal tradition as a heterosexual woman arguing against generations of ghazal critics that the beloved has always been a flesh-and-blood woman although her desire has almost never been represented. But rather than critically examining the shameful lack of female poets in the poetic canon, Ahmad's 'feminism' offers *jinsiyyat* as the heremenutic principle for retrieving (heterosexual) *desire* of the female beloved as sign of her reality. The hidden tradition of female beloveds, he insists, shores up a healthy, unified tradition of love poetry (contiguous with other 'great' Indian poetic traditions in which woman is the beloved) depicting the bodily sensations of a gendered subject as proof of its authenticity and internal wholeness. Woman's individuation excludes all non-heterosexual configurations and is premised on the clear-cut exhibition of her desire as proof, for male lovers, readers and critics, of her embodied individuality. The sexuality of boy-beloveds and/or woman-beloveds lends the desired (temporal) continuity and (aesthetic) unity to the poetic tradition. Shadani, "Mīr ṣāḥib kā ēk ḳhāṣ rañg" in *Taḥqīqāt* (Barēlī: Jalīl Ikaiḍamī, 1968), 133–77; Z. Ahmad, *Ḳẖāṭir-e maʿṣūm: urdū shāʿirī mēñ maḥbūb kī jinsiyyat kā muṭālaʿa* (Karāčī: Aḥsan maṭbūʿāt, 1990), 28, 57, 59.

[67] Raipuri, "Adab aur zindagī," 32, 76.

[68] Ahmad, "Naʾī shāʿirī aur pūrā ādmī," 28.

heterosexual conjugality that this sexual metaphysic is exclusively realized, the ghazal's unnamed erotic configurations, such as boy-love, persist in these modern readings. It is tempting to argue that the elaborate metaphysical paraphernalia of Ahmad or the parroting of Maxim Gorky's views on revolutionary literature in Raipuri are compensatory gestures for disavowing the old literature's troubling erotic aspects. This would indeed be the case had the old poetry's sexuality been understood by these critics as superficial to it. The concept of *ʿishq* (eros) is not just a thematic, representational element of the ghazal; it is the philosophical concept in which its historical value and functions abide. Thus any attempt, historical or metaphysical, at a cultural or social assessment of this poetry requires an evaluation of what sexuality means in this particular society and culture. While conservative (homophobic) sexual ideology regularly inflects these sexual definitions, "sexuality" escapes definition through its dominant conception as a primordial force. Such shying from sexual definition can be read, in view of the ghazal's modern reception and criticism, as an ideological effort to install heterosexual desires as the only "real" romantic relation, and to ensure in particular control over women's sexual labour and redefine femininity along class, caste and communal lines, but simultaneously invoking a zone of pre-symbolic (ahistorical, metaphysical) attachments in which inscriptions of intimacy becomes socially legible. As I have suggested earlier this zone of subjective wholeness is imagined and articulated in terms of same-sex intimacy, undergirded by modernizing logics of the nation and its communal identities. Thus we can finally situate same-sex intimacy in the ideological field of nationalist thought as an attempt to cover over and diminish the stumbling block of premodern traditions by positing an epistemological category of primordial sexuality, in

and through whose conceptual ambiguity, delineated by heterosexual ascription, the past may be said to live on.

It is in this metaphysical thicket of sexuality that the ghazal is constantly located as if questions of form, literariness and representation are materialistic deviations from the ideal functions of each of these terms in the historical life of the genre. But this poetic sublimation of physical sexuality signals a particularly modern shift in Urdu poetics. It produces a theory of literary realism where sexuality signals authorial intention such that sexuality becomes a hermeneutic device to rend the veil of figuration. Apart from recovering authorial intentionality in poetry, this theory transforms poetry from an imaginative (image-producing) medium to a means for re-experiencing reality. This reality is comprehended not through the material logics of gender, class, community or caste, but through the metaphysical categories of love, sex and the body in which the poetic self gains completion overcoming the thwarting effects of colonialism manifested in precisely those material logics. This is the basis of the constant reference to romance (*ʿishq*) and its metaphysical associations as the only framework for reading the ghazal corpus. Even a Progressive critic like Raipuri explains the escapism and disembodied treatment of sexuality in pre-1936 sentimental poetry by the analogous relation between the economic subordination of women in bourgeois domesticity and the sexual obsession (he calls it "slavery") of men in the amorous relationship with women,[69] as if the reification of women's (re)productive labour is equivalent to the subordination of male subjects, in poetry, to their own phallic desire. The de-sentimentalization of *ʿishq* does not mean forsaking its immanence in poetry since it is its enabling experiential quality

[69] Raipuri, "Adab aur zindagī," 68.

that bypasses other categories of social perception in the poem in order to secure the normative force of exclusively aesthetic categories classified under romance (*ʿishq*). The ideological shift reflected in this reading of the ghazal inheres in the resistance to the privatization of sexuality. This resistance is sometimes expressed in the criticism of poetic language as obstructing authorial and intentional expressiveness, and at others, as the commonly shared experience of amorous poetry, exceeding its merely representational function, in which unmediated sexual awareness of the self can be witnessed and harnessed for various schemes for social intervention. It is this aesthetic shift signalled by the need for publicly intentioned poetry, realized in the embodied awareness of non-privatized sexuality, that sets the grid of interpretation for this sexualized tradition. We have encountered this interpretive principle already in queer historiography's interpretative circle of self-completion. The Urdu literary establishment's historically prior and enthusiastic reliance on it points to a historical *problematic* of homosexuality for the nationalized spaces of South Asia in which *not* naming same-sex relations and feelings outlines the languages of intimacy, experientiality, intentionality, interiority and sensuality in poetic writing. The notion of primordial sexuality (*jinsiyyat*) in Urdu criticism is thus a historical argument for a literary realism that accounts for both the cultural overvaluation of the old poetry and the novelty of the new in the single statement of the underlying continuity of the poetic tradition.

Finally, the thematic knot of primordial sexuality as the basis for poetic imagination confirms for the latter a coming into its own without the support of colonial ideologies such as utilitarianism and reformism. But its implication in the redefinition of

women's symbolic significance in literature, specifying proper forms for social and sexual intercourse, and regularizing representational realism in literary production, bring forward older debates within colonial reformism and those very colonial ideologies, distance from which demarcates current ideological positions (the modernists repudiate reformist social engineering while the progressives open up that project towards revolutionary politics) and simultaneously reproduces the decisively colonial search for an authentic plinth for the monument of identity.

Sexual configurations of reform

In both reformist self-reflections and later twentieth-century reflections on Muslim social reform, the spread of western education in the political community (*qaum*), represented by a leisured Urdu-speaking class of the northern plains, is presented as the panacea for its social backwardness. The comparatively late emergence of proposals for education of women of this class has been regarded as the historical fulfilment of the communal effort to reverse this backward trend and synchronize itself with modern social forms such as the new woman, bourgeois domesticity, print nationalism, and nationalized education.[70] Aamir Mufti argues against this teleological view of Muslim social reform, held by nationalist historians and elite Muslim interests alike, to emphasize the reluctant formation of bourgeois class interests among Muslim elite groups. A reluctant embourgeoisement was the historical form of emergence of bourgeois tastes and sensibilities under the glare of the colonial government's identification of post-1857 anticolonial disaffection with the "Mohammedans." The self-definition of this embattled political community required shoring up older class (*ashrāf*) interests through a

[70] The classic account of this process is given by Gail Minault in her *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

limited programme of synchronization with western forms of governance and public employment. [71] Thus Muslim women's education was not so much a later instalment in the battle against social "backwardness" as one of the determinate points from which embourgeoisement could be regulated. New Urdu literary genres, such as the exemplary biography, novelized prose narratives and didactic poetry, departing from its erotico-classical genres, staked their representational claims in this space of limited modernization, one of whose exemplary constituents are women.

The importance of women's experience,[72] either in their emergent life narratives such as the Bengali women's memoirs or (*smritikatha*) or in male reformist's use of their voices in their writing, which Kumkum Sangari characterizes as "ventriloquist reformism,"[73] points to the shared ground of women and representation in early nationalist thought. For such ventriloquism to become possible a male narratorial/authorial position presented itself as the arranger of life experiences drawing on its exemplary mediation of traditional life with modern consciousness. The politics of exemplarity, offered by Aamir Mufti as explanation for the contradictory existence of elite and subalternist identifications in Indian nationalism, identifies subaltern groups with an original, premodern cultural kernel, the negation of which lends the elite leader exemplarity in national representation.[74] While this description is meant to explain forms of

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[71] Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 112, 139.

[72] My point of reference for "experience" as a conceptual term is Kumkum Sangari's formulation: "I would argue that 'experience' comes into being as an authenticating category for women and the oppressed through *repetition*, a repetition which establishes its quality, facticity, and its authority *as* experience, as something that can happen again and again, and eventually points towards the systemic character of patriarchies." Sangari, "Feminist Criticism and Indian Literary History," *Language Writing Discourse: A Journal of Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (2002): 38.

[73] Ibid., 35.

[74] Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 27–28, 133.

majoritarian Indian nationalism, the politics of exemplarity points to a larger conception of nationalist thinking not confined to only one successful (i.e. ethnically majoritarian) version of nationalism. The particularities of the movement for a Muslim political community, such as its opposition to anticolonial nationalism, are lost in cultural/ethnic differentialist explanations if they are not situated within the system of colonial dominance and nationalist thought. Such explanations also invariably disperse the ideologies of gender and sexuality which enact these cultural/ethnic differentials in the first place. In what follows I will examine three key reformist texts which present a gendered imagination of this political community through genres of a new literariness (*adab*): the exemplary biography, the didactic woman's poem and the pedagogical novel.

The Immortal Life

Critical histories of ninteenth-century reform among Muslims in the colonized world have pointed to their instrumental use of the idiom of tradition. In his reading of the legendary pan-Islamic reformist intellectual Jamāl ud-Dīn Afġhānī, Aziz al-Azmeh describes how the reformer as a modern subject bases its claim to traditional authenticity "by a recommencement and a revivification of its beginnings, which still subsist within it just as a nature… inheres in a body."[75] It is crucial for reformism to rediscover the almost dead embers of tradition in the speech and writing of the reformer whose authoritativeness is derived precisely by disqualifying claims of continuity and descent in traditional bodies of knowledge. This ideology works on the condition that some link with the past can be posited as an essence untouched by the traditional institutions of knowledge transmission. Al-Azmeh's figure for this ideological system is an unchanging "nature" held inside bodily variations such that any dialectical relationship is denied

[75] Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993), 88.

between the two entities. While assertions of an essentialized nature are the ideological rallying points for a range of reformisms (whether the essence be called "Islam", "*dḫaram*," "*qaum*" or "*tahẕīb*"), the ideological contest is fought over the semiotics of the "body" in which forms of tradition are realized.

The trend of writing the life-narrative of an exemplary male individual's career was popularized in Urdu by Altaf Husain Hali in his three biographies (*biyōgrāfī*) of two great men from the past (Saʿdī Shīrāzī and Mirzā Ġhālib) and one from the present (Syed Ahmad Khan). The idea was derived from the tradition of exemplary biographies of self-made men in Victorian England inaugurated by George Lillie Craik's *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties* (1829) and Samuel Smiles' best-selling *Self-Help* (1859) whose title will ring familiar to readers of Hali's treatise on poetics where the phrase is transliterated in Urdu and offered as a reformist slogan.[76] Despite its reliance on the idiom of religious mobilization, Hali's biographical writings perform a new method of recounting and presenting the life of these exemplary figures.

Hali's biographies comprise of two parts: the first tells a straightforward biographical narrative about facts of the subject's life ("*lāʾif*") and the second is a review ("*rivyū*") of the narrated life of the subject. He views his biography of Syed Ahmad Khan, *Ḥayāt-e jāvēd* ("The Immortal Life") (1901), the final and longest of his exemplary biographies, as a departure from his

[76] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, ed. Vaḥīd Quraishī (ʿAlīgaṛh: Ējūkēshnal Buk Hāʾūs, 2011), 153. Also see idem *Ḥayāt-e Jāvēd* (Naʾī Dihlī: Qaumī Kaunsil barā-e farōġh-e Urdu zubān, 2004; fifth ed.), 121, 356. The *Self-Help* phenomenon (which included exemplary biographies of scientists, scholars and inventors) was not an isolated social fashion but affected the realist conventions of the Victorian novel in Britain. For example, in her introduction to Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* (1857), Heather Glen shows the effects of the self-help genre (first popularized as lectures in the 1840s) on the novel's conception of a Victorian middle-class, male subject's self-narration and its contestation by the idea of a self-made, self-reliant, self-helping socially productive male person. In colonial reformist studies, such "low" cultural influences have not been investigated in their effects on the formation of the disinherited *sharīf* intellectual. Cultural privilege and class locations are matched by Urdu literary historians in the roster of influences on elite Muslim reformers from the west, chosen exclusively from such high-pedigreed sources as the English Romantic poets, Edward Gibbon, the Mills and Thomas Macaulay. See Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

previous biographies because of its "critical" (*kirṭikal*) approach to life-writing.[77] A life like Sir Syed's demands its viewing through the clashing view points it generated in society. The exemplary reformist's element was criticism and so his biography too must reflect his formation in the conflict of social opinions. While the over-all tone of the text is hagiographic, the new literary sensibility demands authenticating writing by the nature of consciousness objectified in it. The need for authenticity arises from the changed circumstances of the Muslim community: "we must live now as subjects, and not rulers, in the world"[78] and "we need to live in amity with other communities."[79]

Sir Syed's educational achievements are overshadowed in Hali's biography by attempts to prop him up as a religious reformer. This contributes to the imagination of a political community built on religious identity. But in order to establish this role in his career the biographer updates common perceptions of tradition, religion and class leadership. For example, to counter the charge of apostasy against Sir Syed, he posits an internal division within religion (*maẕhab*). Islam is different from the Islam currently in practice (*muravvaja*).[80] Whenever rational doubt assails the subject of religion, a current practice and not the original (*aṣlī*) kernel is its cause. Thus rational thought only clarifies and restores that which historical accretions hide. To characterize the expanse of modern thought, Sir Syed worked with the rule of thumb that nothing in true religion can contradict the law of nature (*qānūn-e fiṭrat kē ḳhilāf*).[81] The vagueness of nature (*fiṭrat*) offers a space within which various textual readings, exegetical

[77] Hali, *Ḥayāt-e jāvēd*, 26.

[78] Ibid., 19, 21.

[79] Ibid., 22.

[80] Hali is quoting Sir Syed here to shore up the latter's *Tafsīr* project. Ibid., 219.

[81] Ibid., 220.

departures and ideological adjustments can take place without appearing as deviations from the canon. It comes in handy as an ideological lever to work the interior division within religion as the basis of identity: between its original core and its historical accretions. In political terms, this division signifies the outdated consciousness of the Muslim ruling class whose representation of the community was based on belief in fortune and continuity of tradition. This class's persistent reliance on local manifestations of communal life and rationalizing loss of political power as reversal of fortune shows its inability to even acknowledge its loss of political status.[82] The exemplary biography offers a new consciousness, associated neither with traditional religious authority (*ʿulamā*) nor royal descent, in which a political community subject to temporal powers and historical change can be imagined.

With these claims for its self-representation, the exemplary life continues to exist in traditional ecology. It repudiates blind imitation (*taqlīd*) while recommending its own formulae for pedagogical imitation. But it is in this duplicated terrain of tradition, religion and communal life that the departures of reformist thought can be identified. The concept of *qaum* presumes a society of several such entities competing with each other for securing resource advantages under colonial governance. The loss of political power held by a culturally composite ruling class is resignified as a loss for the Muslim community now reduced to subject status. While religion is assumed to be the basis of all Muslim social and political formations from the rise of Islam to post-Mughal India, its instrumentality in securing a political community, in an "Asian" (*ēshiyan*) society subordinated to a secular colonial government without a tradition of patriotism, undermines assertions of its trans-historical essence.[83] Finally, the reformer's spanning the gap

[82] These comments summarize Hali's diagnosis of the fallen condition of the Muslims in the *rivyū* section of the biography. Ibid., 576–77.

[83] Ibid., 304.

between primordial essences and historical deviations draws on secular literariness (the critical biography, for example) for revivifying tradition in which the self-evident distinction of religion and secularity can no longer be taken for granted. Thus Sir Syed is characterized as both a religious and "literary reformer" (*liṭrērī rifārmar*).[84]

These ideological innovations outline the reformist mind. The drastic nature of the departures in areas such as religion is recast by reference to the reformer's unconventional behaviour, which signals his inimitable uniqueness. For example, Sir Syed's reformist zeal is credited not to an exceptional birth or a rigorous upbringing (both of which characterize the old regime's standards), but to his remaining celibate after the death of his first wife.[85] The making of the reformer requires repudiation of those energies which do not contribute to the making of the community, and the departure is recast as a religious ideal. His singular attention to the education of elite Muslim men through life-long projects such as translation of scientific writings, editing of medieval historical texts, and establishment of all-male educational institutions, arose from the repudiation of women's participation in imagining the community. In fact, it is on the woman question that Hali dares to disagree with his subject. He notes that Sir Syed's neglect of women's education in the hope that education would trickle down to women through male kin has not come true. Educated men now seek wives ("ladies") intellectually equal to themselves while the uneducated women of the community must marry its unenlightened, uneducated men.[86] The social agency acquired by men through western education is incomplete if it cannot reproduce the community's kinship relations and religious identity. It is for this reason, and not amelioration of the the real conditions of women living in segregation, that the

[84] Ibid., 512.

[85] Ibid., 302.

[86] Ibid., 617.

question of women's education becomes important for male reformism. Having coded women's lives with such symbolic functionality, the male reformer's renunciation of the comforts of conjugal sexuality is offset by a humanizing gesture which Hali illustrates in the final sections of the *rivyū*. Sir Syed's correspondence with male friends and allies such as Maulvī Zain ul-ʿAbidīn Ḳhāñ with its libidinally charged terms of address (Sir Syed calls him "Zainū") points to that realm of same-sex intimacy which appears to negate forms of nationalized sexuality but which is the only possibility of personalizing, indeed humanizing, the public persona.[87] This is the realm from which the social movement derives its political energy in non-ascriptive ties of comradeship, discipleship and intimate friendship. In so far as reform postpones women's education in the name of modernizing the all-male community, it offers male–male intimacy as the model for imagining the political community. The efforts of self-taught *sharīf* women like Ashrafunnisā Bēgam and the exceptional few taught by their reformist husbands, such as Muḥammadī Bēgam, at the very end of the nineteenth century put into question this identification of same-sex alignments with the community's primary social relations.[88] It is in this changed context that Hali wrote his two didactic *naẓm*s on the woman question to imagine the limits of women's participation in reform.

The Praise of Silence

The impetus for Muslim women's education came from Shaiḳh ʿAbdullāh, a convert to Islam and a graduate of Sir Syed's Aligarh College. It was for Abdullah's journal *Ḳhātūn* that

[87] The text of the letter is reproduced by Hali in ibid., 738–39.

[88] Ashrafunnisa Begam's autobiographical account of her self-education was printed in 1899 in one of the earliest women's reformist journals, *Tahẕīb un-nisvā*n, edited by Muhammadi Begam, who also wrote the former's biography *Ḥayāt-e Ashraf*. See C.M. Naim, "How Bibi Ashraf Learned to Read and Write," *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 6 (1987): 99–115 and Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 28–29, 110–114.

Hali served the *naẓm* "Čup kī dād" (The praise of silence) in 1905.[89] The poem's message is amplified by its publication in a journal dedicated to the cause of women's education.[90] But the causes for praising women's silence, coercively kept away from formal writing and education under the alibi of gender segregation, are not so straightforward. The speaker of the poem is the typical reformist voice mediating traditional interests from a position distinguished from traditional sources of authority (*ʿulamā* and Sufi *pīrs*).[91] The bait of basic education is offered to women as a class to neutralize the agony of their existence in domestic seclusion. Two kinds of fears are implied in this reasoning. The consciousness of common oppression among women as a class might turn into a group sentiment against the sources of oppression. Education itself may no longer appear as the single-point agenda of bourgeois reform preserving the structural features of gendered domestic seclusion. The poem's rhetorical energy works towards a monological conception of education which would preempt the group expression of women's discontentment by asserting illiteracy as its singular cause. The lack of enthusiasm towards women's education in the reluctant embourgeoisement of the *ashrāf* thus signifies not the trickling of modern ideas down the gender hierarchy but a fear that middle-class women's political mobilization of their common experience of oppression might destabilize the traditional hierarchies determining the community's identity.

This fear is materialized through the litany of oppressions faced by women throughout history. The poem constantly holds up the silent response of women to these oppressions as the

[89] See Minault's introduction to her translation of the poem for a background to Hali's writings on the woman question. Minault, ed. and trans., *Voices of Silence: English Translation of Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hali's* Majalis un-nissa *and* Chup ki dad (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986).

[90] For an account of the evolution of *Ḵhātūn* as part of the Aligarh movement, see Minault. *Secluded Scholars*, 122–29.

[91] The poem is written in the *tarkīb band* stanzaic format used for long single-theme poems in Urdu and Persian poetry. Hali, "Čup kī dād" in *Kulliyāt-e Ḥālī*, ed. Shaiḵh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl Pānīpatī (Dihlī: Jadīd Kitāb Gẖar, 1960), 257–60.

reason their misery deserves alleviation. This produces a figure of the universal woman, the ubiquity of whose oppression gives her a timeless, contextless presence. The reference to women's experience as the common ground for speaking about gender oppression offers Muslim *sharīf* women identification with that experience. In it an individual woman's experience can be substituted with another's from any historical period (e.g. pre-Islamic Jahili society)[92] or other cultures (e.g. high-caste Hinduism).[93] In poetic terms, the latter substitution is enabled by the imagination of a common Indic tradition of representing women, particularly where women's songs of lament and other oral expression are read as women's everyday speech. Even in this seemingly collectivizing imagination of women's experience of their oppression the effort is to limit its representation to either experiences such as labour pains glorifying female gender roles,[94] or those exemplifying a dubious patriarchal benevolence against its own violence such as *sati* or female infanticide.[95] These examples suggest that women have suffered greatly throughout history but it is their silence and the self-adjustment of patriarchal ideology that has checked the socially disruptive tendencies of women's vocalized discontentment. The conventional allusions to women's resilience to pain rhetorically constructs a history of women's oppression for antifeminist purposes. This history speaks in place of a female subjectivity and

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[92] "gāṛī gaʾīñ tum muddatōñ miṭṭī mēñ jītī jāgtī // ḥāmī tumhārā tẖā na kōʾī juz z̲āt-e khudā" [For ages you were buried alive in the ground // Nobody was your protector save the godhead] Ibid., verse 3, stanza 5, 259.

[93] "zinda sadā jaltī rahīñ tum murda ḳhāvindōñkē [*sic*] sāt̲h̲ // aur čain sē ʿālam rahā yi sab tamāshē dēkẖ̲tā" [You were always burned alive with dead husbands // and the world watched all these spectacles in comfort] Ibid., verse 4, stanza 5, 259.

[94] "dardōñ kē dukẖ̲ tumnē sahē jāpē kī jẖ̲ēlīñ saḳhtiyāñ // jab maut kā čakkẖ̲ā mazā tab tum kō yi daulat milī" [You braved the sorrow of the pains and the hardship of birthing // when you tasted death then you got this wealth"] Ibid., verse 2, stanza 3, 258.

[95] God (*ḳhudā*) and justice (*ḥaq*) are seen to be always on their side (see quotation in footnote 79 above); it is only worldly patriarchal authority that has oppressed women. In the logic of this view, oppression of women should then mean contravention and disrespect of divine authority, but this implication is never drawn by the narrator. Women's education (*tāʿlīm-e nisvāñ*) is posed as a stage (*marḥala*) in the evolution of the community (*qaum*), and not an integral part of its foundational belief system. Ibid., verses 4–5, stanza 8, 260.

thus renders irrelevant any contemporary movement of women to improve the real conditions of their existence. The history of women's oppression enables the authenticating of woman's identity as the precipitate of that history and whose liberation is transcendentally offered through education (*taʿlīm*).

The writing and publishing context of this poem signals an ideological shift which was in the making since the late ninteenth-century didactic novels of Naẕīr Aḥmad and Rāshidul Ḵhairī written for a new female readership: the manufacturing of women's consent to the new patriarchy based on the private/public dialectic of nationalist thought. The poem performs this shift by ventriloquizing patriarchal objections to the education of women against which the narrative voice delineates its modernity. One objection claims that modern education would obliterate the difference between the sexes since educated women become more like men (aisā na hō mard aur ʿaurat mēñ rahē bāqī na farq // taʿlīm pā kar ādmī bannā tumhēñ zēbā nahīñ[96]). Faisal Devji has shown that normative Islamic legality struggles against the perceived *similarity* of the sexes and that reformist ideology in particular aims to recast the "pagan" private realm (inhabited traditionally by both women and young boys, the *ẓuʿafā*) as a gender differentiated space. To arrive at the proper feminization of women, curricula for men were introduced in women's education programmes. The success of the new educational paradigm depended on spreading a common cultural curriculum based on the standards of a reformed *adab*.[97] But the fearful similarity of women meant limiting not just the spread of education to the bourgeiosie but also the contents of that education. Hali's poem therefore proposes women's identification with their particular history of oppression as the condition for receiving modern education. The fear of

[96] Ibid., verse 3, stanza 7, 260.

[97] Faisal Fatehali Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform, 1857–1900," in Zoya Hasan, ed. *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994), 22–37.

gender similarity belongs to an older conception of women; in the new conception this fear is displaced in an abstract and universalized gender difference. The slip between "man" and "human" (*ādmī* in the verse quoted above) connotes both the traditional fear of loss of femininity through education and the reformist agenda of preserving subordination of women by offering them a chance, like the colonizer's civilizing mission, to become human. This contradictory message to women coheres from a male reformist perspective: "her" education is "his" awakening into modernity.

Hali's other tribute to suffering femininity appeared almost two decades earlier as *Munājāt-e bēva* (The Widow's Prayer; 1886) written in the voice of a widow addressing a transcendent authority (exhibiting properties of the Islamic godhead, a cosmic mother, a caring despot, a judge, even the Empress of India).[98] Ventriloquizing the widow's voice connects the speaker with the popular reformist novels in which women characters typified the goals of *sharīf*hood. The fiction of the typically suffering widow is supported by women's (*ʿaurat ẕāt*) universally substitutable experience irrespective of religious and cultural differences. While this strategy allows the imagination of women's collective consciousness, it isolates a common element in suffering femininity: the restrictions on sexual desire. The panic in reformist, particularly upper-caste Hindu groups, about the sexually active widow surfaces in the poem as the widow's allusions to preserving her honour (*ʿizzat*), resisting her carnal self (*nafs*), refusing her desire (*dil*) despite her unjust treatement by society. The panic is couched in the acknowledgement of the widow's sexual self-denial as the intense experience which forges her as a pedagogical blazon for the community. The spectacle of suffering high-caste Hindu

[98] The poem is written in the *maśnavī* rhyme scheme and format. Hali, "Munājāt-e bēva," in *Kulliyāt-e Ḥālī*, ed. Shaiḳh Muḥammad Ismāʿīl Pānīpatī (Dihlī: Jadīd Kitāb Gẖar, 1960), 267–88.

femininity (e.g. Draupadi's disrobing in the *Mahabharata*'s *Sabha-parvan* episode,[99] the self-immolating widow on the husband's pyre,[100] the child bride and the child widow[101]) is deployed to authenticate an experience greater than the individual self or community. The allusions to curbing sexual desire, despite its miserable cost, become the essential attributes of a publicly visible, vocalized and self-identical femininity. This is why the redemption of the widow, or the point of her prayer, is not a plea for allowing second marriages for widowed women as might be expected. After detailing the misery of sexual renunciation, the widow turns to the addressee, the transcendent authority, and asks for his love (*muḥabbat*).[102] The final lines angrily attack male society ("I want to burn down the temple of love": "*pyār kē mandir kō āg lagā dūñ*"[103]) while claiming redemption in divine love. This carefully staged dialectic between a powerful rejection of temporal social identity and bodily sexuality and its recovery in sublimating devotionalism signals the instrumental use of women's experiential narratives for allaying patriarchal fears and containing women's resistance.

In this reformist poem the implications for women's sexuality point to a larger problematic of representing sexual desire in literature for reformist ideology. The metaphors for non-reproductive sexuality, such as fruitless trees, fish gasping on a sandy beach, a rudderless boat, presented in the voice of the female renunciant devotee using a distinctly low idiom of

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[99] "rahī akēlī bẖarī sabẖā mēñ // pyāsī rahī bẖarī Gaṅgā mēñ" [I remained alone in the packed assembly // I remained thirsty in the flooded Ganga] Ibid., section 5, 275.

[100] "jalīñ karōṛōñ isī lapaṭ mēñ // padmōñ pẖukīñ isī margẖaṭ mēñ" [Millions (of women) burned in this blaze // Billions went up in flames in these cremations] Ibid., section 9, 282.

[101] "hōsh sē pahlē hūʾī haiñ bēva // kab pahuñčēgā pār yi kẖēvā" [They've been widowed before maturity // When will this boat row across?] Ibid., section 9, 283.

[102] "čāhtī hūñ ik tērī muḥabbat // aur nahīñ rakẖtī kōʾī ḥājat" [I desire only your love // I have no other need] Ibid., section 12, 288.

[103] Ibid., section 12, 288.

women's speech (marked as rural, folk and oral) collapse women's sexuality in naturalized imagery from pan-Indian literary registers. In fact, it is in his woman poems, unlike his own didactic prose narrative *Majālis un-nisā* (1875) directed at *sharīf* women, that a truly nationalized subject (Hindu *and* Muslim) becomes possible to imagine. A shared regime of patriarchal control over women's sexuality also produces the field of interaction between the various competing "Indian" literary modes and cultural languages. Interestingly the reformist poet does not draw on Muslim cultural difference to argue that Islam, normatively, has never contested the widow's right to remarry. The widow as a sexual subject is above these denominational differences and appears as a model for self-limitation within which gendered self-expression is imagined. Sexual self-expression, even if limited and eventually disavowed and unburdened as a rant against temporal patriarchal control, threatens to turn the personal into a rallying point for gendered group consciousness. Hali's poem senses this and after allowing the widow a description of her sexual frustration makes her acknowledge that her individual rebellion against these strictures wouldn't end the oppression of women as a class.[104] Therefore there is no need for outright rebellion against temporal social structures. Thus the remedy of sublimating bodily desires through metaphysical union draws on age-old images of the female devotional voice in *bhakti* and Sufi devotionalisms where the negativity of female consciousness

[104] Cf. the feminist writer's disagreement in an imaginary dialogue with a figure of dissident femininity from the past in Lalithambika Antherjanam's Malayalam short-story "Praticaradevatha" (The Goddess of Revenge; 1938): "Fired as you were with the intoxication of revenge, why did you not try to inspire all the other weak and slavish anterjanams [segregated Namboodiri women]? Why did you shoulder the burden of revenge alone? In such matters, Sister, individuals cannot triumph. On the other hand, they can bring disaster upon themselves." The two situations overlap not only in terms of a gender-segregation ideology common to both upper-caste Namboodiri (Brahmin) and *ashrāf* societies, but of the argument, common to both early (late colonial) feminism and reformist anti-feminism, that individual acts of transgression are merely personal, temporary, and ultimately anti-political. The individualized personal realm in both cases is symbolized by sexual desire and its expression. Lalithambika Antherjanam, "The Goddess of Revenge: Praticaradevatha," in Gita Krishnankutty, trans. *Cast Me Out If You Will: Stories and Memoir* (Calcutta: Stree, 1998), 29.

enables access to the transcendental.[105] Reformist writing produces a new experiential poetics whose ideological base is formed, in this case, by premodern poetic devotionalism, women's oral and folk idioms, and autobiographical self-revelation, and defined by a sexual regime identifying the subject with her voice, and experience with gendered experience. If these are the enabling conditions of female authorship and women's writing in general, they also coincide with the ideological programme of identifying the personal with the sexual, and non-reproductive desires as socially disruptive and personally destructive.[106]

A Tale of Affliction

In his essay on the new colonial conception of *adab*, C.M. Naim has shown that newly western-educated Muslim men felt an increasing gap between *adab* (the earlier prescriptive genre of conduct literature but also including within its scope poetry, fictions such as *dāstān*, *qiṣṣa* and belles-lettres) and *ʿilm* (science and knowledge).[107] This gap determined the debate on educating the Urdu-speaking elite and was expressed as concern about the writing of textbooks for primary education conducted, at the time, in the "vernaculars". Naim describes how the novels of Nazir Ahmad came to organize a new *adab* which was prescriptive in tone but written

[105] See Kumkum Sangari's analysis of the politics of figurative modes, especially the female voice and metaphors of female experience, in medieval *bhakti* traditions in "Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of *Bhakti*," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 25, No. 27 and 28 (1990), 1538, 1543. For a similar gendered argument about Sufi mystical discourse, see Faisal Fatehali Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space," 29–30.

[106] Twentieth-century feminist poetry in Urdu returns to these conditions of its birth through not just the *naẓm* (seen here in its inchoate possibilities) but also the ghazal to reformulate the relation between lyrical desire and an emancipatory social consciousness.

[107] C.M. Naim, "Prize-Winning *Adab*: A Study of Five Urdu Books Written in Response to the Allahabad Government Gazette Notification No. 791A (1868)," in idem, *Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays of C.M. Naim* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 121.

in narrative form. This re-working of *adab* was, however, not simply an attempt to clothe western ideas ("the Protestant ethic of success"[108]) in indigenous, "Islamic" garb.

The persistence of the term *adab* to define a new body of literary–pedagogical writing signifies both continuities and departures from an earlier period when the late Mughal service class's (both upper-caste Muslim and Hindu) interests were dominant. The novelty of genres such as the novel, essay, long poem, published lectures, and journalism, categorized as *adab*, suggest selective engagements with new forms of consciousness represented in particular adaptations of the genres such as exemplary life narratives, didactic poetry and pedagogical novels. A common assumption unifying the new *adab* was the primacy of rationalist prose over imaginative poetry. An early literary historian such as Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, following the example of the Orientalist scholar of "Hindustani" Garcin de Tassy,[109] while commemorating the great tradition of Urdu ghazal poetry, introduces his subject with the admission that historical accretions of Urdu's poetic language hinder clarity in literary and journalistic expression. [110] The problem with poetry, its inherent strangeness to modern literary taste, was not so much its thematic contents, but its continuous social functionality across emerging distinctions between ethical instruction (*malfūẓāt,* didactic *maṡnavī*), primary education (old *adab* texts such as Saʿdī), literary-aesthetic education (the ghazal), historiography (*tārīḳh*, *taẕkira*), and belles-lettres (*inshā*). The emphasis on the imaginative quality of poetic language contrasted with its earlier pedagogical role in teaching stylized ethical and aesthetic reflexes as the conditions of *ashrāf*

[108] Ibid., 150.

[109] For a survey of de Tassy's career and translation work, see Sayida Surriya Hussain, *Garcin de Tassy: Biographie et Etude Critique de Ses Oeuvres* (Pondichéri: Institut Français d'Indologie, 1962).

[110] See Azad's comments on the inadequacy of Perso-Urdu *inshā-pardāzī* (belles-lettres) for writing history and transmitting western knowledge in the introductory essay to his monumental literary history *Āb-e ḥayāt* (1880). Azad, *Āb-e ḥayāt* (Lakẖnaʾū: Uttar Pardēsh Urdū Ikaiḍamī, 2003; sixth ed.), 57.

socialization. Poetry's loss of its power for social distinction was attributed to the disaggregation of a presumed premodern unity of religion, community (*qaum*), class/caste (*ashrāf*) and gender norms. Therefore it had to give way to a reformulated *adab* within which it was one genre among emerging new ones like the novel.

The question of the ghazal, which I will take up in detail in the next chapter, was essential in making this historical distinction between old and new literature. Defining the ghazal as a particular genre of poetry was based on its association with sexualized expression. The ghazal transparently invoked erotic states in which its range, diversity and representational strategies were objectified and converged. The preponderance of this genre in the history of Urdu poetry made it a necessary building block for the new *adab*. As the main theorist of this transition from worn-out thematic to modern formalism, Hali acknowledges the power of culturally dominant writing like the ghazal that must be injected with new messages to recreate the unity of precolonial social consciousness. He compares the situation to early Islam when the Quranic text used the same idioms and figures of speech prevalent in pre-Islamic *jāhilī* erotic, eulogistic and Bacchic poetry.[111] The best and dominant ideas of the age need the vehicle of socially prevalent forms, even when these are associated with profaneness. In this leap from South Asian ghazal to pre-Islamic erotic poetry, signifying the continuity of profane art forms, we notice a new morphological imagination of literary genres and erotic expression. It is best seen in the literary-historical writings of Azad who, in his study of Persian linguistic and literary evolution, claims to uncover ancient social morphologies through etymological research on philological principles (*filālōjiyā*).[112] The homology between texts separated by centuries is

[111] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shaʿirī*, 205.

[112] Azad, *Suḳhandān-e Fārs* (Naʾī Dihlī: Qaumī kaunsil barā-e farōġh-e urdū zubān, 2005; reprint), 12, 104, 107.

based on certain common axes of evolution and development. The erotic themes of the Persian and Urdu ghazal, raised to the status of an archiving principle in the Orientalist retrieval of ancient and medieval texts, naturalized these themes through the morphological imagination.[113] The social-syntactic function and meaning of these erotic forms and images were overshadowed by the perception of a tradition of accumulated, neatly stacked and classified verse with internally substitutable units organized by sexual morphologies that overrode any other subgeneric variation.[114] The identification of poetic language with sexualized expression stressed its homogeneous and monotonous features. The conception of literature as creative, imaginative art needs a forceful separation from its opposite, i.e. mechanistic work, and the ghazal form appears destined for mechanistic repetition. Its suffused sexuality reproduced what the exercise of its formal elements achieved: unreproductive, unnatural, mechanistic expressions of desire. Postcolonial criticisms of reformism, partly described in the previous section, would see this 'negative' judgement as the kneejerk rejection of older (sexual and aesthetic) morphologies in response to colonial domination. But in this move between the old and the new, if we read closely, there is no escape from those very mechanistic forms of traditional writing that impede progress and evolution. The loss of cultural coordinates to colonialism, and a growing feeling of alienation from one's culture, turn these mechanistic forms into reassuring paths to meaning. In the ghazal's domain, poetic language, albeit entangled in erotica, is assured of representational power.

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[113] For examples of this process see Kumkum Roy's essay on the *Kamasutra* and Uma Chakravarti's comments on Max Mueller in "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" both cited above.

[114] V.N. Vološinov's criticism of the morphological bias in linguistic theory derived from Indo-European comparative linguistics in favour of studying social-syntactic utterance provides a useful model for the study of sexual morphologies in colonial thought. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), 109–13.

The residual forms in the new *adab*, such as poetry, foundational in disseminating ethical and aesthetic education, required repatterning their morphological features to blend with the new social weave. The favoured medium for this was prose. A new sexual script was first invented in the early novels of reform, almost invariably devoted to the edification of the segregated inhabitants of the *zanāna* with whose life experiences its rough ideological edges were gradually smoothened. These novels opened out what they first posited as premodern sexual congelations, into social identities, by way of experience-testing, unifying women's experience under single-issue reformist concern, and typological links between characters, gestures, subjectivities and the community. Their narratives hit the thinly described ground running: the threshold of entry for the ideal reformist reader is consistently the problem of socialization (not just of children, but also of the child-like constituencies of women and pre-teen boys). Under the signs of reform (*iṣlāḥ*) and education (*tarbiyat*, *taʿlīm*), the novels of Nazir Ahmad, the pioneer of the genre, persistently problematize socialization as if modern forms of social life are hurdles to be cleared by the subject on the way to her socialization. This developmentalist view is deconstructed by Denise Riley to remind us that "you can never logically precede your own socialisation, or lag behind it: the individual is always the plenum of her or his own social experience and is necessarily saturated with it."[115] Obsessively turning around the question of Muslim socialization, these narratives insist on a primordial ground of subjective experience whose categories are presented as if they precede the subject's socialization into modern experience. These include morphologies of linguistic use, attire, habit (*vaẓʿ*), rationalized by distinctly *modern* technologies of gender and sexual identification.

[115] Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and the Mother* (London: Virago, 1983), 33.

Nazir Ahmad's novelized tract *Fasāna-e Mubtalā* (1887) shifts his earlier focus on styling the new Muslim woman[116] to the persistence of older styles of masculinity in the community.[117] The narrative's assessment of this issue is reflected in the pun on the hero's name: Mubtalā, the afflicted one, but also the enamoured one. Mubtala's problem to begin with is his name. His *taḳhalluṣ*, a poetic alias, popularized by his dandyish traits, one of which was writing amorous poetry, completely replaces his given name. But the greater trouble is Mubtala's self-identification with this fictive poetic persona: he has a pleasant face, fair skin, a well-proportioned body, in other words, a manifestation of the very subject of poetry ("ṣūrat shakl kā aččẖā, rañg kā gōrā , aʿẓā kā mutanāsib, yaʿnī shiʿr kā mauẓūʿ lahu vāqiʿ hūā tẖā"[118]). Careful attention to his toilette and styling his bodily features on poetic conceits about youthful male beauty, puffed his sense of self so much that he asks for the fabulous dowry of a golden bedstead. Irked by the extravagance of these demands on such flimsy grounds as self-admiration, most prospective in-laws reject his suit, calling him names such as *hījṛā* (eunuch) and *zanḳhā* (effeminate male).[119] Mubtala however does get married to a first cousin. In this early trajectory of the formation of a masculine identity, narrated it must be remembered in a normative spirit, bodily signs and practices do not denote any identity. His narcissistic masculinity is no more an identity than his inhabiting heterosexual desire (the single issue the novel seeks to resolve is the Muslim practice of polygyny represented in Mubtala's disastrous second marriage). Narcissism, coded as femininity, does denote an interior androgny but it does not manifest itself as male

[116] This includes his novel sequence about the reformist female paragon Aṣġharī Ḳhānam: *Mirāt ul-ʿarūs* (1869) and *Banāt un-naʿsh* (1873).

[117] The earliest representation of this thesis appears in the character of Kalīm in Nazir Ahmad's third novel *Taubat un-Naṣūḥ* (1874).

[118] Ḍipṭī Naẓīr Aḥmad, *Fasāna-e Mubtalā*, ed. Iftiḳhār Aḥmad Ṣiddīqī (Lāhaur: Majlis-e taraqqī-e adab, 1962), 65.

[119] Ibid., 92.

homosexuality. Equally, the presence of heterosexual desire does not displace Mubtala's effeminate traits. Moreover, effeminacy is not a clearly defined repertoire of womanish mannerisms (gait, voice, gestures) but rather a public avowal of attending to one's appearance like a woman would. In other words, no proof of Mubtala's sexual identity is offered as an explanation for his behaviour.

The perversity of his actions arises from the defence of Mubtala's self-presentation as a cultural achievement. Nazir Ahmad takes this defence seriously by presenting it as an antithesis in a series of staged arguments to the thesis of reformism represented by Mubtala's stodgily upright uncle, a born-again cousin and a pious classmate from his wild *madrasa* days. The antithesis is elaborated by ventriloquizing not just the dandy's voice, but situating it within a harmony of other sexually dissident voices patronized by Mubtala as part of *sharīf* patronage of the entertaining arts. These belong to the hereditary castes of performers (*bẖānḍ*, *naqqāl*, *masḳhara*) and recreational women (*ranḍī*; singing and dancing women). These social groups mark the point of degeneration of the elite's self-fashioning and thus trope sexual perversity as a problem of social relations. Sexual perversion has still not become a "species" but designates a social differential governed by sale of labour-power (of mimics, clowns, dancers, musicians, singers) to the economically dominant class. The most obvious critique of the old *sharīf* household, the nerve centre of this class, is the heavy cost of its salon culture which cannot be sustained by the dwindling incomes from traditional sources such as landlordism and revenue collection.

This economic situation is at the heart of a debate on aesthetics between Mubtala and his *madrasa* classmate ʿĀrif. He accuses Mubtala of being *ḥusn-parast* (a Dorian Grayish devotee of

beauty) which the latter takes up as his defence.[120] Mubtala argues that he attempts to approximate his self-presentation to the conventional, idealized descriptions of physical beauty (*sarāpā*) in the Lucknow school of poetry. But he is not simply taking a leaf out of the book of the past because he justifies his resolve in terms of the ideals of sublime natural beauty, such as glimpsing a fog-covered mountain in Nainital, studying and emulating which is the new aesthetic style. The aesthete's antithesis, ventriloquized by the reformist narrator, does not rely on the old hat of tradition but updates itself in what reformism considers its new aesthetic language. What is clearly missing in this tendentious reconstruction of the "old" aesthetic, for example, are the cultural justifications of *amrad-parastī* (the poetic cult of the boy), mystical rationalizations of erotic desire, and the general defense of the ennobling qualities of ghazal poetry. Instead, the *ḥusn* thesis defends itself as a subcultural refusal[121] of reformist dominance, based on older continuities such as gender segregation and the sexual commodification of women's (and lower-caste men's) artistic work. For reformism, then, social order is threatened by these social groups and not by a species of individually verifiable sexual deviants.

On the thesis side of the debate, Arif argues that beauty (*ḥusn*) is not a socially relevant notion because it depends on historical accidents that, with time, attain social legitimacy through usage and convention. Beauty, in other words, leaves the door open to historical variability in social life. It disrupts and miscegenates the social order. A form of its appearance is the pursuit of merely personal tastes (*ṭabīʿat-e shaḳhṣī*) which because of their inherent non-universality are derived from sources such as literature and poetry. His example for the universal condition (*ṭabīʿat-e insānī*) is reproductive heterosexuality (*tavālud–tanāsul*) which does not need artificial

[120] See chapter 17 titled "Ḥusn-e ṣūrat par Mubtalā aur ʿĀrif kā mubāḥaśa" in ibid., 188–209.

[121] The classic account of the formation of subcultures along the faultlines of hegemonic culture is Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 2005; reprint).

fictions because it exists as need, irrespective of literary-aesthetic beauty.[122] The debate however breaks down when Mubtala replies to Arif's point about the economic and moral costs of pursuing beauty by citing his personal "wealth" of physical attractiveness as defence of his position. Arif flies into a rage, at last voicing the real ideological worry, for which the formalized debate appears to be an intellectual cover, that Mubtala has valorized femininity and its wiles over his masculine identity ("mard hō kar tum kō ʿauratōñ kē hunar par nāz kartē hūē sharm nahīñ ātī?").[123] The identification of disruptive desires with socially mobile groups such as female prostitutes[124] and entertainers and with fears of social contagion[125] constitutes the conditions under which *sharīf* masculinity could lose its social exemplarity. The threat significantly does not come from a "same-sex"/ "homosexual" reading of Mubtala's feminized narcissism. While the accusations of emasculation and effeminacy point to the underlying prejudice against non-reproductive forms of sexuality, the need to remind the renegade male subject, without recourse to homophobic rationalization, that his habits are destructive of his personal and familial reputation, points to the stark absence of a homophobic imaginary in the

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[122] Nazir Ahmad, *Fasāna-e Mubtalā*, 203.

[123] Ibid., 205.

[124] In late ninteenth-century Urdu fiction often the first moral threat to the hero arrives in the form of an alluringly anonymous woman who rents accomodation in the hero's neighbourhood (*muḥalla*). In *Mubtala*, the threat appears in the form of Bēgam, a *ḳhāngī* (an upper-class prostitute who does business only with the aristocratic scion and observes gender-seclusion rules of *sharīf* society), whose ingratiating herself in Mubtala's household results in a temporary insurrection of his wife and other *sharīf* womenfolk in which she is physically beaten and thrown out by them. In Sharar's *Flōrā Flōriṇdā* (1897), a historical novel (*nāvil*) set in Moorish Spain, Florinda, a Mata Hari-like Christian nun, disguises herself as a pious Muslim widow, rents a house next to the hero's, and manages to seduce him into marriage in order to destabilize the moral city. ʿAbdul Ḥalīm Sharar, *Flōrā Flōriṇdā* (Lāhaur: Maktaba al-Quraish, 1986).

[125] For a description of the British fear of contagion represented in the body of the erstwhile courtesan–prostitute and the legislation on venereal-disease inspection in the red-light areas of Lucknow city, see Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow: 1856–1877* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 134–42. Also cf. the diagnosis of Kalīm, the arch epicurean rake (*čẖailā*) in Ahmad's *Taubat un-Naṣūḥ*, as suffering from both a constitutional inability to reform himself as well as communicable disease ("*bīmāriyāñ jō mutaʿaddī kahlātī haiñ*") he has contracted from the external world. The link between Kalim's epicene self-presentation and his proneness to these infections of the world hint at a particular threat of venereal disease to the body of the transgressive *sharīf* male. Ḍipṭī Naẕīr Aḥmad, *Taubat un-Naṣūḥ* (Dihlī: Qaumī kaunsil barā-e farōġh-e Urdū zubān, 2003), 168.

text.[126] This is not to suggest that reformism tolerates sexual dissidence. But its intolerance of particular sexual acts and identities makes sense only in an ideological context within which older sexually transgressive continuities set the limits of imagining such intolerance. Thus, for a text which liberally quotes Quranic and Prophetic exempla, the prohibition of sodomy (*livāṭ*), the most obvious juridical justification for the intolerance of sexual transgression, does not frame the narrative's understanding of sexual deviance.[127] It is in such singularized, juridical prohibitions (mostly relating to the behaviour of women and acts outside conjugal heterosexuality, e.g. the *zinā* rules) that the Semitic religious traditions reproduce their canonical sanctity and doctrinal continuity (as "Abrahamic" monotheistic religions) over centuries. However a very different fear grips the reformist position in these ideologically programmatic writings: the heterogeneity of gender socialization. It is not so much homosexual panic than a fear of epicene self-presentation by a genitally male person that best describes the new sexual ideology.

Thus the Foucaultian explanation for the birth of the modern "homosexual" – from temporary aberrance of sodomy in a heterogeneous population to interior androgyny as proof of a homosexual species[128] – is not so much negated by this material as shown to be open at both

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[126] A remarkable parallel to this situation can be seen in Joseph Massad's account of the uneven development of western sexual ideology in the writings of the Arab *nahda* tradition from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. The incredulity of writers in the latter period towards the casual acknowledgement in early ninteenth-century writers, such as Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi, of the prevalence of "sexual deviance" (represented in pederastic poetry) in native society, and their non-judgemental observation of its lack in western societies, shows the uneven trajectory of western sexual ideologies in colonized societies. Notions such as "colonial homophobia" offer merely a self-fulfilling explanation for the prevalence of homophobia as if it were a coherent statute imposed uniformly in these societies. Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 36–37.

[127] For the long history of this term across various Islamic juridical traditions, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 118–22.

[128] It is as a *figure* of sexuality, located in the corporealized soul of the subject, that homosexuality comes to attain a durable social force: "L'homosexualité est apparue comme une des figures de la sexualité lorsqu'elle a été rabattue de la pratique de la sodomie sur une sorte d'androgynie intérieure, un hermaphrodisme de l'âme. Le sodomite était un relaps, l'homosexuel est maintenant une espèce." Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 59. In simpler terms, one could now *be* a homosexual without necessarily *doing* any of the sexual practices signified by "sodomy". It is necessary to reestablish these slight inflections in Foucault's argument in view of particularly South Asian LGBT studies' mindless dismissal of his thesis by presenting other,

ends. The canonical prohibition of "sodomy," in the non-western context, does prove handy as an ideology of sexual normativity but it does not correlatively produce in society precise subjectivities in which it could be exemplified. The latter process belongs to much more stringent and historically verifiable operations of gendered socialization, division of labour, and naturalization of caste. The particular fear of intersexed, epicene masculinity, arises out of the larger project of policing the *zanāna* because its inhabitants represent the biggest threat to the idea of communal purity and identity. Reformism rehabilitates this epicene figure to a subcultural style, reducing its dominant presence in elite forms of culture, to signify its exile from the times. This process creates imaginary spaces, memorably realized in Nazir Ahmad's description of the performance of the *naqqāls* (professional mimics) at Mubtala's soiree, that look like the unintended but liberatory interstices of the normative text in which we may discern the precise shapes of insurgent sexual subjects. But these reconstructions of antithetical positions and subjectivities, as I have shown, have a distinct role to play in preparing a workable logic of social dominance. The epicene man, the hereditary entertainers, the conniving courtesan (Mubtala ends up marrying one) and the silently suffering wife (Mubtala's first) connect to create a network in which the dominant sexual script of reform becomes legible.

In the larger field of reformist ideology that I have traced so far, the epicene man, in particular, obstructs the exclusive feminization of women. He stands in the way of the evolutionary development of male subjects from traditional socialization to modernized selves defined by "education." But within him there are rumblings of the new as well, shown in the refraction of "traditional" aesthetic style by descriptions of aesthetic experience in western

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premodern terms of categorizing homosexual acts and feelings. The Focaultian formulation, quoted above, does not render impossibile older terms of description or their real referents, but it maps the stark shift from a system of noting practices between bodies to a strategy of locating these, and their juridical–moral valuations, inside (*intérieure*) the singular "soul" (*l'âme*).

languages. He also threatens the particular nationalized same-sex intimacy in the all-male networks of reform by forcing it to distinguish itself from his world. In Nazir Ahmad's novel, the re-sexing of pronouns, to use Alan Sinfield's reading of Auden's phrase as the motto of closeted gay aesthetics,[129] has still not taken place: Mubtala still refers to his courtesan acquaintances (*nāzanīnān-e shahr*) with the male pronoun while exclaiming that it is *they* who are in love with *his* alluring beauty.[130] Mubtala's death in the novel is an exemplary one. The contradictions he represents are resolved in his death but not before he is shown to have gone through the hurdles of modern socialization (education, marriage, child-rearing, religious practice, colonial employment) and failed at each one of them. In so far as this career reminds us of the caricatured devaluation of non-reproductive, deviant sexuality in antihomosexual thinking, its genealogy can be more usefully located in the practice of what came to be viewed in colonial times as subcultural aesthetic styles and their marginalized bearers and transmitters, the entertainment and service-providing castes, than in the utopia of unbroken literary traditions, like the ghazal, with their re-sexed pronouns.

Despite their self-evident meanings, sexuality and literature appear as volitile concepts in the field of colonial history. In this chapter I have tried to clear the ground for a description of the historical objectification of both these concepts through the concrete examples of Urdu literary reform and criticism. No overarching, consistent theory about colonial sexuality is offered, at least none which would reduce sexuality to a simple business of individual selves and their erotic desires, celebrated or thwarted in literary representation. Instead sexuality emerges as a sexual ideology, exemplified in reformist language, with varying stresses in its prescriptions

[129] Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading* (London: Routledge, 2005; second ed.), 60.

[130] Nazir Ahmad, *Fasāna-e Mubtalā*, 205.

for women's sexuality and its ambivalence about the sexual coding of male-male interactions. Gender difference, more precisely the naturalization of women's experience as gendered subjects, emerges as the ground on which 'traditional' sexual codes are formulated and tested. In fact the category of "experience" provides a historical window to the kinds of contestations and debates about normatively gendered behaviour that shaped the concept of literature (*adab*) as good literary *and* socio-sexual conduct. It is in the literary elaboration of sexual themes, whether in the language of criticism, autobiographical writing, didactic poetry or realistic narrative, that we notice the abstractions of privacy and sexual desire taking on hard, material exigencies. In this process, sexual becoming breaks out of a narrow individually subjective moment into a powerful ideological construct implicated in canon formation, life writing, and aesthetic and historical judgement. The impetus for this breaking out is provided most coherently by nationalist thought in its demand for re-orientation of 'traditional' loyalties, desires and subjectivities towards a unifying cultural project. However, my constant emphasis has been to look for figures of sexual transgression, in relation with the real exercise of cultural and political power, that proved exemplary actors for the sexual script of colonial nationalism. In this comparative mobility of social actors, picked up by retrievalist, minoritizing projects as LGBT historiography as signs of dissent and alternative canon formation, I point to the historical accretion of prejudices around sexuality and gender transgression that rationalize 'modern' normative views about the new woman, caste identities, and literary realism. Finally, my account of the various emphases in the sexuality debates, overwhelmingly expressed in mystificatory concepts and language, in twentieth-century Urdu literary criticism has shown the urgently political impingement of the ghazal's historical content on the writing and criticism of poetry today.

Chapter Two

Ghazal, Men and Boys: An alternative history

There has been little doubt in the minds of modern critics and poets that the theme or motif (*maẓmūn*) relating to the appreciation of the beauty of pubescent, "hairless" boys (the Arabic term is *amrad*; pl. *murd*) signifies male homosexuality (*amradparastī*, *shāhidbāzī*, *launḍēbāzī*, *hamjinsiyyat*). Yet no particular act or personage emerges in these descriptions as the exclusive bearer of homosexual feelings or identity. Nūn Mīm Rāshid (1910–1975), the modernist poet, characterizes the whole "classical" tradition as "homosexual" to highlight his own contribution to its erotic language: sexual openness, objectification of woman's desire for the male speaker, and specification of such remarkable sexual acts as masturbation, homosexual desire and violent sexual intercourse.[131] Historians of sexually marginalized identities in South Asia have regularly turned to these "homosexual" traditions, mobilizing descriptions such as Rashid's, to demonstrate recent colonial forces behind sexual marginalization ("western homophobia") and the persistence of resistant counterexpressions in continuous material traditions such as poetry.

The ghazal's designation as "love" poetry immediately conjures images of romance, coupledom and sexual orientation. In contrast with the coherence of the knot of assumptions behind this view, historians of sexuality, post-Foucault, have shown socially coercive forces underlying such knottings. The obvious correlative of sexual desire, for example, in Foucault's western European genealogy of it, is the "desiring subject" whose obviousness comes from the

[131] "Homosexuality" (*amradparastī*; in a radio interview he even uses the English word to similar effect) is one in the triad of social forces including religion (*maẕhab*) and feudalism (*jāgīriyyat*) that shaped premodern Urdu poetry. Rashid, "Urdū adab par muʿāsharatī aṡar," in Shima Majid, ed. *Maqālāt-e Rāshid* (Islamabad: Alhamra, 2002), 157, 161. He describes his sexual innovations in poetry in several interviews, e.g. "Nūn Mīm Rāshid sē ēk muṣāḥaba (Saʿādat Saʿīd)," in ibid., 389.

medieval Christian idea of the "flesh."[132] It was this axiomatic concept that has obstructed any study of human sexual relations outside the framework of a person embedded, not just corporeally, but morally in acts of sexual commission. A century of modern ghazal criticism has shown us that this "Christian" axiomatic is the basis for theorizing the ghazal's social meanings and aesthetic implications. Foucault's call then to return the *subject* of desire to the historical field (*le champ historique*)[133] for students of non-western sexuality cannot mean identifying with subjects who apparently defy this "Christian" logic of the flesh. Nor can it provide ready references for "modes of subjectivation" (based in behavioural practices or *askesis*) to produce authentic non-western traditions of sexual acts because such modes already come to us mediated by colonial rewritings, most recognizably in Orientalist, new-age commodities e.g. yoga, *tantra*, "Sufism", Vedic "science," and western "Buddhism."

If we understand the conceptual force of *ʿishq* (love, eros, desire) that defines the thematic unity of ghazal poetry as an ascetic practice (in Foucault's sense of *askesis* as a working out of the self through the rigours of mental practices[134]), we turn its *literary* or *poetic* mediation into a self-evident social fact that has little bearing on the imagination and reproduction of "love" as a powerful ascetic institution. At least two distinct but complementary kinds of literary mediations come to mind here.

The first, the eroto–literary, insists on reading the ghazal as an accommodation to the western lyric tradition. This is where the desiring subject, male for all purposes of generalization,

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[132] Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, 2*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 5.

[133] Ibid., 4. See also David M. Halperin, "Historicizing the Subject of Desire," in idem, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 81–103.

[134] In his own words, simply, "un exercise de soi, dans la pensée." Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité II: L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 16. In the Hurley translation, *The Use of Pleasure*, 9.

is known to speak in full voice consciousness because of his distance from social matters. Hereby literary texts attain evidentiary value for a range of historical excavations, including same-sex historiography. In this view, the gap between the personal lyric voice and the "social bustle"[135] is filled by historical reconstruction such that the aesthetic object makes whole its own aesthetic and historical fragmentariness. In the case of the ghazal and other traditions of erotic poetry in South Asia, this practical aspiration is thwarted by at least two internal principles of organization concretized in two principles of literary writing. The Sanskrit conceptual differentiation between *kāvya* (written literariness) against other content-specific textualities such as *itihas* ("the way things were"), *sastra* ("systematic thought"), *purana* ("ancient lore") allows poetry to persist in its unverifiability.[136] It is history which is beholden to reality and its description. In the Arabic and Persian-influenced traditions that operated partly under this differentiation, poetry is distinct from knowledge (*ʿilm*, *ḥikmat*) but in no way deficient in cultural force. Then, the concept of poetic theme (*maẓmūn*), attributed variously to Sanskrit poetics and the *sabk-e hindī* style of Mughal Indo-Persian poetry, insists on the lack of semblance between poetic expression and social circumstances.[137] It marks the self-sufficiency of the poetic proposition for its ascetic reference to a motif-like theme. Both these literary-textual principles obscure not just the evidentiary contours of poetic content but, for historical analysis careless with them, their own social force that elevated acts of poetic writing to assertions of *principles* of social organization.

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[135] Theodor W. Adorno, "Lyric Poetry and Society," in Brian O' Connor, ed. *The Adorno Reader* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000), 212.

[136] Sheldon Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out," in Pollock, ed. *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 44, 46.

[137] Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "Īhām, riʿāyat aur munāsibat," in idem, *Urdū ġhazal kē aham mōṛ* (Naʾī Dihlī: Ġhālib Ikaiḍamī, 2006; third ed.), 39, 41, 45.

The second literary mediation, the philological, occurs through the grand imagination of bodies of textual traditions, first organized on a global scale under concepts such as world literature, comparative religion and the classics, assembled under Orientalist scholarship.[138] It is here that the 'historical field' for textual traditions like the ghazal appears in the solidity of a culturally authentic archive. Again, this is not a moment of colonial bad faith, whose distortions may be overcome by resorting to interpretive principles mined internally from textual corpuses. The concepts of "poetry" (*shāʿirī*) and "œuvre" (*dīvān* or *kulliyāt*) in Urdu poetry derive their contemporary ordering functions from this historical fashioning of the archive where poetry is a generic classification of literature and a poet's œuvre is imagined within the covers of his manuscripturally authentic *dīvān* or *kulliyāt*, i.e. in internally consistent, authorially authenticated inscription of his work in book form.[139] It is through this textual mediation that the "desiring subject" of the ghazal is recognized by "practices" and "forms" that have been effectively re-arranged according to the irrefutable logic of a subject formed by the temptations of the flesh which can always be expressed and verified in writing and confession. The tendency to see this logic as simply a western imposition misses the historical nature of this rearrangement in which the object called sexuality is first defined and offered by colonial state practices (legislation, demographic mapping, education, academic research, historiography) and nationalist thought as that principle of self-fashioning and self-expression without which both processes are socially unrecognizable. This is why the Foucaultian celebration of *askesis*, distilled from ancient Greek

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[138] Aamir R. Mufti, "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures," *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2010): 458–93.

[139] Rashid Hasan Khan's advocacy of *taḥqīq* (scientific editing and research) and deep language learning in editing manuscripts is one salutary example of the philological tradition in Urdu criticism, which has resulted in exemplary publications such as *Bāġh o bahār*, *Gulzār-e nasīm*, *Siḥr ul-bayān* and *Zaṭal-nāma* by the Anjuman-e taraqqī-e urdū (India), lovingly researched, edited and annotated by Khan himself. Also, see his essays about the principles of *taḥqīq* and the poverty of Urdu criticism (*tanqīd*) due to the unavailability of standard editions of classical works, in Khan, *Adabī taḥqīq: masāʾil aur tajziyya* (ʿAlīgaṛẖ: Ējukēshnal Buk Hāʾūs, 1978).

texts, becomes a risky proposition for historians of non-western (outside the grand tradition of Greece, Rome, and medieval Europe) sexuality because the aura of continuous traditions (invariably patriarchal, majoritarian, and naturalizing social stratifications such as caste) inheres in the realm of practice, even when eclectically or syncretically derived, upholding irrational, violent nationalist-patriarchal institutions.

In this chapter I will continue the genealogical description of the sexuality question in Urdu's literary history begun in Chapter One by narrowing the frame and focussing on the issue of *amradparastī* (boy-love), fashioning from its thematic fixity, elements of historical analysis. Three writers will stand in as points of this focus: Ḥālī as the clearest commentator on the spectre of homosexuality haunting Urdu poetic practice and criticism in the late nineteenth century, Firāq as the sexually ambiguous modern poet whose critical writings stage the disjunctures not just between a personal sexuality and lyric expression, but point to the instability of twentieth-century resolutions of the sexuality question of Indian nationalism traced in the previous chapter; and Yaqīn, the poet from the still-obscure eighteenth century, the intimations of whose violent death and formal innovations in the ghazal signal a possible framework for understanding the formalization of sexual desire in poetic expression still confronting writers, readers and critics of the Urdu ghazal.

A National Passion

In Hali's reformist writings on the ghazal, the relation of poetic representation of amorous acts to particular sexual identities has a spectral quality. While he denies the social existence of practices such as pederastic attraction, he warns against the unsettling implication of sexual

criminality in poetry. In his two key meditations on the implausibility of the ghazal's erotic scenarios we notice this pattern of avowal-disavowal of male homosexuality. In the biography of Saʿdi (1886) he notes that the ghazal has always been a medium of erotic (*ʿāshiqāna*) expression whose prototype is a man's attraction to a beardless boy (*amrad*).[140] In his essay on poetics, which began as an introduction to his own poetic collection (*dīvān*), he recommends gender ambiguity or neutrality to dispel the undeniable homoerotic implication in the ghazal.[141] These are certainly no positive ascriptions to the idea of same-sex love or its expression in poetry.

His essay's unremarkable reception when it first appeared with his poetic collection, its subsequent re-publication as a treatise in its own right in 1893 and becoming the founding text of Urdu literary criticism only after the author's death in 1914, highlight the anticipatory aspects of its theorization against the edifice of the "classical" ghazal. Though it calls for the reformation of all poetic genres, the *Muqaddama* is really an attempt to understand the ghazal conceptually. The first problem in indigenous poetics, it argues, is that no adequate concept of "poetry" exists.[142] The definition of poetry (*shiʿr*) traditionally includes metre (*vazn*) and rhyme (*qāfiya*), but this, according to Hali, predetermines the social irrelevance of poetry as formal exercise and verbal ornamentation. He proposes a negatively determined concept of poetry (*shiʿr*) which needs neither metre nor rhyme, and as such is a medium for fluidly transcribing an individual's thoughts into language.[143] This is a paradigmatic shift in the conception of poetry, no longer defined formally or internally against the narrative flow of prose (*naṡr*), but rather against the

[140] Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥālī, *Ḥayāt-e Saʿdī* (Lakẖnaʾū: Uttar Pardēsh Urdū Akādamī, 1982; facsimile of second ed.), 233.
[141] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, ed. Vahīd Quraishī (ʿAlīgarẖ: Ējukēshnal Buk Hāʾūs, 2011; reprint of 1893 ed.), 182.

[142] Ibid., 107.

[143] Ibid., 107–08.

power of intellectual discourse (*ʿilm* or *ḥikmat*).[144] As a specialized social form enabling self-inscription of subjectivity in the collectivity of linguistic usage, poetry contrasts with the generalizing, deindividualizing effects of institutionalized knowledge practices. Various pejorative readings of Hali's argument focus only on its derivative use of concepts such as "imagination" (*taḳhayyul*) and "nature" (*nēčar*) and utilitarian obsessions such as the community (*qaum*), "self-help," and reform (*rifārm*) to either accuse it of misunderstanding indigenous poetics or not comprehending western aesthetics properly.[145] The traffic between these two apparently watertight ethnicized domains takes place conceptually in Hali's paradigm-shifting argument about the role poetry needs to play in colonial society.

Approaching the lack of a positive concept of poetry obliquely, Hali laments that old poetry has undergone disenchantment (*ṭilism ṭūṭtā jātā hai*).[146] Its architecture has been breached irreversibly by the march of scientific knowledge (*ʿilm*) and civilization (*sivilīzēshan*). In a typical move he relates this socio-historical fact to shifts in the relationship between poetry's building blocks, word (*lafẓ*) and signification (*maʿnī*), thereby offering a view of literary change both internally consistent and historically mediated. Any obvious continuity with centuries-old Arabic and Persian literary debates about this fundamental polarity is undermined by selective citation from sources such as Ibn Rashiq and Ibn Khaldun.[147] His main thrust is to present the break in Urdu poetics from an old system which, in his view, valued word-tricks over meaning-

[144] Ibid., 108.

[145] For an account of Hali and Azad's 'westernizing' approaches to Urdu criticism, see Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). The accusations of colonial collaboration and mimicry of western standards against reformists in general have been made by Urdu critics such as Askari, Salim Ahmad and Faruqi. A less polarizing view and an attempt to reccuperate the distinctive intellectual formation of Hali (i.e. not subsumable under the educational reform movement led by Syed Ahmad Khan) can be found in Muʿīn Aḥsan Jaẕbī, *Ḥālī kā siyāsī shuʿūr* (Lakẖnaʿū: Aḥbāb Pablisharz, 1959).

[146] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, 91, 154.

[147] Ibid., 122, 152.

making. Modern critics are swift to point out that the old system was not such a drastic philosophy of verbal autonomy and Hali's own view denies poetry its essential verbal callisthenics.[148] But the conception of poetry as a socially meaningful act puts this hoary distinction to a new literary-theoretical task.

He offers this fundamental distinction from Perso-Arabic poetics as an ontology of poetic language. In ancient societies (such as pre-Islamic Arabia) poetic expression was socially determined. It was the social demand for poetry (as ritual protocol, self-expression, weighty communication) that bound words to their signification.[149] It is remarkable that, contrary to various post-Hali tendencies of positing a utopian autonomy of poetry in primitive (protoypically Arabian) societies,[150] his theory understands the plenitude of the poetic signifier not as an aesthetic a priori but a socially determined fact. In ancient society, the poet's intention was identical with social needs, as poetic form rendered this identity without studied mediation. The decline from this paragon, presented as a historical deviation from ideal social forms (the 'egalitarian' Arabian tribal unit) resulted in the blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of ancient models.[151] The *continuity* of poetic tradition was nothing but the sameness of composition achieved at the expense of individual expressiveness. Poetic conventions (*dastūr*) were based on congelations of poetically significant themes (he uses *maʿnī* and *maẓmūn* interchangeably here), the modern

[148] Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness* and Faruqi's introduction ("Ibtidāʾiyya") to his *Urdū ġhazal kē aham mōṛ*.

[149] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, 97, 161.

[150] In particular, see Shibli Numani's *Shʿir ul-ʿajam: jild čahārum* (Āʿẓamgaṛẖ: Dār ul-muṣannifīn ikaiḍamī, 2004).

[151] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, 103.

salience of some of which seriously questions the historically fixed, because conventionally assumed, correlation between words and signification.[152]

He approaches this salience as an issue of grammatical gendering and the stock conception of the beloved as a gendered object, discernably either as a boy or a publicly visible and therefore sexually available woman. Yet the anxiety caused by such erotic content of the ghazal is more serious than any re-sexing of pronouns could fix. It points to a larger concern that connects the emerging sexual morphology for classifying desires with the relevance of self-expression to literary writing. After stating that homosexuality in poetry is based on a "misunderstanding" (*ġhalaṭ fahmī*) and a "national passion" (*qaumī ḥamīyat*, i.e. it is a convention taken up too enthusiastically), he hurriedly offers extra-poetic reasons for giving it up: it is morally reprehensible, unnatural and contradicts reason (*ʿaql*).[153] He reminds readers that there are laws against such kinds of criminality which should dissuade poets from presenting it in poetry. In this mix of ancient prejudice, biology, aesthetics, sexual morality and legality we witness the formation of a modern taboo. There is no appeal to theological dogma to censure homosexual references. Instead the appeals to reason, science and "nature" suggest an ambiguity around homosexuality whose purportedly fulsome condemnability does not come together as a self-evidently reasonable taboo. According to Adorno, the force of the modern sexual taboo is based less on a coherent raison d'etre than on the activation of older half-forgotten prejudices that may be mobilized at strategic moments of reconstituting social consensuses, outside of any appeal to theological dogma or psychologically compelling irrationalities (such as the incest

[152] Ibid., 182.

[153] Ibid.

taboo).[154] It is enough to concentrate the taboo against homosexuality on a point in social consciousness that accommodates disparate rationalities thus legitimizing the taboo's unquestioned social obedience.

The taboo is not in itself a prohibition of anything specific as shown by Hali's insistence that poets must avoid not just reference to boys', but also women's attributes. His earlier claim that pederasty does not really exist as a social practice is not repeated for heterosexuality. Women must not be objectified in poetry because their identity is based on their invisibility from public life.[155] Female seclusion is the only concrete taboo that connects this new poetics with actual social practice. Its self-evident legitimacy lends force to the otherwise ambiguous prohibition of same-sex contact. Included in an essay on poetic theory, Hali's discussion reveals the new boundaries being drawn around sexual desire which is not contemporaneous with some socio-sexual practice 'out there' but is a principle of ordering any such acts whether potential or actual, enforced most obviously by the taboo against women's access to public life.

The idealized unity of word and signification is disrupted by the salience of new sexual significations of poetic representations which are premised on a new rationality which demands that a third term – author or authorial intentionality – govern poetry and in doing so constitute itself. The *arbitrary* collection of poetic themes (*maẓmūn*), one of which is the love of boys (*amradparastī*), suggests a historical dimension to the fixtures of the ghazal aesthetic, transforming them into an essence without which poetry cannot be written or spoken about. This double emphasis on the historicity *and* essentialism of ghazal motifs is expressed as a moral panic about references to homosexuality, congealed as a taboo against homosexuality, thus

[154] Adorno, "Sexual Taboos and Law Today," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 76.

[155] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, 183.

enabling a historical perspective on their development and usage. The homosexual suggestion typically puts to work, on one hand, an elaborate "Sufi" framework for interpreting pederastic references in the ghazal and, on the other, signposts a commonly shared erotic repertoire through which literary influences may be collated for proposing an internally consistent orientation for "eastern" or "Asian" poetry, against the western.[156] It is possible to trace these varying functions of the taboo around homosexuality because "it" is never precisely defined as either a poetic theme, social practice or sexual act. The compelling unquestionability of the taboo creates convenient alibis for objectifying the erotic quality of "eastern" poetry, justifying exceptional situations or interal limits in which this poetry has historically claimed an identity greater than itself. It would be absurd to claim that the ghazal's mystical allegorical properties or indeed its aesthetic unity was invented by reformist critics. Yet the anxiety about homosexual connotations forces an unprecedented inventorying of the literary influences on the ghazal. On more than one occasion Hali reminds readers that the appreciation of puerile beauty arises from Persian poetic influences whose innovations consist of pederastic love and mystical allegory.[157]

Within the history of Perso-Islamic mysticism (*taṣavvuf*) references to the boy-theme have been intertwined with its technology of attaining and expressing mystical experience. However the theme threatens the oscillation of meaning in poetry between its metaphorical (*majāzī*) and transcendental (*ḥaqīqī*) registers, necessary for transcending the literal and phenemoneal realms of experience and language by insinuating a destabilizing corporeality in

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[156] Notably, technical "Sufi" apologetics for the ghazal are absent in Hali's *Muqaddama* and used perfunctorily in his discussion of 'classical' poets such as Saʿdī, Nāṣir Khusrō and Ġhālib. Azad too does not deploy the Sufi apparatus of interpretation in any instrumental way in *Āb-e ḥayāt*. But by the early twentieth century, as an iron-clad historicism grips literary historiography, we begin encountering technical Sufistic explanations as the exclusive key for decoding the classical ghazal. See ʿAbdus Salām Nadvī, *Shiʿr ul-hind* (1926) especially volume 2 (Āʿẕamgarḥ: Dār ul-muṣannifīn ikaiḍamī, 2010) and Nūrul Ḥasan Ḥāshmī, *Dillī kā dabistān-e shāʿirī* (Dihlī: Anjuman taraqqī-e urdu, 1949).

[157] Hali, *Ḥayāt-e Saʿdī*, 236 and *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, 182.

metaphysical aspirations.[158] Annemarie Schimmel notes that in the earliest Persian-language treatise on mysticism and composed in South Asia, Hujvīrī of Lahore (d. 1071) unqualifiedly denounces the cult of boyish beauty as part of the heretical beliefs of the *ḥulūlis* (incarnationists or transmigrationists).[159] The same author, she notes, produced the earliest survey of the emerging mystical schools in the Persian-dominated parts of the Islamic empire, classifying them according to their distance from the orthodox mainstream. Terms such as *ḥulūlī*, *hashviyya* and *mujassimiyya* were abusive nominations for groups threatening the established interests of the orthodoxy, both mystical and clerical. Mohammad Habib understands these terms as examples less of actual heretical contestations than the persistence of non-Islamic traditions, particularly Zoroastrianism and Mahayana Buddhism, in newly converted societies in Persia and Central Asia.[160] The theme of boy-love therefore functions under its appearance of an esoteric, sublimating aspect of pre-formed "Sufi" practices as one ground of contestation in the formulation of Sufi doctrinal self-image.

Doctrinally speaking, the image of the boy (designated in Persian and Urdu 'mystical' poetry as the *shāhid* or *maẓhar*) unthreateningly (not being female) marked the point of mediation in the perception of the phenemonal world through which the super-perception of mystical reality (*maʿrifat*) could take place. Its own signification as actual sexual object could very well signify the heretical practice of a nonconformist sect of mysticism or an alternative to orthodox devotional practice thus enforcing the dominant culture's stigmatization of man-boy

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[158] Shibli, *Shiʿr ul-ʿajam: jild panjum*, 69–81; Hashmi, *Dillī kā dabistān-e shāʿirī*, 23–25.

[159] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 290.

[160] Mohammad Habib, "Early Muslim Mysticism," *Politics and Society During the Early Medieval Period: Collected Works of Professor Mohammad Habib, Volume One*, ed. K.A. Nizami (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1974), 264, 265.

love. Within mystical thought the issue of desiring boys exemplifies the doctrinal aporia of conceiving the objectivity of the divine absolute through the privation of subjectivity. It thus enables writing of a poetry whose mystical quality is precisely this transubstantiation of the erotic into the mystical.[161] "Transubstantiation" is obviously the wrong term here since the unity of the Islamic godhead is defined by Sufis like Hujwiri as an unqualified essence, but it helps identify the distinctive South Asian influences on Islamic mystical thought confronted by older 'Hindu' traditions of mysticism (Tamil Shaivite *bhakti* and north-Indian Vaishnavism in particular). These traditions could have come to signify doctrinal dilution not simply because of their cultural otherness, but precisely because they offered similar sounding views about divine non-divisibility such as Shankara's advaitism. While such similarities could have contributed to the development of syncretic ideas, a distinct note of alarm is discernible in the doctrinal shifts like those proposed by seventeenth-century reformer (*mujaddid*) such as Shaiḳh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564–1624). Most pertinently here, the shift away from the doctrine codified as *vaḥdat ul-vujūd* (literally, unity of Being) by Ibn al-ʿArabī turned on the impossibility of mediation between creature and creator because the world was created for the witness (*shuhūd*) of the creature.[162] Schimmel characterizes Sirhindi's views as a return to the doctrinal purity of Persian Sufism that had been miscegenated by syncretic views at Akbar's court.[163] Whatever its historical determinants, the dominance of *shuhūdī* ideas among Chishti and Naqshbandi orders throughout

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161 Sisir Kumar Das presents this allegorical movement as one of the obvious affinities between the discrete medieval traditions of Persian and Indic vernacular poetries where "mystical love" is framed by secular narratives. Mystical signification arises and is understood on the so-called outer structure of the poem: "this question of transformation of the secular to the sacred, howsoever important to the modern reader, was and is totally irrelevant to the saint." Das, "The Mad Lover," in idem, *The Mad Lover: Essays on Medieval Indian Poetry* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1984), 15–16.

162 Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 367–68.

163 Ibid., 368 and idem, *Pain and Grace: A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth-Century Muslim India* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 6, 7.

the subcontinent produced a profound anxiety about material arts (music, dance, painting and poetry in particular) as *vujūdī* media.[164] Each of these represented the collapsing of the medium of mystical askesis on itself, i.e. each could be enjoyed for its own sake. Of course music (in *samā*) and poetry flourished in these orders but their technical execution required the demonstration of the oscillation between the real and the supra-real, eroticism and mysticism, knowledge and gnosis. In this aesthetic ideology, the medium itself must never adequate itself with divine essence and must uphold the latter's immateriality against the materiality of its own representations. Thus Sufi apologias for the boy-image reveal an irreducible anxiety about its bodily-sexual implications rather than a celebration of either its pleasurable or mystical properties.

In order to present the this-worldly nature of Sufi celebrations of "homoeroticism," Saleem Kidwai presents a schematic, socially neutralized description of its conception of boy-love.[165] But the problem of linguistic and material mediation of mystical practice, symbolized precisely in the embodied *shāhid* ("witness" but also beautiful boy), characterizes, in stark contrast, the exercise of worldly power in mystical circles. In her study of the eighteenth-century Urdu poet Mīr Dard's (1722–1785) mystical and poetic career, Schimmel notes the recurrence of the image of the mirror in his poetry as a symbol of invisibility of the medium in mystical contemplation.[166] It is merely a reflecting surface whose one side is black and the other is nothing but the true reflection of God. According to Dard, the world is this reflecting surface through whose sights one can know about the divine mystery. In his own words, the mirror and

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[164] Cf. Mir Dard's anxiety, being a *mujaddidiyya* mystical leader, about his love for music and *samā*. Schimmel, *Pain and Grace*, 54.

[165] Saleem Kidwai, "Introduction: Medieval Materials in the Perso-Urdu Tradition," *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2001), 117.

[166] Schimmel, *Pain and Grace*, 75.

reflected reality are two separate things; or the representation and its medium are two profoundly distinct entities.[167] In poetry, metaphor invisibilizes its verbal content to reveal its divine essence.

Such doctrinal disequilibriums can shed some light on mysticism's relationship with social institutions within which mystical practice had to operate not only to maintain its links with the secular power of Islamic statehood, but also the assumption of a rationally ordered universe whose "absolute reality" could be known only by working through its phenomena, and concepts used for comprehending them.[168] The mystical groups' relation to state power was especially fraught because of early persecution by the orthodoxy and rulers. But, as Mohammad Habib shows, after the establishment of Sufi orders in Persia and South Asia, even orders like the Chishtis that renounced direct state patronage, or particular saints such as Nizamuddin who opposed contemporary rulers like the Khilji sultans, upheld the "state-idea."[169] Similarly, the doctrine of *faqr* or wilfully chosen poverty devalued any attempt by the poor to improve their lot as being merely a worldly goal, i.e. not worthy of mystical aspiration. Most Sufis belonged to the upper classes and their poverty was chosen not born into.[170]

From another institution, patriarchy, the mystic borrowed the image of ritual defloration of a girl as the necessarily painful and submissive act that realizes for the creature God's grandeur (*jalāl*) more effectively than a less sublime, because qualitatively predicative, appreciation of his beauty (*jamāl*).[171] The ineffable is represented through physical experience,

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[167] Ibid.

[168] Habib, "Early Muslim Mysticism," 281.

[169] Ibid., 252 (fn.).

[170] Ibid., 280.

[171] From the allegorical narrative *Nāla-e ʿAndalīb* (1741) by Dard's father, Muḥammad Nāṣir ʿAndalīb, cited in Schimmel, *Pain and Grace*, 89.

which in itself means nothing because it naturalistically assumes the social fact of women's physical and symbolic subordination to men, as the means for mystical self-knowledge. The doctrine of *shuhūd* provides both an internal justification for and necessary alignment with contemporary social relations in the penumbra of divine self-revelation, thus making them appear unchangeable. The beautiful boy provided a more standard medium for witnessing God's beauty in which any notion of consent or building a relationship with the object is obviated by the exercise of power over a purely receptive objectivity. This social fact is rehabilitated in the problematic of the Sufi vision of self-annihilation (*fanā*) which consists of the ability to retain subjectivity by moving out of the self. It is the socially determined availability of such figures as the boy, the indigent, and the virgin that allow the imagination of the defragmentation of the self (*fanā*) and its recovery, as a higher conception of the self, in the Other (*baqā*). Habib rightly translates *fana* not as self-annihilation, but "self-expansion."[172]

This allegorical reading's force is such that many modern traditionalisms can be fabricated through a mere recitation of its terms. One of the earliest influences of Hali's *Muqaddama* can be found in ʿAbd us-Salām Nadvī's *Shiʿr ul-Hind* (1926), a history and theory of Urdu poetry. Nadvi commends Hali for showing a third way out of the conundrum of homoeroticism in the ghazal, one of which was the "Lucknow school"'s attempt to write explicitly about women: now modern poets could refer simply to the absolute being (*vujūd-e muṭlaq*) for which gender difference was immaterial.[173] Although Hali, for whom the social determination of poetry's references is an axiom, never proposes such a drastic "Sufi" theory for modern poetry, mystical apologetics for poetry's gender specificity indicates a historical link

[172] Habib, "Early Muslim Mysticism," 284.

[173] Nadvi, *Shiʿr ul-hind: jild duvum*, 24.

between erotic specification and mystical allusion. Hali's argument itself suggests the spectral possibilities of this historical linkage in the conduct of such keywords as *ḥaqīqat* which simultaneously means the transcendental realm of mysticism (essence of divine unity) and the emerging notion of literary realism (empirical truth/ reality/ actuality).[174] The latter contradicts the very basis of mystical poiesis i.e. the view that the phenomenal, mundane, perceptible world is merely the shadow of the unseen, essential, supra-real presence of the divine. This overlap of connotations hides the instrumental logic at play in the reformist argument to selectively shore up traditional vocabularies to describe new social experiences. Thus the anxiety about corporeal and material life (strictly, non-*ḥaqīqī*) in mystical thought is offered as a resolution for the very modern problem of sexual specification in poetry, even as the anxiety over the reality (*ḥaqīqat*) of homosexual desire is denied through the historical distancing and esoteric significations of mysticism. The 'mysticism' in *taṣavvuf* comes to express an internal limit of the ghazal universe according to which poetic forms, corpuses and image-repertoires are historically arranged and streamlined following a logic of sexual classification, while any sexual content is assumed to be negated and resolved beyond literal reference.

In Hali's instrumentalizing view, mysticism itself becomes a historical practice with a stake in the material arrangements of everyday life, and, due to the belated recognition of its homoerotic features, also becomes a non-contemporaneous practice whose antiquity lends it tremendous cultural power. While the actual practice of homosexuality is condemned from a range of positions, its literary elaboration in mystical poetry is seen to elevate some poets as exemplars whose work institutes those internal limits through which the ghazal may be historically and internally understood. In an interpretive move reminiscent of almost all major

[174] Cf. the competing usage of *ḥaqīqat-e vāqiʿī* (existent reality) and *ḥaqāʾiq-e vāqiʿiyya* (the "essential" realities of the Sufi path) in Hali's discussion of the *amradparastī* question in Persian poetry in idem, *Ḥayāt-e Saʿdī*, 234, 232.

studies of the 'classical' ghazal in the twentieth century that posit a mechanistic esoteric–exoteric, mystical–erotic formula, Hali redefines readerly pleasure as the pleasure of cracking this esoteric code which pertains only to the "true" ghazal.[175] In this interpretive schema, as I have shown, the immediate verbal meanings are but reflections of ineffable, mystical truths. Thus conventional homoerotic significations, in the poetry of such master poets as Saʿdī, Ḥāfiẓ, Rūmī and Ḵhusrō ("*shuʿarā-e mutaṣavvifīn*" or the Sufistic poets), have *no relation* to social or personal reality. The pleasure in reading them consists in a distinctive "eastern" pleasure that involves uncovering strata of meaning reaching down (or rather up) to divine significations.[176] It is this layering that comes to represent poetic worth for Hali because, as he puts it, only an illiterate person would consider poetic allusions (*kināya*) to be conventional (*takalluf*) and artifical (*banāvaṭ*).[177] The homosexual taboo does not allow characterizing any of these poets, each of whom has been associated with homoerotic desire in narratives of their lives, as homosexual, but confined to their poetic expression, their treatement of boy-love turns into great poetry because of its intended transformation into its very negation. Hali notes in passing that it is the same Saʿdi, the homoerotic poet, who is the pioneer of the "mystical" ghazal.[178]

One obvious literary point the homosexual taboo asserts is that objects in the world and in poetry share a common logic of organization. The question of grammatical gendering could be resolved mystically, but more contemporaneously and topically by ascribing ambiguity (by calling it neutrality) to male same-sex interactions in poetry and society. Hali eventually recommends using the male speaking voice addressing grammatically masculine attributes of a

[175] Ibid., 234.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid., 235–36.

person because the gender also marks universality in Urdu grammar.[179] Expressing attraction to a state of unconditionality (*iṭlāq*) and therefore ambiguity protects one's masculine honour (*nañg o nāmūs*) whose repository is femininity.[180] Alongside, he dismisses the convention of using masculine grammatical features when obviously describing an object with female attributes (bodily or sartorial) for its implying a beloved who is a eunuch (*hijṛā*) or an effeminate man (*zanāna*).[181] The gender confusion implied in these figures points to the limits of the homosexual taboo as a moral code. Its interdiction is not a universally applicable moral code since, on one hand, it promotes ambiguous interactions between grammatically neutral males as expressing de-eroticized poetic sentiments, and on the other, it excludes women and effeminate or castrated men as not even potentially real or imaginable referents of this poetry.[182] The charge of modern, western homophobia brought against this generation of writers obscures the symbols of these so-called unimaginable desires – women and sexually ambiguous people – who are not even worth objectifying in, let alone authorized to produce, literary language. To these we might add the exemplary antithesis to the new art of poetry, the traditional entertainers and performers (*bẖāñḍ*, *naqqāl*, *bahrūpiyā*) whose artistry is devalued ("*ẕalīl*") throughout Hali's argument as merely imitative, outdated and socially irrelevant.[183] The ambiguity of male-male relations, whether in poetry (due to the neutrality of male pronouns) or society (in de-eroticized themes such as patriotism, familal love, friendship), arises from a fundamental instability in ghazal's terms of

[179] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, 183.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid., 184.

[182] The ideology of gender seclusion is naturalized not just by such explicit taboos against female visibility but in the cliches of literary criticism which view the "outward" form of poetry, its social manifestation as entertainment (*tafrīḥ*), as a veil (*parda*) for inner, esoteric meanings. See, for example, Ḥashmi, *Dillī kā dabistān-e shāʿirī*, 27.

[183] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, 83–84.

address: objectification is the prerogative of femininity which must never appear except in masculine form. The objection to homosexuality in this set-up can only be superficially ascribed to a western-origin, legalistic prejudice since it develops around indigenous codes, rules and rationalities within which both homosexual desire and homophobic hatred constitute the realm of experience for *indigenous* sexually marginalized groups such as 'respectable' women, eunuchs, members of the entertainment castes and effeminate, gender-crossing men.

In the colony the period routinely reviled for its adoption of western homophobia is thus a period in which the correlation of individual lives to their sexual tendencies is naturalized as well as a period that names, classifies and groups together castes, personages and typologies that have traditionally threatened the moral order, but now belong to a "precisely designated minority."[184] With the minoritization of 'Muslim' cultural forms within Indian nationalism, the points of stress in the ghazal aesthetic, by no means resolved by bourgeois reform, represented by its sexually minoritarian styles and themes, continue to signify politically the social faultlines of Urdu/Hindi, Hindu/Muslim, east/west, minority/majority and deviant/normal for the next generation of writers and critics in the age of nationalism.

Nomadic Love

The reformist attempt to read historical currents in the assumed monolith of tradition inaugurated a mode of critical thinking that could not be dismissed even by its most self-consciously anticolonial critics. But where, on one hand, the reformists tried to describe a constellation of "eastern" styles, tastes, texts and literary tradition, nationalist writers claimed this category as

[184] Adorno, "Sexual Taboos and Law Today," 76.

self-evident essence of a monolithic tradition. As an example of this, if mysticism was posited as one instrument of sublimation in ghazal poetry, then in the nationalist period such readings from literary history are transformed into cultural scripts the exemplification of which is the task of national art. Within this monumentalist view of culture, even discomfiting aspects of sexual desire and homosexuality could be neutralized, by correlating them with precise social objectivities, in the self-realization of the national spirit.

If homophobia forced the neutralization of the erotic aspects of the ghazal in Hali's argument, it is the poet and critic Firāq Gōrakẖpūrī (born Ragẖūpatī Sahāʾē) (1896–1982), who may be expected to bring a personal 'homosexual' perspective to bear on the question of homoeroticism in the ghazal. However, apart from recent 'outing' of his sexual preferences in gay-writing anthologies,[185] there is no corresponding public avowal in Firaq's own poetic and critical works. The circulation of anecdotes and jokes about Firaq's homosexuality is the closest we come to any 'proof'.[186] The proof of homosexuality through such means is dangerous not least because it might be false, but more so since homophobic villification, in a homophobic society, works through the same anecdotal medium. There is very little in his poetry, especially since he is one of the practitioners of the classical ghazal, that can be taken as proof of his sexual

[185] Firaq Gorakhpuri, "Public Meeting and Parting as Private Acts," in Hoshang Merchant, ed. *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999), 1; and idem, "Poet vs. 'Critic'," in Vanita and Kidwai, eds. *Same-Sex Love in India*, 264–66.

[186] Gyān Čand Jain describes Firaq's homosexual persona in one of own his autobiographical essays about meeting the poet in his later years as a professor at Allahabad University. Firaq's homosexual desire is shown to be an open secret, which most people (especially Firaq's students) and the author included cannot resist unravelling before readers. Jain, "Firāq ṣāḥib sē mērī mulāqāt," in idem, *Parakẖ aur pahčān* (Dihlī: Ējūkēshnal Pablishiñg Haʾūs, 1990). It can be concluded in this context that the modern Urdu autobiographical self is as much interested, if not more, in unravelling the truth about other people's lives and that too in distinctly sexualized terms. In this sense, "colonial homophobia" is less to do with Vanita and Kidwai's theory about the delegitimation of indigenous sexualities by colonialism, than with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorization of the way in which modern western definitions (and differences) of homo- and heterosexuality govern epistemological claims about the truth of a person's life or a group's identity. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008; updated ed.), 1, 3. Another unravelling of Firaq's sexual persona occurs in Jōsh Malīḥābādī's autobiography (1970) which recounts 'good naturedly' homophobic jokes and anecdotes about his friend's homosexuality. Josh, *Yādōñ kī barāt* (Naʾī Dihlī: Dānish Pablishiñg, 2007; new ed.), 551–52.

preference for men. Firaq's writings on the ghazal turn to a comparatively safe realm of literary history and criticism and make a particularly insistent argument against the ghazal's homosexual orientation. Yet, like Rashid after him, Firaq understands *amradparastī*, exemplified in a strand of the classical ghazal, as sexual love for people of one's own gender ("*apnē hamjinsōñ sē jinsī muḥabbat*").[187] It is here that we may begin looking for a possible modern 'homosexual' perspective on the Urdu ghazal.

In his essay on the nature of eroticism in Urdu poetry (1945), Firaq parallels two culturally opposed traditions of conceptualizing love (*ʿishq*). The first is distilled from the classical Urdu ghazal which Firaq reads as a philosophical commentary on love. Unquestioningly adopting the literal–esoteric interpretive dichotomy for the ghazal, he deploys the by now axiomatic critical vocabulary of interiority-exteriority (*dāḳhiliyyat–ḳhārijiyyat*) to describe two opposing orientations of poetic language. The art of love poetry is the navigation of the tension between these two realms of experience, which we can rename psychic and social. In this way love poetry becomes a symbol of praxis (*ʿamal*) and not a self-enclosed commentary on the experience of love. The other tradition of love, pertinent to the homoerotic themes of the ghazal, is the western homophile tradition, represented not just by obvious figures like Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter, but such miscellaneous texts of English Literature taught in colonial India as Shakespeare and Tennyson, which, according to Firaq, treat love between men as exceptionally ennobling.[188] Braiding these two arguments about the transcendental properties of love, he conceives the level of bodily sexuality (*jinsiyyat*) as the lowest stage to be surpassed to reach a higher consciousness of love. While the magical concept of "love" raises love poetry

[187] Firāq Gōrakẖpūrī, *Urdū kī ʿishqiya shāʿirī* (Karāčī: Maktaba-e ʿazm o ʿamal, 1966), 34.

[188] Ibid., 12–13.

above brute social reality, it still invokes the reformist fear about the social irrelevance of this poetry. As he customarily dismisses Hali and his generation as anti-romantic figures, his argument cannot help reiterating the terms of poetic criticism first established by them. Thus "love", not merely an emotion now but a category of experience,[189] institutes the fundamental binary, even as it claims to dissolve it, between inside and outside.

This higher stage is defined as an essential unity in all experience that becomes apparent only after the façade of social conflicts (*taṣādum*) and dialectics (*jadaliyāt*) has been dismantled by the experience and exercise of love.[190] This is the realm of the universal (*āfāqiyat*) in which the self becomes conscious of its harmony (*ham-āhañgī*) with the macrocosm.[191] To highlight the nature of this universality, he turns to that critical faultline in ghazal criticism, the gendering of the beloved. The materiality of poetic language, understood in its mundane aspects of literal references and gender specification, disrupts poetry's sublimatory function. The ghazal, he argues, is fundamentally a verbal movement which sublimates its material aspects, e.g. verbality and gendering, into universality. In the sweep of this philosophical assertion, Firaq neutralizes, among all its other material qualities, the question of the boy and femininity as poetic objects.

Within this conception, however, tremors of history are felt at each stage in love's movement towards transcendence. The argument appears to keep looking over its shoulder for any criticism of its conservatism. Firaq keeps making overtures to a progressive (*taraqqī-pasand*) position[192] but only manages a superficial juxtaposition of romantic and "social" issues, betraying an unease

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[189] Firaq claims that the lover, not the farmer of the worker, is the agent of social change because he has privileged access to the realm of ideas (*ḳhayāl*). Ibid., 30.

[190] Ibid., 77.

[191] Ibid.

[192] Ibid., 32.

about the inadequacy of "love" to apprehend social struggles. This unease is expressed as the need to express and demonstrate the social function of sexuality (*jinsiyyat*) through literary historical examples. He rehearses the axiom of evolution of social and literary forms from simplicity to superfluity to argue that sexuality used to be immanent to an organically constituted society.[193] It expressed the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. This ideal function may have been lost but some cultural currents still bear its mark: the Lucknow school of the ghazal, for example, which boldly produced a poetry of corporeal desire, in contrast with the self-absorbed, melancholic style (*dāḳhiliyyat*) of the Delhi poets.[194] But such internal evidence from the Urdu tradition of celebration of corporeal love is not enough to qualify as universal love poetry. The symbol of praxis for Firaq's notion of poetry is ancient Sanskrit and latter-day vernacular "Hindi" (Sanskrit-derived) poetry. In them the rebelliousness of love, as envisioned in Urdu poetry, is reconciled with society through their meditation on the virtues of quietude (*shāntī*) and the heterogeneity of aestheticized emotions (*ras*).[195]

Firaq's argument till this point appears as a selective retrieval of the ideal erotic (as an interaction of the erotic and the ideal) subcurrent of ghazal poetry in which an ancient unity could be identified and recuperated. But he abandons the pursuit mid-stream as if the conceptual edifice of love he had built out of the material of the Urdu ghazal turned out to be mere ventriloquism and not sincere expression. To understand this implosion in the argument we must turn to the second aspect of the intervention of history in the essence of love poetry.

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[193] Ibid., 28.

[194] In the same self-absorbed melancholic style, Hashmi identifies the heights of 'mystical' poetry, against which the so-called corporeal excesses of the "Lucknow school" came to be defined. Hashmi, *Dillī kā dabistān-e shāʿirī*.

[195] Firaq, *Urdū kī ʿishqiya shāʿirī*, 119.

The homophile tradition is cited by Firaq to combat the brisk dismissal of homosexual love as decadent and unnatural. Within his larger philosophical conception of love, he attempts to recuperate homosexual love as an adequate medium for transcendence. His reliance on Edward Carpenter's mystical search for the resolution of corporeal desires in a mystical conception of the self[196] helps in this and returns the compliment by citing the European experience of the Orient as the self-evident value of Oriental conceptions of sexuality. He also cites the famous defence of homosexual art and poetry by lining up great 'homosexual' personages from the past: Socrates, Caesar and Shakespeare, as evidence for the greatness of (some) homosexuals, if not of homosexuality. Homosexuals, he states, are not necessarily vile (*ẕalīl*).[197] Notably none of the great homosexuals belong to an 'eastern' culture. The alibi of 'great' homosexuals appears to be a foreign way of thinking having no bearing on indigenous sexual morality. This view is adumbrated by his acknowledgement of homosexuality as a socially disruptive force. Again, the historical evidence for this comes from Urdu poetry, which despite its universalistic tendencies, he writes, has generated a defeatist homosexual eros.[198] Homosexual poetry was a later, artificial development in the ghazal, which hindered the transformation of its references into universality. Finally, he notes that the real "ghazalness" (*ġhazaliyyat*) belongs not to the stock themes of Urdu poetry such as Shirin–Farhad or Laila–

[196] For an account of Edward Carpenter's transactions with 'eastern' spiritualism, see Antony Copley, *A Spiritual Bloomsbury: Hinduism and Homosexuality in the Lives and Writings of Edward Carpenter, E.M. Forster, and Christopher Isherwood* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 36–59.

[197] Firaq, *Urdū kī ʿishqiya shāʿirī*, 36.

[198] Ibid., 119.

Majnun but to Krishna, Sita, Radha and Shakuntala, figures from the Sanskritic pantheon of Indian culture.[199]

Firaq's essay is written just before the culmination of the crisis of minority rights and culture in the partition of British India. The argument bears the self-conscious air of an illusory era coming to an end in the sovereign nationalist return to the 'real' bases of Indian civilization. In the name of nationalist democratic politics, he finds the ghazal and its philosophical assumptions foreign to Indian culture. The enervating eroticism of the ghazal (he repeatedly calls it a disease-causing germ),[200] including its homoerotic possibilities, has become symbolic of Urdu's reluctance to accept "Indian" modes of thought. A final rhetorical expression of the non-indigenousness of Urdu poetry seals the argument simultaneously against homoerotic and minority expressions in national culture: he complains that Urdu poetry is deficient for its inability to incorporate the feminine.[201] The point is not radically feminist, imagining women as sexually desirable objects, and exemplars of de-eroticized gender roles as mother and sister. Urdu lost out on the aesthetic power of femininity because it chose to copy Arabic and Persian.[202] The implication is that, just like its choice of erotic themes and adoption of high cultural styles, its resistance to femininity has disconnected it from society. He praises "Hindi" culture as the product of this land and stresses that this is not a religious claim. He argues that all poetry, even universalistic love poetry, is a product of its culture, thus implying that Urdu love poetry, which should belong to its culture, does not, or belongs only to a minority expression at

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[199] Ibid.

[200] Ibid., 17.

[201] Ibid., 142.

[202] The historical reality of female authorship in these literary traditions is not even theoretically conceivable in Firaq's argument.

odds with the dominant culture of normative, civilizational heterosexuality. He even thunders about a return to the "soil" against the labyrinthine metaphysics of Sufism.[203] The rhetoric of cultural alterity surfaces unnervingly in the essay's conclusion as the "Muslims" are accused of projecting their communal identity on to Urdu, as the repository of their lost cultural glory and political power, and not on the emerging nation. In 1945, when this essay was first published in book form, the ethnic minoritization of "Urdu" and "Muslims" is well under way in the syncretic, 'progressive' viewpoint of Firaq. He announces that those who call for the defence of 'pure' Urdu are moribund, while he himself calls for a rejuvenation of nationalist Sanskrit that would wash away the narrowness of all such minority expressions. He stops the argument on that seemingly disjointed but insistent appeal to versify femininity, restoring its aesthetic status historically denied by Urdu poetry. The sense of historical reparation against domination by non-Indic cultural forces emerges crucially here under the emotional appeal to represent femininity, which explicitly becomes the symbol of an innocent, mistreated, Indian civilizational core. Firaq drily ends the argument on a clash between two kinds of sexual orientations. He rhetorically asks "what would nomadic love achieve?" (*ḳhānabadōsh ʿishq kyā karēgā*) confronted by the ascendant cultural purity (*pāk*) of the "goddess in the house" (*gẖar kī Lakshmī*).[204]

Firaq's life was lived in stark contrast with the tidiness of his metaphysical conceptions of femininity and matrimonial love. He was married, with children, but separated from his wife early and lived alone for the rest of his life on university campus where he was a professor of English literature. Vicious rumours, homophobic jokes and legendary tales have circulated about his exclusive preference for young men, especially his students. Another notorious anecdote

[203] Ibid., 147.

[204] Ibid., 154.

recounts his seduction of his son's friend which allegedly led to the son's suicide. Yet in interviews, published articles and essays, as well as in his poetry collections that marked a turn away from "Urdu" themes, he insisted on the beauty, healthiness and Indianness of heterosexual love.[205] Homosexuality may have metaphysical associations and signify a refined, elite poetic style, but it has no place in the life of the nation. The 'people' are simple, rural, anaesthetic, and unchanging in their tastes, symbolized by the eternal figure of quietly suffering Indian ('Hindu') femininity. The individual artist's genius may be based on exceptional qualities such as a personal but sublimated homosexual desire, but its link with its social surroundings can only be conceived in the form of a man's erotic attraction to a universal, abstract femininity. To strenghten this link, both the "diseased" desires of the psyche and the "foreign" domination of the social must be rejected.

Firaq's example shows that the valorized continuity of homoerotic tradition in the modern period does not automatically make available a subject position in which a homosexual existence becomes imaginable. The only 'positive' reference to homosexuality significantly comes from the western homophile tradition, which primarily offers self-transcending possibilities. In spite of this reference, Firaq's argument appears to be searching for the ideal alterity in which the self may gain its historically denied completion. One obvious solution offered is "Indian" femininity. He regularly cites his own poetry as examples of this new "Indian" aesthetic for the ghazal. Critical views on Firaq's ghazal have identified its pervasive melancholia (*ġham*) of subjective solitude. ʿĀlam Ḵhundmīrī argues that Firaq's contemplation of subjective solitude has a historical dimension to it: his deeply felt need for an individual praxis

[205] See his repeated comments on this issue reproduced in Ḵhalīlur Raḥmān Āʿẓmī, *Urdū mēñ taraqqī-pasand taḥrīk* (ʿAlīgaṛẖ: Anjuman-e taraqqī-e urdū, 1972), 153; and Shamīm Ḥanafī and Suhail Aḥmad Fārūqī, eds. *Firāq: dayār-e shab kā musāfir* (Naʾī Dihlī: Maktaba-e jāmiʿa, 1996), 64.

(*infirādīʿamal*) against the impersonal forces of collective praxis (*ijtimāʿīʿamal*), i.e. history. In Firaq's poetry the only point which can return the self to an understanding of itself, and not be diminished by the Sartrean "hell of history" is the contemplation of "cosmic beauty."[206] Femininity and beauty thus serve as ideal markers of alterity, whose pursuit in poetry gives meaning to the solitude of the self. It is worth wondering, as a consequence, whether this solitude arises precisely from the self's inability to imagine femininity and beauty as parts of its constitution. This is certainly one implication of his view on the ghazal aesthetic as an enervating disease because it offers the reflection of the *same*, non-feminine self as the alienating condition for self-knowledge. The reference to femininity as the ideal object comes as an afterthought, rehearsing notions of the sublime which may be represented only in a self-effacing, alienating figure of woman,[207] pointing to a delayed realization of gender difference in love. It is as if homosexual desire, as refusal of the feminine, is an aesthetic antithesis to social reality. Its reversal requires nothing less than changing the linguistic character of the Urdu language, so that it would become truly syncretic (Hindu and Muslim), by absorbing Sanskritic vocabulary and literary forms which are the spirit (*rūḥ*) of India.[208]

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[206] Alam Khundmiri, "Firāq kā shuʿūr-e ġham," in idem, *Maẓāmīn-eʿĀlam Khundmīrī: intiḳhāb* (Ḥaidarābād: Urdū Ikaiḍamī Āndẖrā Pardēsh, 1994), 156, 157.

[207] A comparable notion of the sublimity of the female figure, in opposition to the foregrounding materiality of the homoerotic male form, arises in Johann Winckelmann's systematic study of the expression of ideas in classical Greek statuary. Unlike Firaq though, Winckelmann keenly pursues the historic expressions of the male figure as the productive contradiction between art as an ideal and as historical phenomenon. In his study of Winckelmann, Alex Potts also highlights his originary idea that ancient societies were organic wholes and their art reflected a struggle between the polarities of idea and materiality, or contemplation and desire. Taken up by the German aesthetic tradition of Herder, Hegel and Goethe, these ideas resurface in the colonial period in Hali's conception of the organic wholeness of ancient society and its poetry and subsequent movement of composition, in the modern period, away from the conception of "poetry" itself. Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 111, 127–28, 19.

[208] Firaq, *Urdū kīʿishqiya shāʿirī*, 128.

The negativity of homosexual desire, in Firaq's mid-twentieth century assertion of it, points to the insubstantiality of homosexuality as a concept. It appears at the precise faultlines of linguistic, communal and religious differentiations pointing to its determination in the nationalist politics of the subcontinent. Appeals to various sorts of essences of cultural authenticity and aesthetic sublimation end up justifying antihomosexual sentiments even as a 'great tradition' of homosexual writing is presented as their historically manifest form. If there is a distinctive homosexual aesthetic operating in Firaq's theory, then its stress on the homosexual's rehabilitation reveals an overvaluation precisely of those modes of self-completion that require positing a constitutive otherness, such as femininity. The hypervaluation of the feminine can arise from a masculinist disavowal of that same vulnerability in one's homosexual desire. Focusing on conditions of homosexual alienation therefore reveals the *real* historical conditions of homosexual existence which are lost in the conjuration of a positive, substantial essence of homosexual desire that we may wish as its liberatory counterpoint.

The recovery of the self under colonialism, itself a quasi-mystical exercise, entails a mystical faith in the modes of subjectivation available to premodern society. The aura of authentic sexual practices, conceived in opposition to 'Victorian' sexual ideology, threatens to turn even the inequalities and prejudices of the past into positive continuities with our present sexual politics. In the final section of this chapter I will offer a glimpse into a premodern determination of sexuality and the ideological labour performed by the sexual itself in relation to 'homosexual' lives to argue against atavistic continuities.

On the Threshold of the Premodern

The zeitgeist of the long eighteenth century, broadly datable at one end by the death of the last 'great Mughal' Aurangzeb in 1707 and, at the other, the death of Mir, the last great "Delhi-school" poet in 1810, has been treated by social and political historians as an internally consistent spirit of an otherwise heterogeneous culture.[209] It is assumed that prior to colonial conquest, which in fact had taken root well before its proper period of political ascendance in north-Indian political centres during the Anglo-French wars in the Carnatic (1756–1763) and the defeat of the Bengal nawab (1757), indigenous society reflected a cohesion of traditional cultural and political practices. Thus eighteenth-century South Asian cultural forms and narratives have developed an aura of indigenous authenticity even when we know very little about the signifying systems within which these were received. Sexuality studies turn to this century for the traces of precolonial, multivocal, fluid sexual identities that never the less appear coherent to our contemporary notions of discrete sexual identities.[210] In this rush to mine the particularities of culture as self-evident data for historical generalization, the significance of localized differentiations in the social structure is lost if we do not care for the dominant forms, concepts and vocabulary of conceiving society in this period.

The conception of sexual desire as a necessary stage to be passed along the way to reconstituting the self in what lies beyond the senses has become the basis of allegorical readings of the ghazal, from reformism to later colonial and postcolonial criticism. This necessary

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[209] While critical of the Marxist and nationalist historians for their dogmatism and broad generalizations, the revisionist historians, also known as the Cambridge school, of the South Asian eighteenth century have offered apparently unmediated descriptions of economic and political institutions as the basis of an authentic eighteenth-century spirit. For a revisionist's account of the debates in this field of study, see Richard B. Barnett, "Introduction," in idem, ed. *Rethinking Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002).

[210] A case in point is the *rēḵhtī* style of the Urdu ghazal, written by male poets in the female voice emerging at the end of the eighteenth century, celebrated in a dominant segment of LGBT criticism as undercutting gender ideology and heterosexual pleasures. For a counter-view about the ingrained gender prejudices of this female "homoerotic" tradition, see Carla Petievich, "Gender Politics and the Urdu Ghazal: Exploratory Observations on *Rekhta* versus *Rekhti*," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2001): 223–48.

illusoriness of sexual desire, reflecting both a tolerance of sexual expressiveness because of its transitory quality and a general devaluation of it, has been understood as a doctrinal position of Islamic mysticism. Yet how are we to read this culturally influential position for its effects on sexual behaviour? How are we to conceive the social arrangement of north-Indian society in the eighteenth century not simply as a concatenation of discrete ideologies of mysticism, religious orthodoxy, kingship, aesthetics and the family each marked by its own specialized vocabulary for exercising social control? Indeed, from the viewpoint of sexuality, did the sexual even exist as a singular, remarkable force for ordering and policing hierarchies of sexual acts and identities? And if so, how was this force socially expressed?

Portrait of a Boy-Lover

Dargāh Qulī Ḳhāñ's (1710–1766) untitled word-album recounting his visit and stay at the Mughal court in Delhi from 1738 to 1741, first published only in 1926 when its editor gave it the title *Muraqqaʿ-e Dihlī*, has become an influential source for the study of eighteenth-century imperial culture. It is routinely cited in historical studies, along with such other subjectively authored works such as Ġhulām Ḥusain Ṭabāṭabaʾī's history of the later Mughals and the English East India Company *Siyar ul-mutaʿaḳhḳhirīn* (1781) and Muḥammad Ḥasan Qatīl's account of north-Indian social practices *Haft tamāsha* (1811), to reconstruct urban cultural trends in the period. However, the text is far from an eyewitness account of a set of events or personages. Written in Persian, from the perspective of a high-ranking officer (*mansabdār*) visiting from the newly autonomous province of the Deccan, it presents a panoramic tableau of streetlife divided into sections about prominent mystic shrines, mystics, marketplaces, poets, fashionable aristocrats, dancing boys, courtesans and singers, all rubbing shoulders free of any apparent principle of hierarchization. The juxtaposition of places of piety and the demi-monde appears to

confirm a picture of "social breakdown" although the narrator's voice implies an amoral vantage point over the contiguous terrains of urban life in which he does not always pretend to be a disinterested observer.

In describing the mood around mystic shrines and their monthly pilgrimages (*ziyārat*), the terminology of mysticism refracts the empirical details about the shrines, literalizing the idealized expectations of mystical emanations associated with such places. For example, the speaker calls the generally enchanting aroma of the environs (*faẓā*) of one such shrine "the aroma of Reality" (*nikhat-e ḥaqīqat*).[211] The point of the description is however not just the self-fulfilling quality of mystical experience but the revelry attached to its popular practices. The evenings culminate in fairs, picnics and illumination when people congregate in a decidedly unmystical, celebratory mood. It is signalled through conventional figures e.g. the ascetic (*zāhid*) gone astray and the errant law-enforcer (*muḥtasib*),[212] signifying the temporary breakdown of both religious and secular authority.

There is nonetheless a hint of alarm about the incongruity of revelry at holy shrines. As an example for this, the speaker describes the annual festival (*ʿurs*) at the tomb of Bahādur Shāh I (d. 1712), located in a Sufi shrine complex, in whose festive atmosphere two distinct sets of people indulge in carnal pleasures: "muʿāshirān bā maḥbūbān-e khud dar har gōsha va kināŕ dast dar baġhal va ʿayyāshān dar har kūča-o-bazār ba ḥuṣūl-e mushtahiyāt-e nafsānī dar raqṣ-e jamal."[213] Lovers (*muʿāshirān*) can be found embracing their beloveds (*maḥbūbān*) in every nook and cranny while the profligates (*ʿayyāshān*), having had their fill of carnal desires

[211] Notice for the shrine of Ḥaẓrat Shāh Turkmān Bayābānī: Dargāh Qulī Khāñ, *Muraqqaʿ-e Dihlī: Fārsī matn aur Urdū tarjuma*, ed. and trans. Ḳhalīq Anjum (Naʾī Dihlī: Anjuman-e taraqqī-e urdū, 1993), 56.

[212] Notice for the *ʿurs* of "Ḳhuld manzil": ibid., 58.

[213] Ibid.

(*mushtahiyāt-e nafsānī*), are engaged in wild dancing (*raqṣ-e jamal*). The gender neutrality of Persian nouns does not so much hide the gender of these personages as announce the obviousness of these transactions between freely moving social actors, which in this social context, were men. Yoked in the sentence, this distinction creates an implicit hierarchy between genuine lovers and pleasure-seekers. This difference appears to arise from the mystical understanding of human perception through the agency of the *nafs*, a mystical category representing the non-material aspect of physical existence. Shahzad Bashir explains this concept as the changeable aspect of the make-up of a person characterized by forces of egotism and concupiscence.[214] The *nafs* acts on the body which its interface with the material world. This is the self that is sought be disciplined and finally annihilated in mystical practice.[215] The echo of this concept in the speaker's distinction between lovers signals the hierarchization of mundane, corporeal desire below non-sexual, 'romantic' union. Sexual transactions during shrine festivities are thus made to signify according to the logic governing mystical practice and not as occurrences that might have a logic, intentionality, and affective value of their own. The conventionality of the description is stressed further by its rhyming prose structure. The ideality of such verbal structures signals the symmetry of experience in this fragment from social life. Even socially threatening behaviour needs to be expressed in the tidiness of carefully intentioned and patterned prose.

A similar hierarchization may be observed in the speaker's description of the crowd of attractive boys thronging these events. The notice for Bahadur Shah's tomb also describes a rush of beardless and newly downed boys (*hujūm-e amārid va nau-ḳhaṭān*) as the "breakers of ascetic

[214] Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 41.

[215] Ibid., 42.

vows" (*tauba-shikan-e zāhid*) and the "overthrowers of the foundation of virtue and rectitude" (*barhamzan-e buniyād-e ṣalāḥ va sadād*).[216] These boys, as a social group, operate outside the economy of the male same-sex intimate couples noted earlier. They are described as winking (*čashmak zadan*) and lighting a lamp in the eyes of the beholder (*tā čashm čarāġh raushan kunad*). This seductive act is interrupted, the speaker says, only by brazen invitations from "women" (*zan ki payām mī farastad*). Conventional and self-consciously paralleled phrases such as "abominations" (*favāḥish*), "world of sinners" (*ʿālam-e fassāq*) and "world of fornicators" (*jahān-e fajjār*) frame this sexually charged exchange. It is hard to tell whether there is a sustained moral critique intended here and, if it is, what its relationship is with the over-all amoral description of the carnal bustle. As later sections on boy-dancers and women singers and performers in the account testify the presence of these groups at the shrines serves their economic interest and the obvious function of entertainment of male patrons. References to genuine lovers throws into relief groups described as *ʿayyāsh* and *fassāq* who are customers for the services on offer at the festival. This suggests another principle of hierarchization, i.e. the sale of erotic objects as a manifestation of the selfish, anti-transcendental desire of the *nafs*. It is a particularly gendered hierarchy because the transgressors (*fajjār* and *fassāq*) are male patrons who are seen to be threatened by the wily, commercialized charms of these professional, both puerile and female, objects of desire. The intermittent eruption of moral concern is therefore less to do with the containment of a social threat represented by these groups, than with the disruption of elite, male conduct in public places. Even this latter implication is not satiric in tone since the author never claims a radical otherness for either the behaviour of the male patrons or the charms of the boys and women on display. The power of observation belongs squarely to the leisured, male aristocrat, like the author, whose social (and sexual) power is represented by

[216] Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqaʿ-e Dihlī*, 58.

access to the bodies and services of these subordinate groups. This power is amplified by reference to the trangressions of the male self, underscored here using mystical assumptions, that only confirms him as the exclusive aspirant for the realm of mystical perfection.

The particular liking for young boys (*amrad-parastī*) is definitely a fashionable trend in mid-eighteenth-century Delhi. Prominent nobles at court are described as its dedicated practitioners. In these descriptions there is a clearly satirical tone. Yet in comparison with contiguous descriptions of religious divines, those given to wine and desire for women,[217] it is not possible to identify a specifically homophobic butt to the satire. The boy-lover is distinguished from the heterosexual divine by the remarkability of the durability of his predilections. Boy-love is referred to as an art (*fann*) and its topoi described as a specialized forum (*maḥfil*) for people of a particular temperament (*mizāj*) and disposition (*ṭabīʿat*).[218] The reference to these characterological states is neither exclusively sexual nor deeply psychological but defined primarily as a taste, for example, in music and the arts in general. Thus, Āʿẓam Ḳhāñ, a son of Fidvī Ḳhāñ, a nephew of Aurangzeb, is presented as a prominent *amradparast* of the city whose temperament (*mizāj*) is caught (*dar band*) in the desire for clean-faced boys (*sāda-rūyān*).[219] There is little psychological depth in this description of habitual sexual preference as, right in the beginning, the subject (Azam Khan) is located at the centre of a particular cultural economy of boy-love. It is quite literally the economic aspect that describes the practice of boy-love as an aristocratic hobby akin to music, dancing, riding etc. The proceeds of revenue from his various revenue-producing lanholdings (*jāgīrāt*) are spent on the expenses of

[217] Notice for Shāh Raḥmatullāh: Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqaʿ-e Dihlī*, 69.

[218] Notice for Āʿẓam Ḳhāñ pisar-e Fidvī Khāñ: ibid., 69.

[219] Ibid.

this group (*firqa*). The speaker sounds a disapproving tone here because of the wasteful spending involved and not the more glaring transgression of pederasty and homosexuality.

Furthermore, the connotation of a non-utilitarian hobby is stressed by the sustained use of the metaphor of bird-catching, or pigeon-gaming, to describe the conduct of the hobbyist: "from wherever news of a colourful boy (*amrad-e rangīnī*) arrives, in observance of the heart's desire (*ba riʿāyat-e dilḳhvāh*) he throws in the noose of his own friendship (*dar kamand-e rafāqat-e ḳhud mī andāzad*)."[220] The image of ensnarement of pretty boys is matched by the reference to a necessary, impersonal associative tendency (*riʿāyat*) of the heart (*dil*) which compels the subject to act on its desire. This incitement to desire and its fulfillment may be understood as the working of the self (*nafs*), that non-material constituent of the body's relation, including sexual, with the world. The body as such is not the location for the feeling, perception or incitement of sexual desire. This is why the description of Azam Khan's libidinal urges takes on a satiric tone because the guile inherent in his hobby for collecting pretty boys is contrasted wryly against the unintentional working of his desire. If *nafs* represents the changeable aspect of the human self, then Azam Khan's self appears to be helplessly imprisoned in a desire governed by external objects. This is the point of satire rather than an emphasis on the sexual transgressiveness of his taste for boys, who belong to his own gender. The fact that his behaviour shows durable, unchanging tastes is additionally objectionable as it signifies the trangressiveness of men who choose to express their desire *exclusively* for boys and men.[221] The oxymoronic association of "noose" and "friendship" hints at the debased quality of this desire which uses the alibi of friendship to ensnare unsuspecting boys. An Urdu translation of this passage gives "*iḥsān*"

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[220] Ibid.

[221] The fact that even grown-up men are part of this economy of erotic patronage is hinted by Azam Khan's continued employment of the boys even after the coming of puberty. Ibid.

(beneficence) for the Persian "*rafāqat*"[222] thus specifying the idea of psychological manipulation in the game of boy-love. But *rafāqat* contrasts the institutionalized notion of friendship (as a class-bound, caste-limited and gender exclusive affective bond) against its inherent ambiguity in the economically determined context of boy-love. In the latter, it marks the possibility of limited inter-class interactions through which an alternate economy of patronage comes into being, described conveniently but ambiguously as friendship. This idea is strenghtened when we compare the description of the conduct of the real *amrad-parast* with his idealized poetic counterpart in the ghazal. The metaphor of the hunter or the bird-catcher (*ṣayyād*) is reserved for the beloved in the Persian and Urdu ghazal. But here the real *amrad-parast* overturns this ethic of boy-love by actively pursuing the objects of his desire thus becoming the hunter himself. This should remind us that the scenarios of love between two conventionally unequal people in the ghazal do not denote in any imitative way the actual conduct of amorous relations in society. The use of poetic images in prose narratives also shows the perspectival quality of the idiom of poetry, signifying distinction and evaluation, when brought into the genre of social description and thus poetry's potential as social praxis in this historical period.

As pointed earlier, the description of Azam Khan's desire contrasts sharply against similar references to sexual excess among figures of power and religious authority. While the old religious divine's libidinal energy is cause for some mirth but eventually a sign of his masculine achievement, Azam Khan cuts a pantaloonish figure in a similar state of decrepitude. References from the homoerotic ghazal are cited to highlight the artificiality of his self-presentation: "by the ray of the mole on the face of these rosy-cheeked boys, he dyes black the morning of old age (*ṣubḥ-e pīrī-rā ḳhiẓāb mī kunad*) and from fear of time running out, he spends the remaining time

[222] Ibid., 137.

hastily procuring earthly, selfish pleasures (*istijlāb-e ḥuẓūẓ-e nafsānī shitāb*)."[223] His battle against old age is hopelessly desperate and dissemblingly cosmetic. The charge of selfish (*nafsānī*) desires again underscores the devaluation of carnal pleasure. The contrast between the two figures is clearly not absolute because the religious figure belongs to an otherworldly persuasion in contrast with the worldly, artistic personality of Azam Khan. But the practice of boy-love, worldly as it is, is described unequivocally in terms of artifice and hypocrisy.

The speaker calls it colourfully "the art of magic tricks" (*fann-e siḥrkārīhā*). It thus belongs to the larger continuum of the arts which have formal guild-like structures of recruitment, training and support. Most of Azam Khan's boys, after their *amrad* period is over, end up in high posts or remain close confidants to the patron. Others continue serving at his soirees and conducting household duties. These latter are identified as urban fashion icons known for their reckless lifestyle and riding fast horses. Similar groups of boy-entertainers exist in the world outside the royal fort led by masters who keep them to perform, sing, dance and prostitute themselves at public gatherings. We are told of one *svāng* (mimicry) master Taqī owning a troupe (*akẖāṛā*) of catamites (*ḥīzān*) and effeminate boys (*muḳhannaś*) whose entertainment duties clearly exceed that of mime and play-acting.[224]

The *amradparastī* image in these descriptions emerges through its rhetorical contours. Nowehere is it presented as a universal, or even a widespread social phenomenon. It belongs to a minority of tastes in sexual life. It is coded as artifice and dissimulation on the lines of other aristocratic pastimes, especially the arts. Its moral evaluation works on a thin line between disapprobation and amused indulgence, signifying, at least on one level, the acuteness of

[223] Ibid., 69.

[224] Notice for Taqī: Ibid., 97.

observation of *inshā* writing (epistolography) as opposed to moralistic generalization.[225] The motifs of the ghazal and the codes governing their interrelationship provide a master language that turns social facts of sexuality into normative, aesthetic descriptions of social geography. This helps put the excesses of sexual conduct in the perspective of male navigation of social terrains. The tendency to parallel social practices, from descriptions of religious leaders to debauched aristocrats, in an ongoing panoramic survey underscores the continuity of the social. Thus, events like the sacking of Delhi by Nadir Shah's armies that took place during the author's visit in 1739 is mentioned only once in the notice for a courtesan and only to say that she stopped performing for the emperor because he had given up music after the bloody invasion.[226] The effects of the invasion are clearly not felt in the same mournful way by the rest of the city for the author describes enjoying performances of all the major boy-dancers and courtesans of the period, and not relating this behaviour to his earlier moral anxiety about the perverse attractions of boy-whores. This amorality of observation is not a remarkable achievement of a tolerant, pluralistic society, that is a neat sum of its heterogeneous parts, but arises from a need, dictated by generic conventions of *inshā* writing, for a singular and coherent vantage point amidst the acknowledged heterogeneity of society. This effect is produced in the text by the rhetorical claim that the author reflects society in his description *as it is*. This claim of as-it-is-ness is a deeply ideological one achieved through the management of socially threatening forces, i.e. the commercialization of sexual relations and the popular modes of artistic dissembling, using conventional codes of social description that pin them down into miniaturized particularities.

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[225] Muzaffar Alam and Seema Alavi point out that in Mughal *insha* writing the point was not just to deliver messages, "but also a philosophy." Alam and Alavi, trans. *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient: The Iʿjāz-i Arsalānī (Persian Letters, 1773–1779) of Antoine-Louis Henri Polier* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

[226] Notice for Kamāl Bāʾī: Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqaʿ-e Dihlī*, 109.

The tendency of erotic descriptions to exaggerate the enchanting power of the sexualized subordinate groups follows the same logic of describing holy shrines in a language that literalizes their idealized properties. This is not to suggest some alternative linguistic system inherent to this language, culture or religious philosophy. This aspect of language use is determined by the kind of society it seeks to describe. The word-album could neither be a journalistic account nor a memoir recording personal experiences simply because audiences for such genres do not exist at this point in history. The speaker gives different names for his composition: notebook jottings (*bayāẕ*), everyday journal (*jarīda*) and biographical compendium (*taẕkira*) suggesting a lack of interest in classifying the text internally. But the kinds of rhetorical strategies utilized shows a studied engagement with the descriptive effects of verbal signs. This is where its normative energy arises in distinction with more obvious normative textual traditions such as the *malfūẓāt*, *taẕkira* or theological treatises. The connotative power of mystical terminology as the self-evident normative framework of social organization puts this framework to work outside the context of doctrinal prescriptions. The mystical refraction of descriptive language gives us a glimpse of the content and working of normative judgements in this society. This is why we cannot rely on a decontextualized, trans-historical "Sufi" textual tradition that is somehow more tolerant of expressions of socially and sexually dissident desires to support a rosy picture of premodern multivocal sexualities. The portrait of Azam Khan certainly does not read as an intolerant commentary against 'homosexual' desire but it also does not fail to inscribe the impression of a sexualized ideology which criticizes all sexual preoccupations as a subjective compromise of the masculine potential for self-transendence.

In the final section of this chapter I will show how this rosy picture of idealized social continuities in premodernity breaks down in moments of violent retribution against sexually

dissident subjects. I will also show the role poetry plays in securing an aesthetic order for this ideal social organization, thus revealing the points of social contest and contradiction as it attempts to smoothen these out with its verbal texturing.

The City-Gazelles

The evolution of the ghazal has been signposted by literary historians through generations (*daur*) of exemplary figures in whose successive interventions the form attained its fullest fruition possible.[227] An emphatically teleological argument, it posits both the ghazal form and its linguistic register as always straining towards self-completion through the medium of "great" poetic exempla. While modern critics emphasize the internal stasis of its themes and techniques of composition, there is near universal reliance on a linear historicist model for studying the ghazal's history. Thus by the middle of the eighteenth century, in Jalibi's view, the ghazal's mould was perfected when a movement (*taḥrīk*) for linguistic and poetic reform was launched by Maẓhar Jān-e Jānāñ (1699–1781). Although Mazhar himself wrote little poetry in the emergent literary register of north-Indian speech, which he is seen to theorize and recommend, he trained his followers such as Tābāñ, Yaqīn and Bayān in this purportedly new style, producing a momentum for 'reform'. According to Jalibi, his innovations primarily arose from two related proposals: (i) the rejection of the early eighteenth-century poetic trend of verbal embellishment (the poets using *īhām* i.e. word-play) in favour of a style that used verbal art to express sentiments (*vāridat-e qalbiyya*) and experience (*tajribāt*); and (ii) the cleansing of poetic language towards purity (*shāʾistagī*) of a linguistic standard, which would enable vigour and sweetness in expression (*bayān mēñ jōsh aur ḥalāvat*), achieved ideally by borrowing Persian

[227] Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, *Āb-e ḥayāt* (Lakẖnaʾū: Uttar Pardēsh Urdū Akādamī, 1982); Nadvi, *Shiʿr ul-hind*; Jamīl Jālibī, *Tarīḵh-e adab-e urdū* (3 vols.) (Dihlī: Ējukēshnal Pablishiñg Hāʾūs, 2006). The first use of generational periodization in *rekhta* ("Urdu") *taẕkiras* appears in Qāʾim Čāndpūrī's *Maḵhzan-e nikāt* (*c*. 1754).

verbal and idiomatic constructions and removing "Hindi" and other local dialectal ones.[228] It was this movement and its poetry that paved the way for the ghazal's coming into its own in the work of maestros such as Mīr, Dard and Saudā and their final synthesis in Ġhālib.

The neat symmetry of this model, especially its ability to predict all later developments in poetic style as already implied in an originary model, strengthens the belief that the ghazal is a historically stable and temperamentally asocial art. It implies that poets in the past always knew, ahead of its time, what form best enabled its coming-into-being. This iron-clad logic has resulted in the streamlining of irregularities and departures which might reveal the contingency of literary developments in relation to a multiplicity of external factors. The salience of gendered expression and irregularities of sexual morphology are the first casualties in this historicist steamrolling of literary evolution. In paricular, it fails to account for the ebb and flow of homoerotic themes in "classical" ghazal poetry other than as a superficial traffic in sundry, self-evident 'sexual' themes. Indeed, the content of eroticism is sacrificed in it to distil its outer forms, to mark cherished civilizational continuities.

The poetry of Inʿāmullāh Ḳhāñ "Yaqīn" (c. 1727–c. 1755) in this horizontal literary history is seen to prefigure Mir's grand style. As a predecessor of the "god of poetry," Yaqin's ghazal is limned with the aura of inchoate but great beginnings. If we compare his *dīvān* with that of immediate predecessors, the *īhām* poets such as Ābrū and Nājī for example, for the first time the ghazal emerges clearly as the unit of composition and poetic expression. If we do take seriously the claim that there indeed was a self-styled *īhām* school of ghazal poetry, characterized by the callisthenics of word-play conducted necessarily on the most basic unit of poetic presentation, i.e. the *shiʿr* (distich), then Yaqin's *dīvān* contrastingly fashions the ghazal

[228] Jalibi, *Tārīḳh-e adab-e urdū: jild duvum, ḥiṣṣa-e avval*, 362.

as the artefactual unit of poetry. Both sets of poets, the *īhām* poets and Yaqin's 'reformed' generation, the latter named variously in *taẕkiras* as the "plain-speakers" (*sāda-gō*), the "fresh-speakers" (*tāza-gō*), or the "simple-speakers" (*āsān-gō*), practised the same external form, but configured differently the axis of poetic composition. Yaqin's œuvre (*dīvān*) is visually striking with a concentrated selection of 167 ghazals (modest for poets of the period) comprising of a strictly observed limit of five distichs each.[229] The patterning is heightened by the use of a limited number of metres (*baḥr*) with the *hazaj* metre (*baḥr-e hazaj muśamman sālim*, i.e. *mafāīʿīlun* four times) recurring most frequently. Thematically, in sharp contrast to the *īhām* poets, there are ghazals which have a reigning motif or *maẓmūn* (the most frequent one is the Shīrīn–Farhād motif and its corrolaries) although each distich does retain its autonomous quality. Thus a strong sense of continuity based on thematic reverberations is sounded in the ghazal unit. It is further emphasized by a heavy semantic charge on the word bearing the rhyming syllable (*qāfiya*), considered a mechanistic appendage of "ghazal" composition, but here signifying compositional unity through semantic stress. This is occasionally re-emphasized by including distinctly lengthened refrains (*radīf*) at the end of the rhyming hemistich, a feature notably missing in the *īhām* poets, creating an external connecting rhythm (both acoustic and semantic) over the conventional distich breaks.

This reclamation of the vestigial appendages of the ghazal marks a new economy of poetic composition. The poetry of *īhām*, identified by a playful use of punning, offered the pleasure of working out, trope by trope, how poetry trips up the referential claims of language. Often a risqué meaning emerges from behind the self-cancelling obviousness of a verbal or acoustic image. In contrast, new, plain-speaking poetry, such as Yaqin's, carefully selects and

[229] ʿInāmullāh Ḳhāñ Yaqīn, *Dīvān-e Yaqīn Dihlavī: ʿInāmullāh Ḳhāñ "Yaqīn" kē dīvān kā tanqīdī iḍīshan maʿ muqaddama va ḥavāshī va farhañg*, ed. Farḥat Fāṭima (Naʿī Dihlī: Anjuman-e taraqqī-e urdū, 1995).

presents themes that have come to signify the ghazal sensibility *tout court*, e.g. the rejection of hypocritical piety, celebration of defeat in love, observations about the beloved's body, including the boy, and making boastful claims about one's own poetry. This does not however mean that the old nuts and bolts of verbal artistry, *īhām* (paronomasia), *riʿāyat-e lafẓī* (semantic consonance), *ẓilaʿjugat* (double entendre running throughout the discourse), have been rejected. These continue to find a place in Yaqin's poetry but they are conceived as immaterial to the business of poetry:

shāʿirī hai lafẓ o maʿnī sē barī lēkin Yaqīñ
kaun samjẖē yẖāñ tō hai īhām o maẓmūñ kā [*sic*] talāsh[230]
[Poetry is innocent of verbality and signification, but Yaqin:
Who understands? There's only rummaging for puns and motifs here.]

The reference to the activity of composition as "poetry" (*shāʿirī*) points to a fracture, represented in the verse's rhetorical conduct, in the concept. The first line expresses an assertion about poetry; the word "innocent" gives it the weight of juridical indisputability. The utterance stops at "but" (*lēkin*) making us expect a revelatory overturning of this truism. This possibility is withdrawn in the second line only to strengthen the assertion's truth by furnishing not a syllogistic proof but, bracketed in the first foot of the line (fāʿilātun: *kau-n-sam-jẖē*; "who understands"), an assertion of the general ignorance of this truth. The rest of the line supplies a delayed explanation that only refers to the prevalence of a counter-conception of poetry against the earlier assertion. Rummaging for novel puns and intriguing themes is not poetry, even if it has been considered so. "Poetry" is something beyond words and signification. The rhetorical power of the missing proof for this assertion suggests the emergence of an alternative view of poetry. As readers familiar with the protocols of modern Urdu and western lyric poetry we may

[230] Ibid., gh. 50: 143.

jump to the conclusion that the speaker considers poetry a subjective medium of expression and not an artefact made of figures of speech and language. But the lines point to the *coexistence* of two opposing conceptions of poetry in this period. Their positioning in the structure of the distich is additionally significant. Let us call the discredited but popular conception "*shiʿr*", the prevalent word for "poetry", especially in similar couplets of metapoetic significance in the *īhām* poets.[231] *Shiʿr* is a product of such second-order categories as *īhām* and *maẓmūn*, in contrast to *shāʿirī* which is related, albeit negatively, with the first-order categories *laf̱z* and *maʿnī*. This shows that the two are not comparable opposites but hierarchically arranged and paradigmatically differentiated. *Shaʿirī* is a mode which doesn't take the impression of its manifest contents (i.e. words and signification) and comes out clean from this association, while *shiʿr* is nothing but the pursuit of second-order objectivities, i.e. the materiality of language, hindering the practice of *shāʿirī*. The echoes of a mystical allegory of reading are audible here but the extremity of the assertion against old poetry (*shiʿr*) points to a polemical undertow presented here as proverbial reference to the transcendental function of poetry. The "innocence" of poetry points to the indeterminateness of this transcendental quality: is poetry innocent of linguistic artifice despite passing through its medium or completely detached from it?

The development of the chiselled and thematically delineated ghazal is one kind of resolution of this central contradiction of poetry in the mid-eighteenth century. Since Yaqin is identified as the earliest poet to put into practice Mazhar's reformist proposals, his poetic resolution demands attention. While the obvious features of formal symmetry, metrical regularity

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[231] Cf. the *īhām* poet Abrū's (d. 1733) metapoetic comment in his verse:

shiʿr kō maẓmūn sētī qadr hō hai Ābrū // qāfiya sētī milāyā qāfiyā tō kyā hūā

[Verse's worth is from the theme, Abru // stringing rhymes is no big deal.]

Note the use of the word *shiʿr* (verse) as the keyword for *īhām* poetics. Najmuddīn Shāh Mubārak Ābrū, *Divān-e Ābrū*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan (Naʾī Dihlī: Taraqqī urdū biyūrō, 2000; new ed.), gh. 31, 89.

and thematic cohesion foreground the operation of an authorially controlled poetic performance, at the same time these features rely on the artefactual effects of poetic devices. In his *dīvān*, the turn away from verbal embroidery is marked by the self-conscious versification of, what can be broadly called, paradox. If this turn signifies poetry's release from the prisonhouse of verbal artistry, the new accent is on the putting together of a self-sufficient poetic proposition. The structure of the paradox throws into perspective the treachery of linguistic doubleness (puns, allusions and verbal susbstitutions) by allowing the demonstration of the formation or putting together of a poetic thought. The studied construction of poetic propositions, paradoxical in form, lends a subjective effect to the utterance and rehabilitates the artistry of word-images, i.e. verbal texturing, at the level of poetic discourse. Yaqin's poetry shows a consistent pattern of either splicing seemingly unrelated *maẓmūns*, the motifs from the fiction of the ghazal universe, or internally differentiating existing ones to produce the effect of discursive, rather than verbal, ornamentation.

These processes can be exemplified in a typical paradoxical figure occuring in his poetry, the "city-gazelles" (*shahrī ġhazālāñ*). The gazelles are inhabitants of the desert, and one of the corollaries of the Lailā–Majnūñ story. Having gone mad after being separated from Laila, Majnun's sojourn in the desert is accompanied by its inhabitants, the gazelles whose eyes are a conventional symbol of beauty and remind the lover of Laila's eyes. This *maẓmūn* is brought back to life by the transformative adjective *shahrī* (urban or city-dwelling) in a number of ghazals in Yaqin's *divan*:

1. rakẖā hai gẖēr in shahrī ġhazālōñ nē mirē dil kō
pẖañsā hūñ ab tō is bastī mēñ vīrānē sē kah dījō[232]
[These city-gazelles have surrounded my heart.
I am now caught in this neighbourhood: tell the wilderness.]

[232] Yaqin, *Dīvān-e Yaqīn*, ghazal 101: 169.

2. ḵhabar maiñ hāʾē lē saktā nahīñ apnē biyābāñ kī
nahīñ hai mujẖ kō čẖūṭ ēk ān in shahrī ġhazālāñ sē[233]
[Alas, I can't watch over my wilderness!
I don't have a moment's release from these city-gazelles.]

3. jō Majnūñ āhuvān-e dasht sē ḵhush tẖā tō voh jānē
Yaqīñ ham tō divānē haiñ inẖīñ shahrī ġhazālāñ kē[234]
[Only Majnun knows why the wild deer pleased him,
Yaqin, I am mad only for these city-gazelles.]

4. dil pur kyūñ ki hō mērā baġhair ik manharan ḵhālī
tihī hai shahr ṭiflāñ sē ġhazālōñ sē hai ban ḵhālī[235]
[How can my heart be filled? Without a heart-stealer (it is) empty
The city is free of boys (lit. children), the forest empty of gazelles.]

In each of the *shiʿrs* a half-mocking tone arises from the incongruous image of the city-dwelling gazelles. In part this is light mockery of the abjection of the lover highlighting its stubborn unchangeability. But the novelty of the urban scenario sharply individuates the conventional image of the lover, or Majnun, surrounded by the conventional inhabitants of the wilderness. Each of the *shiʿrs* also demonstrates the transference of the corollaries of the desert as a topos of exile to the ostensibly free-moving, interactive life of the city in the creation of a paradox: the speaker/lover is ensnared or exiled in the populated city. The desert-gazelles gave Majnun company and are shown in contemporary painting to sit surrounding him. In contrast, the city-gazelles surrounding the heart ("*rakẖā hai gẖēr*" in #1) have taken on a warlike, menacing aspect. The old scenario is not completely forgotten. In fact it is the scene to which a new perspective is added by the current utterance: in #1 and #2 the speaker announces in a tone of mock-resignation that his city-exile makes him unable to return to the wilderness, which is his

[233] Ibid., ghazal 137: 187.

[234] Ibid., gh. 143: 190.

[235] Ibid., gh. 133: 185.

rightful domain. The tone preempts any enquiry about how he ended up in civilization when the conventional image has the lover/Majnun actively shun human company. The image of the city-gazelles circumvents this question by proposing a paradoxical undercutting of the gazelle motif: the companions of last resort in the desert, signifying the absence of human company, have become the objects of erotic attraction in the city. This paradoxical transformation is frontally addressed in #3 where the old-style lover ("Majnun") appears as an old fogey, contented merely with wild deer, in contrast with the poetic persona ("Yaqin") who boldly announces his predilection for city-gazelles. The intricacies of the discursive paradox are however brought back into the old economy of word-play (*īhām*) in #4, which as the opening *shiʿr* of its ghazal functions as a compositional ornament, assumed to bear little poetic value. Thus the proposition is less important than the connections implied between word-images, both acoustic and semantic, e.g. the contrast between full (*pur*) and empty (*ḳhālī* and *tihī*). The object of desire is given in the colloquial ('Hindi') appellation "heart-stealer" (*manharan*) which also signifies contrastively against the "boys" (*ṭiflāñ*) and the "gazelles" (*ġhazālāñ*) as a female-gender active lover of Brajbhasha *rīti* poetry. There is a weak association as well between *haran* (acoustic resemblance with *hiran*, i.e. deer) and the gazelles, supported by the colloquial "*ban*" (forest). At the level of the proposition, a paradoxical relation may still be discerned between the heart's emptiness and the emptiness of both the desert and the city, the terrains of amorous interactions: since my heart is empty for want of a heart-stealer (first paradox: if the heart were stolen, there would be no heart), the city is as good as empty of boys and the forest of gazelles (second paradox: in the absence of love, actual presence appears as absence).

In each of these examples the 'traditional' theme is treated with the artifice of proposition building, in particular the paradox, disaggregating and segmenting its motific self-sufficiency.

The poetic proposition cites the theme, delinking it from an image repertoire and offering it in a repertoire of discursive fragments, presenting a perspective on its defining assumptions. The social meanings of this perspective are not given as commentary but signified in such internally riven metaphors as the city-gazelles. The docile, beautiful-eyed gazelles have become the irresistible threat of city-based desires. The hunted has walked into the city and become the hunter. When this innovation in the fiction of the gazelle motif appears in the voice of the ghazal's speaker (a latter-day alter-ego of legendary lovers like Majnun), it implies temporal distance between the time of the utterance and the eternality of the theme. The former is qualified by the metaphor of temporal existence, i.e. the city. The other half of this innovative image, the gazelles, is delicately rehabilitated in this new setting bearing both its older associations of beauty and the newer ones of preying and coercion. Taken together, the compound image, city-gazelles, specifies a temporally mediated, motific image of timeless reverberations.

The idealization of poetic language (*shāʿirī*) is paradoxically upheld by making it sharply converge with the contemporaneity of poetic utterance, manifested through a stock image from the repertoire of boy-love. In the examples above there is neither any lexical nor grammatical indication of the gender of the city-gazelles. However the structure of the paradox calls attention to a distinct literary history behind the motif. The archetypal lover Majnun, in the Arabic poetic tradition, is considered an actual person and poet. He is also one of the stereotypical figures of the *ʿuẕrī* mode of the Arabic love lyric (*ġhazal*) based on the idea of chaste, self-destroying, doomed love topographically situated in the desert. In contrast, the *ibāhī* mode reacted sharply against the *ʿuẕrī* by stressing the physical aspects of erotic union and its comparatively more urbane topoi. The Abbasid poet Abu Nuwas (AD 757–814) is remembered as one of the key

figures who produced a distinctively 'modern' amalgamation of both these modes. In particular his homoerotic ghazals (*muẕakkarāt*), which form part of his 'modern' style in its specification of a distinct taste for pederastic beauty, the boy-beloved is repeatedly referred to as a gazelle (*ẕaby*), a young gazelle (*ḳhishf*) and a fawn (*shādin*). The image is conventional enough by Abu Nuwas's time, as Philip Kennedy points out, that merely its "corollary features" are enough to invoke it.[236] He notes the parodic effect of this image in Abu Nuwas's poetry whose movement both thematically and structurally seems to parody chaste love. The boy-gazelle appears as murderous, overturning the image of chaste, innocent, defenceless love. It becomes a symbol precisely by unsettling the conventionality of the gazelle's symbolism of timidity. Composed in the distinctly urban settings of Kufa, Basra and Baghdad in the eighth century AD, the image partakes of an urban aesthetic of comportment and erotic desire. The "city-gazelles" of eighteenth-century Delhi invoke this subterranean 'modern' conventionalism of boy-gazelles to produce an ironic comment on the continuity of themes in the ghazal repertoire.[237] What appears as the socialized adjacency of ghazal motifs is disrupted by the symbols of a rampant, group sexuality of boys whose metaphoric correlation with gazelles both gives them both topical notoriety and timeless appeal. The location of this metaphoric innovation is significantly the city (*shahr*) which denotes a literary-historical memory about urban topography's externalizing

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[236] Philip F. Kennedy, *The Wine Song in Classical Arabic Poetry: Abū Nuwās and the Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002; reprint), 74.

[237] This plain-speaking yet ironizing treatment of the ghazal's motifs is not a one-off literary experiment. Yaqin's early rival, and almost exact contemporary Mīr Taqī Mīr takes the torsions in the gazelle motif opened up by Yaqin towards a new poetics crystallized in the self-consciously urbane and knowingly plangent voice of his poetic personae. Cf. the use of this motif in two *shiʿr*s by Mir:

čashm-e shōḳh sē us kē yārō kyā nisbat hai ġhazālōñ kō // dēkẖtē haiñ ham baṛā tafāvut shahrī aur gañvār kē bīč
[His sly eyes are beyond compare with gazelles // We perceive a huge disparity between the urban and the rustic]

shahr kī sī rahī raunaq usī sē jītē jī // mar gayā Qais jō tẖā ḳhāna-ḳhudā vādī kā
[The city-like bustle lasted while he lived; // Qais, the paterfamilias of the desert, has died.]

Mir holds the point of view of urbanity with a confidence that, according to Sayyid ʿAbdullāh citing these *shiʿrs*, inaugurates a new poetics of *shahriyyat* (urbanity) in the Urdu ghazal. The impetus for this new poetics, as I have shown, is not entirely Mir's invention. S. Abdullah, "Mīr kā iḥsās-e shahriyyat," in idem, *Naqd-e Mīr* (Lāhaur: Maktaba-e ḳhiyābān-e adab, 1968; third ed.), 314–16.

effects on the motifs and themes of the ghazal. This is a representational realm ("the city"), not to be confused as an empirical reality, in which the solidity of poetic motifs appears fragmented, producing a sense of perspective and shading. This is the objective manifestation of that style of ghazal practised by the great masters instantly recognizable as modern: an ironizing distance between poetic utterance and poetry, the search for layers of signification against the filigree of verbal signs and the subjective trace of the author in his composition.

The symmetrically patterned, compositionally paradoxical appearance of the 'new' ghazal in the mid-eighteenth century betrays social anxieties that were barely hidden in contemporary assessments of Yaqin's figure and poetry. In *taẕkira* literature, Yaqin is accused of plagiarizing (*sariqa*) Persian verses and his *dīvān* attributed to Mazhar's ghost authorship.[238] A figure no less than Mir is responsible for propagating these accusations in his *taẕkira*. Apart from obvious professional jealousy, for Mir came to Delhi as a young orphan when the poetry of Mazhar's circle was the rage, the charge of plagiarism has deeper implications. The Mazhar circle was not just a literary group but based on the strong initiation ties of the Naqshbandi Sufi *silsila*: Taban, Yaqin and Bayan owed personal allegiance to Mazhar, their Sufi guide. *Malfūẓāt* sources even hint at a specifically *amrad-parastī* relation between Yaqin and the master.[239] Mazhar and Taban's open dalliance is stuff of legends as shown in its portrayal in Azad's *Āb-e Ḥayāt*.[240] But the accusation is still very extreme because the trend for Persianizing poetry written in mixed colloquial speech (*rēḳhta*) was based, at least in part, on direct translations of themes, idioms and vocabulary from Persian models. Why single out Yaqin as a plagiarist?

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[238] Mīr, *Nikāt ush-shuʿarā* (1752), cited in Jalibi, *Tarīḳh-e adab-e urdū: jild duvum, ḥiṣṣa-e avval*, 375.

[239] *Malfūẓāt-e Shāh ʿAbdul ʿAzīz Dihlavī* and Muṣḥafī's *Taẕkira-e hindī*, cited in Farhat Fatima, "Muqaddama," *Dīvān-e Yaqīn*, 52.

[240] Azad, *Āb-e ḥayāt*, 133.

The charge of plagiarism relies on the notion of individual, original authorship. The earlier *īhām* style seems insured against deep plagiarism because verbal tricks, such as puns, could not be reproduced in the same way. Language in this case appeared to point to its own artifice, eluding any reference to authorial intentions or subjective expression. In consciously patterned compositions of Yaqin, the thematic realm comes to stand above localized instances of verbal play. The ironic play of not just stray linguistic tricks but of the poetic proposition itself makes real the conditions of authorial/scribal duplicity. This is one reason why in the manuscript tradition widely divergent variants are available for poets' *dīvāns* written during and after the eighteenth century. The charge of plagiarism comes to externally manage this problem of poetic composition by idealizing the meaningfulness of poetry without having to account for linguistic and verbal mediation. The emergence of the individual artist, as a corollary of this notion of plagiarism, rapidly attains its apotheosis in Mir, the very person who accused Yaqin of it, and who in turn was accused at least in one *taẕkira* of stealing others' *maẓmūns*.[241]

Closely related to this anecdotal charge of plagiarism, is the prospect of biographical individuation in the assessment of a poet's work. As we have seen in the word-album in the previous section, such individuation appears through highly conventionalized gestures whose effect is less the portrayal of individual traits than present individuality in the language of social normativity. The *taẕkira* corpus relates that Yaqin was murdered by his own father around 1755. He was twenty-eight at the time. Later *taẕkira* writers and literary historians have enumerated various explanations for this event, none of which accord with other. There is some consensus about the broad fact that his father was instrumental in his murder (it is not clear if he personally committed the act). His body was either dismembered and thrown in the river or put in a large vessel and buried. The reasons given are varied but most point to a sexual transgression,

[241] Jamil Jalibi, *Muḥammad Taqī Mīr* (Dihlī: Ējūkēshnal Pablishiñg Hāʾus, 1990; extended ed.), 37.

expressed euphemistically: 1. he committed an unspecified sexual transgression and was murdered by his father as punishment;[242] 2. his father wanted to have sex with Yaqin, at the recommendation of Mazhar, and Yaqin was murdered for resisting;[243] 3. Yaqin came upon his father having sex with his daughter, Yaqin's sister, which became the cause of his murder;[244] 4. Yaqin was enamoured of his father's slave-girl and the father murdered him for this transgression of class boundary.[245] Farḥat Fāṭima, the editor of his published *divan*, opts for the simple explanation that due to the prevalence of boy-love in Delhi at the time it is most likely that the transgression involved was homosexuality (*amradparastī*).[246] On the paternal side of his family, Yaqin belonged to the lineage of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, the Sufi mystic and religious reformer, partly explaining the family's strong claims to moral authority and possibly the fear of social disrepute.[247] There are reports of Yaqin's addiction to opium as well which had blighted his youthful, handsome visage.[248]

Like the charge of plagiarism, the accounts of his murder both individualize Yaqin as well as cut a figure determined by conventional social description. Yet despite the undecidability about the reasons for his murder, the repeated references to it in the *taẕkira* corpus, each time

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[242] ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Ḳhāñ, *Taẕkira-e gulzār-e Ibrāhīm* (1784) and Mardān ʿAlī Ḳhāñ, *Taẕkira-e gulshan-e suḳhan* (late eighteenth century), cited in Fatima, "Muqaddama," *Dīvān-e Yaqīn*, 46, 47.

[243] ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Ḳhāñ, *Taẕkira-e gulzār-e Ibrāhīm*, cited in ibid., 46. Also, Garcin de Tassy, *Histoire de la Littérature Hindouie et Hindoustanie: Tome troisième* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968; 1870 ed.), 308.

[244] Mīr Ḥasan, *Taẕkira-e shuʿarā-e urdū* (late eighteenth century), cited in Fatima, "Muqaddama," *Dīvān-e Yaqīn*, 47–48.

[245] Amrullāh Ilāhābādī, *Taẕkira-e masarrat afzā* (1778–1780), cited in Jalibi, *Tarīḳh-e adab-e urdū: jild duvum, ḥiṣṣa-e avval*, 377.

[246] Fatima, "Muqaddama," *Dīvān-e Yaqīn*, 47.

[247] Niśār Aḥmad Fārūqī has worked out Yaqin's family tree and states that he was a fifth-generation descendant of Sirhindi. His family tree also shows that Yaqin was married with at least five children. N.A. Faruqi, "Mīr aur Yaqīn," in idem. *Talāsh-e Mīr* (Naʾī Dihlī: Maktaba-e jāmiʿa, 1974), 124, 126.

[248] Lačẖmī Narāʾin Shafīq, *Taẕkira-e Čamanistān-e shuʿarā*, cited in Jalibi, *Tarīḳh-e adab-e urdū: jild duvum, ḥiṣṣa-e avval*, 376.

presented with a slight shift in causality and emphasis, reminds us of the movability of *maẓmūns* (motifs) in the new ghazal pioneered by Yaqin. A kernel of reality is emphasized by each *tazkira* writer trying his hand at constructing a proposition about his violent death. This kernel is not far-fetched or accidental because the operation of power in this pre-capitalist period was distinctly juridico-political, dispensed, on one hand, in the figure of the emperor over his family-like pyramid of officers and state functionaries,[249] and on the other, the father over the actual family based on strict gender segregation. The power over life and death belonged in strictly codified terms with the patriarchal father-figure. Thus in each of the explanations for his murder, a challenge is posed to the father's authority over his children's bodies and sexual behaviour. This view is most strongly hinted in the theory that the father wanted the son sexually, with the approval of the Sufi master, who himself is presented in historical sources as the practitioner of carnal *amradparastī*, and the son's resistance directly causing his murder. The public disposal of his body, in the case of dismembering and throwing into the river, marks the continuity of spectacles of execution and sanctioned public violence against transgressors of law and morality. The outline of this event strongly resembles the modern spectacle of "honour killing" both in 'traditional' and diasporic family units, which feminists like Uma Chakravarti and Pratiksha Baxi insist on calling "custodial killings" because they happen in the domestic sphere in which women and children are held in custodianship of the patriarch.[250] The present continuity of state-

[249] Quoting a *qaṣīda* by Saudā, Ishrat Haque notes that "the very presence of the monarch is a sufficient reason for his subjects to obey him." The idea of "sovereign authority" persists in the emperor. Haque, *Glimpses of Mughal Society and Culture: A Study Based on Urdu Literature in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1992), 51.

[250] Chakravarti points out that the earliest questioning of the category of "honour" appeared in the Pakistani women's movement in the 1980s, captured in a memorable slogan: "there is no 'honour' in killing." Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (Calcutta: Stree, 2003), 157. The argument about "honour" killings as "custodial" killings, and the larger implication of sexual governance in political governance, has been made by Chakravarti in "From fathers to husbands: Of love, death and marriage in North India," in L. Welchman and S. Hossain, eds. *'Honour': Crimes, Paradigms and Violence against Women* (London: Zed Books, 2005), 308–31; and

sanctioned custodial rapes and deaths of political prisoners and 'terrorists', especially women, and the 'traditionally' sanctioned killing of children and siblings for not respecting caste, class, and religious endogamies reveals the complementary operation of laws of sexual and political governance. The motif-like fixity and discursive latency in the references to Yaqin's murder may make the reality of the particular event recede from view but raise in relief, like in a cameo, a scene of social breakdown which requires the exemplary murder and dismemberment of the figure of transgression. In Yaqin's biography, the obviousness of sexual transgression, leading to murder, needs no specification of sexual orientation or authentication of independent observation to highlight the repeatability of such punitive violence on a broad social scale. Dwelling solely on the continuity of traditions of homosexual tolerance, the superficial empiricism of LGBT historical scholarship completely ignores how continuous traditions are constituted precisely by denying, even annihilating, the bodies and desires of sexually transgressive figures. In the din of celebrating sexually tolerant pasts, the very point of LGBT history writing is compromised as the historical prejudices against non-normative sexuality become invisibilized by such patently absurd claims that precolonial South Asian societies, unlike the "Christian" west, never executed anyone for their sexual preferences.[251]

Conclusion

Much before LGBT historiography's celebration of it, *amradparastī* proved to be a historical mirror for all those poetic traditions that versified its poetic themes. Something in its image connoted the shifting quality of temporal life. Commenting almost a century and a half after the

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Pratiksha Baxi, Shirin M. Rai and Shaheen Sardar Ali, "Legacies of Common Law: 'Crimes of Honour' in India and Pakistan," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 7 (2006), 1239–53.

[251] Vanita, "Preface" to Vanita and Kidwai, eds. *Same-Sex Love in India*, xviii.

death of Abu Nuwas, in a prefatory note to the *muẕakarrāt* section of his compilation of the poet's *dīvān,* Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. *c*. AD 972) finds it important to explain Abu Nuwas's taste for writing poetry about boys. He asserts that it was the Abbasid takeover of the Arabian Caliphate that brought with it from the East the practice of sodomy (*livāṭ*).[252] The Umayyads practiced love for women, but the foreigners, especially due to their martial bearings, took to loving boys or slave-boys (*ġhilmān*).[253] Such 'historical' theories about the practice of boy-love suggest a permodern logic of literary and historical periodization. In this logic, cultural admixture is always a sign of decadence and miscegenation, even when pederasty is sexually non-reproductive. This is partly because the ascendance of pederastic tastes always arise within the context of army-life and the threat of military action by a powerful external force against the familiar, heterosexual cultural core to which the observer owes allegiance. In subsequent conquests, in areas familiar with the boy-love poetic image, it becomes a self-evident symbol of the dilution of cultural purity and the ascendance of foreign rule. Thus, in Persian contexts it is the ascendance of Turkic rule that is seen to introduce pederastic practices. An additional feature of this historical logic is the idea of a racially distinctive beauty of males. The image of the Turk (*turk*) famously appears in Persian and later Urdu poetry as a metonym for the beloved, both martial and beautiful in his demeanour.

Almost a millennium after al-Isfahani's rationalizing boy-love historically, Shiblī Nuʿmānī (1857–1914), the South Asian reformist critic, in his history of Persian poetry, repeats the same historicist rationality to explain how this theme came to pervade Persian and Persianate poetic traditions. While he makes clear his repugnance for this theme and practice, he ventures

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[252] Abu Nuwas, *Dīvān Abī Nuvās al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī al-Ḥakamī: al-juzʾ ar-rābiʿ*, ed. Gregor Schoeler (Beirut and Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003), 141.

[253] Ibid.

into it for the sake of truthful description (*vāqiʿa nigārī*).[254] He quotes classical Arabic sources to establish the historicity of the view that the Persians 'invented' boy-love and passed it on to the conquering Arabs as sort of a cultural Trojan horse. The Persians themselves discovered the attractiveness of boys from the abundance of Turkish slaves and wine-servers (*sāqīs*) in their country and due to the racial beauty of Turkish boys. He acknowledges that romanticism (*ʿishqparastī*) in poetry could only be sanctioned paradoxically by the topoi of boy-love (*amradparastī*) since references to women and their sexuality were forbidden by gender-segregation norms.[255] However the popularity of this erotic taste led to the direct weakening of cultural and political insitutions and both Persia and Baghdad consequently were overrun by the Tartars (*tātārī*).[256] Shibli is writing in a period that witnessed the crystallization of the modern homosexuality taboo but which clearly draws on antique prejudices that bring with them their own historical rationalities. One effect of imagining the historical relevance of the prejudice against boy-love is the naturalization of gender segregation as the essential factor in the preservation of 'Islamic' polities. Foreign threats appear both as sexual and counter-cultural threats to the essentially heterosexual core of Islamic civilization. When applied to the reformist context of defending the internal consistency of a 'Muslim' community in colonial India, the criticism of the boy-love repertoire becomes an internal limit for shoring up the truly authentic aspects of poetic and cultural traditions. The historical logic implies that all the great 'Islamic' traditions are traversed by some aspect of boy-love imagery, and thus to reach at the essential core, the question of boy-love must be confronted. This of course means denying any contemporary reality to its themes and implied practices, therefore strenghtening the

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[254] Shibli, *Shʿir ul-ʿajam: jild čahārum*, 125.

[255] Ibid., 128.

[256] Ibid., 128, 133.

contemporary taboo against male same-sex relations by historically distancing them as part of traditional image repertoires.

It is not as if LGBT historiography has rid itself of all vestiges of the 'colonial' taboo against homosexuality, which it accuses indigenous historians and intellectuals of harbouring. Treatments of the image of boy-love betray a distinct uneasiness about modern researches in child sexuality and the social realities of sexual violence against children. One aspect of the reliance on poetic data for making assertions about the historical relevance of the category "same-sex desire" is the emphasis on wholesome declarations of homoeroticism. The LGBT historian shadowboxes with the 'homophobic' critic who insists on seeing precolonial homoerotic relations as exploitative relations between age, class and status differentiated participants, i.e. the aristocratic man and boys. The assertion of wholesomness predetermines historical materials to reveal a conception of same-sex love unmarked by the particulars of age, economic exchange, or even conventions of beauty. The term "paedophilia" haunts this anxious defensiveness and points to the institution of a new taboo on the logics of the old.[257] No doubt the homophobic allegation against homosexual desire of sexually violating or 'recruiting' young persons needs to be thoroughly debunked. But the logic for doing this must not reproduce the same ideology in which homosexual desire signifies unnatural, unimaginable, and death-dealing desires in individualized subjects. This is precisely what happened in the recent campaign (first initiated in 1991) against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (which criminalizes all forms of, forced or consensual, "carnal intercourse against the order of nature") by LGBT groups working in India. The campaign's focus shifted from a repeal of the statute to its "reading down" in order

[257] Cf. the authors' skittishness about the 'pedophilic' insinuations in Perso-Urdu literary history in Kidwai, "Introduction," in Vanita and Kidwai, ed. *Same-Sex Love in India*, 121; and Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 60.

to preserve the criminal culpability of "child abusers."[258] This strategic shift signifies the LGBT campaign's assent to the implicit logic of unnaturalness that now applies only to "child abuse." The boy (*amrad*) comes to mind here as an image that cannot be accommodated in the historical memory of LGBT lives because it signifies paedophilia (unnaturalness), although it still constitutes in part the historical salience of same-sex desires and their traditional continuities. In this double erasure, the contemporary salience of LGBT childhoods, indeed of childhood itself as the formative force in sexual becoming, is suppressed by the emphasis on the wholesome meeting of socially unmarked adult bodies and desires in the plenitude of conjugal, homoerotic bliss.

As I have tried to show in this chapter, for excavating historical forms of sexual desire the aura of premodern "practices" (*askesis*) is a temptation that needs to be argumentationally resisted. It is this aura that makes sexual prejudices appear as univocal antagonists of a freely conducted, subjectively significant sexual practice. In this opposition between prejudice and practice a historically inaccurate picture of homosexual lives and desires emerges. The idea that homosexuality is a denial of heterosexuality and vice versa is a recent view arising from the birth of a modern homosexual taboo. The modernity of this taboo is due not to its western birth but its

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[258] A demand for complete repeal is voiced in some campaign documents, such as Voices Against 377, "Section 377 and Child Sexual Abuse," in Nivedita Menon, ed. *Sexualities* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2007), 312–15. While doing some soul-searching about the immanent conservatism of a campaign based on defending rights to 'privacy' and preserving the category 'unnatural,' Gautam Bhan affirms the political exigency of the campaign for reading down the statute. Bhan, "Challenging the Limits of Law: Queer Politics and Legal Reform in India," in Narrain and Bhan, eds. *Because I Have a Voice: Queer Politics in India* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2005), 40–48. Yet there is no attempt at imagining or challenging the limits of "queer" politics itself, which seems to be struggling on the one hand, for formalized *sexual* identification of LGBT people (the right to have consensual sex with adults), and on the other, the attenuation of their stigmatized *sexual* identification which is the cause of violence against children, hijras, and gender-troubled people. While extra-legal homophobic valuations may trail after the law, this "queer" politics' engagement with the law easily affirms these homophobic valuations in the name of political exigency and legal strategizing. Although piously invoking the women's movement, the LGBT argument fails to take note of the sexual overdetermination of women as subjects, objects and image, without which we cannot account for the construction of gay, lesbian and transgender subjects as the bearers of *sexualized* excess and social negativities. If the point of class struggle is to abolish class differences, and of feminism to neutralize gender difference, then "queer" politics keeps reinforcing and encouraging sexual identification rather than working to dismantle it.

coherence around naturalized aspects of "indigenous" traditions. It erupts on the social skin in the form of a colonial literary controversy about the theme of boy-love in the Urdu ghazal, calling attention to the importance of poetry and its rhetorical moves as gestures of social organization. A part of this ideological programme for poetry is positing sexuality as illusory and presenting its material correlatives as merely aesthetic conventions. But in the realm of poetry this illusory category is continuously deployed for precisely its materializing effects for a socio-historical here and now, as a gesture of authorial individuation, as principle of literary historical periodization and as hermeneutic foothold in justifying a transcendental realm of poetic reference. This fine balance between sexuality's corporeal referents and its idealistic aspirations, i.e. its ideological justification, is, however, disturbed at precisely those moments when the concept of poetry becomes inadequate for its practitioners in a given historical period. My focus on one such moment from the age of the classical ghazal has revealed the formation of the modern ghazal aesthetic along the faultline, and not a self-evident binary of tolerance and persecution, of the historically real implications of homosexual desire: transgressive desire *and* violent social retribution.

PART II

Chapter Three

Love of Boys: The formation of an erotic repertoire

In the evolutionary narrative of Urdu literary history the nineteenth century marks the maturation of a style whose exemplarity can only be termed "classical". This achievement is largely credited to two figures recognized as individual geniuses in whose work classical form appears as the fortuitous synthesis of earlier flashes of poetic brilliance: Mirzā Ġhālib (1797–1869) and Mīr Anīs (1802–1874). While Ghalib's achievement is valued more because he wrote in the dominant mode of the Persian and Urdu ghazal, Anis's poetry has become synonymous with the *marṡiya* or elegy commemorating the persona of Imām Ḥusain and the events surrounding his death at the battle of Karbala in AD 680. This canonical interest in the two poets, repeated in twentieth-century literary histories, can be traced to the reformist critics of the late nineteenth century.

While Ḥālī's biography of Ghalib (*Yādgār-e Ġhālib* [1897]) presents the life and writings of the poet in the form of an exemplary biography, his treatise on poetics, the *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, celebrates Anis as one of the exemplars of the school of "natural" (*nēčaral*) poetry. For him, the work of these canonized poets expresses the immanence of the "natural" (spontaneous, unaffected, de-eroticized) style within the tradition of the Urdu ghazal.[259] This assessment of Anis's *marṡiya*s (clearly ignoring his ghazals and *rubāʿiyāt*) can be found in several twentieth-century critics of classical poetry as well.[260] The generic stability of the

[259] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr-o-shāʿirī*, ed. Vaḥīd Quraishī (ʿAlīgaṛẖ: Ējūkēshnal Buk Hāʾūs, 2011), 231.

[260] See, for example, Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984; second ed.).

marṡiya, its thematic consistency and devotional mood, establishes, allegorically and generically, the eternal groundwork for imagining the literary tradition. However, the literary-historical idealization of the *marṡiya* negates the particular mode of idealization through which the poem is built. Upholding the world-literary emphasis in Orientalized histories of South Asian vernaculars, such demarcations of genre fashion a blueprint to which poetic expression is cut to size and reproduced as literary-historical fact.

The Urdu *marṡiya* does not simply narrate the events of the battle of Karbala but produces a ritualistic presentation and memorialization of the key figures of the Karbala story. The *sarāpā*, the head-to-toe invocation of the beloved's attributes, is one of the conventional thematic segments of the ideal *marṡiya*, describing the physical attributes of the poem's central character. It puts together a conventional description of the hero of the story in terms reminiscent of the ghazal. In Anis's *marṡiya* that begins "yā rab čaman-e naẓm kō gulzār-e iram kar" (first printed in 1877), the *sarāpā* evokes the beauty of the infant Ḥusain born to Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet:

dō nūr kē dariyā kō jō ham nē kiyā ik jā // tab us sē hūā gauhar-e nāyāb yi paidā
tauqīr mēñ bē-miṡl shujāʿat mēñ hai yaktā // ab aur na hōgā kōʾī is ḥusn kā laṛkā [261]
[When we gathered the river of two lights
from that this unattainable pearl was born
Honoured unlike any, incomparable in bravery
Never again, a boy of such beauty.]

The hyperbolic tone turns the reference to the incomparable beauty of Husain unremarkable. The speaker is ventriloquizing the divine voice priding itself on its creation. But, while each hemistich presents a metaphorical substitute connoting the incomparable being of Husain or praises abstract qualities of his character, the statement about the finality of his beauty *as* a boy

[261] Mir Anis, "*Marṡiya I*", in Sayyid Murtaẓā Ḥusain Fāẓil Lakẖnavī, ed. *Muntaḳhab marāṡī-e Anīs* (Lāhaur: Majlis-e taraqqī-e adab, 2010; second ed.) strophe 53: 57.

abandons metaphoric substitution. On one hand, the attributes of "honour" (*tauqīr*) and "bravery" (*shujāʿat*) proleptically announce a virtuous adult hero, on the other, the subsequent characterization freezes the image of the hero as a beautiful boy-icon. What valuation is intended in the hyperbolic statement that no other boy of comparable beauty will ever be born? This would also mean asking: why is the beauty of the hero-as-boy a measure of his worth?

To answer these questions satisfactorily we will have to trace the surfacing, elaboration, dispersal and displacement of the boy-vignette in the Urdu ghazal's erotic idiom, a task I will attempt in this chapter. It is however clear from Anis's lines that the conventions of devotional praise and a particularly aesthetic evaluation (through a sensuous attention directed at the figure of a young boy) of the object of praise coexist in the basic unit of the poem's stanzaic divisions. The conventionality of the idioms of praise in the first three hemistichs allows us to safely assume that even the image of the beautiful boy is similarly *conventional*. Otherwise the artifice of the poem breaks down and we are left with a de-idealizing (de-metaphorizing) image of an attractive boy who is Imam Husain.

The 1877 edition of this *marsiya*, the editor Fāẓil Lakẖnavī notes, had changed the word *laṛkā* with *paidā* thus producing a refrain (*radīf*) of the first verse. The resulting line still preserves the word "*ẖusn*" (beauty) but obscures the gender of this beauty ("no other *creature* of such beauty will ever be born"). It can be argued that the emendation 'corrects' the verse in line with an attribute-less devotion so that the objectification of the hero through a generality becomes possible. Or is this a "Victorian" gesture arising out of moral panic about the publication of the text of a canonical *marsiya* that portrays the hero Husain as an incomparably beautiful boy? It may feel instinctually correct for an antihomophobic critic to arrive at this conclusion, but this would still beg the question of the content of what is lost in this emendation.

The 1877 emendation then, irrespective of its editorial intentions, points to a disruption in the absorption of poetic material into the new rationality and morality of literature. It is too slight for a conventional literary history's notice, interested in smooth transitions at the level of content embodied in the repeated familiarity of genre and governed by the unvarying rules of literature. Yet it is the indexical properties of literary content, such as iconicity, allegory and irony, that reveal the historical points of contestation in the very definition of literature. The example from Anis shows that poetic language itself comes to be divided against and freighted with the erotic image as an archaicizing element. But this does not mean that the past is sacrosanct or to be consumed without manipulation, even for its most straight-faced devotees. The erotic image disrupts claims made by retrospective literary history for the self-containment of the poetic tradition, because of the constant need, arising paradoxically from its conspicuously iconic appearances, for explaining its various historical appearances. This situation is concretized, for instance above, in the slightness of textual variations as the desire for the authentic text of a 'classical' poet or, as shown in Part I of the dissertation, in the reformist reorientation of signs of premodern sexuality for the modern experience of literature. And still the erotic does not die a historical death, freighted as it is with the demand for explaining its ideological viability both at the level of image and discourse: thus, for example, the conventionality of all the descriptors of the hero's attributes presumes repeatability and conveys indisputability of the interpenetration of the erotic and the devotional. While the conventionalized figure of iconic sexuality (the boy) does not cast enough narrative shadow for us to make out its contemporary social correlatives, which may shorten our figurative and historical distance from it, its conventionality and therefore repeatability alerts us to cultural knowledges that are indexed in the figuration. It is this body of

presumed cultural knowledges, expressed often as merely a figurative effects, that I call the erotic.

In this chapter I will propose ways of reading the historical movements of the erotic in the easily assumed premodern unity of the "classical" ghazal. I will demonstrate these, first, by presenting recent historiographical debates about the South-Asian eighteenth century, the period of the birth of both Urdu and its classical ghazal tradition, in which the question of literature becomes the faultline between empiricist social historiography and a colonialist mimetic prejudice against "Oriental" literary forms. By showing links between non-ghazal *rēḳhta* writings of Jaʿfar and the much-maligned ghazal of the *īhām* set (Abru and Naji, in particular) I will argue that it is the history of such mimetic prejudices that blocks our understanding of the rhetorical choices and linguistic play characterizing "early" sources of the "tradition." Focusing on the links between vernacularization (the rise of "early Urdu") and the continuity of erotic themes in the poetic mainstream of the ghazal I hope to show the unevenness of poetic development as notches of historical fractures through and in which the ghazal form reproduces itself.

"Rectilinear simplicity"

The conventional view of this century as a period of economic stagnation, social breakdown and civilizational decline was first established by imperialist writers such as Alexander Dow (d. 1779), Charles Grant (d. 1823), James Mill (d. 1836) and their modern followers like Percival Spear. The nationalist school tends to favour this view in order to highlight the achievements of bourgeois nationalism beginning in the late nineteenth century. The Marxist view, represented by the Aligarh school of historians such as Irfan Habib, Satish Chandra and M. Athar Ali, highlights

the breakdown of a dominant economic system and its chaotic aftermath exacerbated by the mercantilist–colonialist wars of the European trading companies against local powers. These historians argue that the centralized revenue-based state of the Mughals broke down because of the stretching of agricultural-surplus extraction to the limits leading to large-scale immiseration of the peasant. The Marxist view does favour a picture of economic stagnation and associated cultural decline. However the momentous break, in this view, in historical trends is the victory of direct colonial rule by the middle of the nineteenth century. More recently, the growing tide of discontent with the Marxist and nationalist narrative of decline has consolidated in the form of the revisionist school of historians, also known as the Cambridge School. The revisionist historians have produced extensive economic and social histories of the period highlighting the rise of a new "intermediate" economy (an intermediate class of merchants, bankers and tradesmen between the warrior elite and the village economy) which changed social relations of production.[262] There have also been attempts to argue for the continued revenue extraction and general prosperity under the successor states of the Mughal Empire.[263] A picture of vibrant cultural production also emerges from their accounts.

The sharply divided lines between the political positions on the historiography of the eighteenth century implies that each position, and its corresponding historian, is after the same object. It is perhaps because of the easily identifiable, because often polarly antagonistic, camps

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[262] The most important representative and originator of this view about new social groups is C.A. Bayly in his influential *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003; second impression). The "school" is no longer confined to the Cambridge set of historians but include scholars from a wide variety of locations and specializations: Burton Stein, David Washbrook, David Ludden, Muzaffar Alam, Richard Barnett, Andre Wink, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Seema Alavi.

[263] "The disappearance of the Mughal imperial check actually allowed ruling groups to establish a closer hold over the peasantry, artisans and inferior trading groups. It was no so much that the state had weakened more that landlords, merchants and financiers had inherited the state." Bayly, "Epilogue to the Indian Edition," *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 497.

that a singular object of study has paradoxically and slowly formed around the centennial period of this last 'precolonial' century. This has also circumscribed the agenda for debate around the base of social determination: an overarching economic mode of production to explain the features of social exchange, *versus* individual, local phenomena, thought to be more pertinent as categories of analysis for an early modern society, woven together to reflect the segmentation of a society transitioning, more or less peaceably, into colonial modernity. This common agenda, disavowed sharply in revisionist thought in its claim to recover "actual indigenous Indian pragmatism and realism from the ground up,"[264] restricts writing history to the properly 'social' axes of state power, logics of group formation and modes of economic domination, whose expression, again in revisionist historiography, is assumed to shine through, without any mediation, from the surface of their sources.

While blaming Marxist historiography for over-reliance on elitist views inscribed in Mughal state documents, Persian chronicles and revenue records, revisionist methodology relies on a counterprejudice in its choice of more 'popular' texts and middle-level group formations. C.A. Bayly's work on the rise of the occupation and religion-based "corporation" as the sign of the rise of a new "intermediate" economy has pioneered this shift away from assumptions of elite Mughal historiography. In its effort to minimize the supposed effects of the breakdown of empire on social formations, revisionists, following Bayly, have provided neat vignettes of social intercourse in which lineaments of power and coercion are minimized and bracketed outside the reality of social interactions. In particular, questions of caste distinctions and caste as a repository of socio-economic power in this period are diminished in what appears to be a properly Eurocentric division between civil and political rationality. Thus, focusing on social groups outside ruling warrior elites and literate classes dependent on them, Bayly contends that

[264] Richard Barnett, "Introduction," in idem, ed. *Rethinking Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 22.

caste and religious denominations were not divisive forces in the eighteenth century but rather helped develop new "mercantile and urban solidarities."[265] This instrumentalized version of two deep-rooted aspects of social division in South Asia puts in place a political rationality of the "people" who are formed before their socialization into the hardcoding of hierarchical, caste-based society. The running strain in these mirror-inverted categorizations of such modern phenomena as caste and religious community (as only a loose collection of outer signifiers of social differentiation) is the deep mistrust of "culture" and "discourse" as anthropological categories that merely describe and not explain processes of change.[266] This banishment of culture (and in some versions of this position, specifically of literary and artistic forms of expression) from the historical field is achieved only after an internal division of social forms into their economic–political consequentiality and their non-reactive, merely personal facticity. Thus, for example, after claiming a non-reactive, flexible operation of caste in this period, Bayly notes parenthetically that inter-caste relations were operative *except* in "spheres of marriage and formal interdining."[267] He adds that caste might have hindered common "civic relations" but it did not rule out the possibility of "political solidarity": "There seems no reason why the common table and marriage alliance should be the only basis of corporate activity, as Weber assumes."[268]

This raises the question: if caste was not a tight-knit institution as described by anthropology for subsequent periods, what relevance, and it is already assumed that "marriage" and "interdining" are not relevant to the political-economic realm proper, could its distinctions have for an internal account of the processes of change in this century? In other words, if the

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[265] Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 175.

[266] Ibid., 480.

[267] Ibid., 181.

[268] Ibid., 189.

discursive realm, i.e. the realm of representations, narrative and symbolism, is "merely" a repository of illusions about static, ideal utopias, what epistemological value could the division between a civic and political rationality possibly have in this period?[269] For an argument based so strongly on social segmentation, a process in which the moral, economic and philosophical reorientation of a whole society is captured, its lack of interest in the modes of social ascription (for those who do not like the word "representation") on which all kinds of (class, caste and gender) agency depend, betrays its asocial determinism. This is no oversight of methodology but a stated goal of revisionist historiography to posit undistorted, by elite interests and centralized economic logics, conceptual categories such as the "individual" versus "society," and the self-fulfilment of history in "real life". Questions of caste, gender and sexuality, indeed of social configurations in which people's lives and experiences are formed, are not even posed in revisionism's unstated faith in categories of bourgeois thought such as the private individual, public reason and civil society.

While social history refuses to transact with the narrative and representational domains, the particulars of "culture" are reduced to "material" features of social life. Hermann Goetz is cited frequently in revisionist literature as a rare example of a historian of South Asia who pays attention to the vibrant cultural practices of the century without decrying its cultural and economic decline. Goetz does not deny that the ruling classes of the period were decadent (morally and culturally) and insists that cultural efflorescence has nothing to do with structures of power and resource extraction. He writes:

[269] Seema Alavi insists that postcolonial studies, inaugurated by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, "[construct] British India and a colonized 'other' as being *merely narrative productions* within the discourse of colonial domination" [emphases added]. Alavi, Introduction to *The Eighteenth Century in India*, ed. Alavi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40–41.

> [T]he social and moral zenith of a civilisation does not coincide with the flourishing of its material and aesthetic accomplishments; the highest refinement of the latter is attained rather when the first are already in a rapid decay.[270]

This Hegelian-sounding proposition works with a basic division of moral and aesthetic achievements. While morality and the aesthetic become compasses for locating a civilization's historical orientation, the two categories are radically separated in the idealization of political governance (as morality) and artistic production (as aesthetics). This delinks "culture" from other aspects of reality (economy, governance, morality). Goetz then goes on to show through discrete material objects such as dress, painting, pottery and weaponry the unified composition of this culture. He views these objects as producing a different economy ("an unreal atmosphere") of "embodied sentiment" and "excitement of the senses" into which social consciousness could escape the decadence of political life.[271] In so far as the domain of culture is defined as the opposite of politics and social relations, it continues to beg the question of the objective unity of a historical period. Thus, the revisionist position conceives culture as an accumulation of objects which do not participate in social relations. In this way, it creates a domain of social experience, which cannot be explained or accounted for within its conception of social formations in history.

The revisionist consensus provides the broad intellectual background for the persistence and domination of a mimetic frame of reference for premodern literary artefacts. This functional view of writing, not only makes writing and expression invisible as social practices, but turn all written material into a matter of qualitatively different genres of records. Thus, revenue records, private memoirs, mystical treatises, biographical compendia, digests of royal proclamations, account books of merchants are slotted in pre-given spheres of social life as representative

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[270] Hermann Goetz, Lecture 1 "The Crisis of Indian Civilisation in the Eighteenth Century and Early Nineteenth Centuries" in *The Crisis of Indian Civilisation in the Eighteenth Century and Early Nineteenth Centuries: The Genesis of Indo-Muslim Civilisation* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1938), 5.

[271] Ibid. 17.

instances of the social reality of each sphere manifesting itself in historical prominence. The notion of aesthetic autonomy, often premised on the elite social background of such writing, becomes just another principle of demarcating genres of writing according to their social provenance. We might as well speak of the economic autonomy of revenue records or the subjective autonomy of memoirs and life-writings. The incapability of thinking the social is thus encoded in this mimetic prejudice against writing as a transparent medium for a pre-given social reality.

Literary forms are accretions of writing practices some of which continue while others have lost their relevance for us. A knowledge of such practices cannot be recovered without understanding the historical breadth under the appearance of stable forms. But this breadth cannot be mined from external periodization of literary history that chime with prominent events of political history or changes in the organization of society. For mapping it aesthetic categories will have to be exposed to the enfoldings, dispersals, and inversions of a history through which they appear legible to us. The history of the ghazal, in its most influential versions, remains under the shadow of the archivalist spirit of nineteenth-century Orientalism, treating its form and extant writing as embers of a past, understandable only in terms of a stable definition of its formal features and thematic preoccupation. All deviations from this definition, prominently visible in its 'early' premodern examples, are imperfect origins whose unfinished quality heralds the achievement of full form (and its associated cultural-aesthetic embodiment of sensibility, thought and morality) in the present. In this teleological view, *both* ends of the process, premodern and contemporary, are reflections of the final form that began then and completed now. The eighteenth century, already the battleground for the historiography of South Asia, forms the backdrop for this earliest antecedent of the modern ghazal, since it is also the century

of "Urdu," in whose gradual coming into being linguistically, as the single claimant for the literary mantle of north-Indian speech, the ghazal's aesthetic unity and self-sufficiency was secured. In the rest of this chapter I will examine this purported originary moment through representative father figures, and their particular inhabiting of the themes and linguistic choices in which later generations recognized characteristics of their own poetic and social lineaments.

The challenge of *īhām*

Twentieth-century studies of the ghazal in both Urdu and English have relied on producing a list of illustrative vignettes to explain the topography of its world. In their view, the ghazal conjures an alternative world which may be described only through conventional perspectives (e.g. expressed through the male voice of the *ʿāshiq* or the lover) and strictly coded interrelationships (e.g. the *maḥbūb/maʿshūq* or the beloved should be presented at a respectful distance from the speaker). Seen through these vignettes, the various imaginary scenarios encountered in the compact two-line format of the *shiʿr* or *bait* appear to be fragments of a coherent back story.[272] This interpretive strategy is one basis for the dominant frame of reading the ghazal as a lyric form in which inner introspection (always around affective pulses of a romantic state) develops against the background of an external world of action and social bustle. The narratability of the ghazal vignettes is however part of a distinct historical moment, colonial reformism, in which the formal features of the ghazal were reclassified as historical accretions of an embodied, essential cultural spirit. This was the same moment when the homoerotic vignettes attained a social life of their own, sharply orienting poetic practice and its criticism towards a concern about gender and sexual morality and conditions of the 'Muslim' linguistic community. The differentiation of a poetic universe into its continuous vignette-like terrains was therefore a product of the

[272] Qāẓī Afẓāl Ḥusain, *Mīr kī shiʿrī lisāniyāt* (Dihlī: ʿArshiya Pablīkēshanz, 2010; second ed.), 66.

emergence of the ghazal as a collection of 'fragmentary' poetic compositions (*shiʿr* or *bait*), which became its identification for all times.

The ghazal form has perpetuated these interpretive vignettes because in them the form is seen to reproduce itself. Each generation recognizes the ghazal as the same old form that versifies the "*gul o bulbul*" (rose and nightingale) themes.[273] In them a palpable connection with the older, parallel tradition of the Persian ghazal is secured. This reiterability of its vignettes has produced the notion of a unified ghazal object. But this strategy of framing readings around vignette frames takes as premise what it purports to explain: how does the ghazal form reproduce the relation between historical readers and the objects embodied in it? The conventional answer is that the story-fragments, i.e. vignettes, versified through the protocols of metre (*baḥr*), rhyme (*qāfiya*) and linguistic usage (Persian-inflected diction) arise from an automaton that keeps working alongside but apart from historical processes.

A standardized picture of linguistic development emerges from the generation-to-generation stability of the ghazal's formal features. Histories of the "Urdu" ghazal inevitably have to tackle the reality of premodern linguistic non-standardization and hybridity in whose multi-veined circulation the ghazal form also passed into the light of modernity. A distinct

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[273] Cf. the connotation of triteness implied in the phrase "rose and nightingale" (*gul o bulbul*) in two different historical contexts: (i) In E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), after his triumphal acquittal in the rape trial, Dr. Aziz is asked by a Hindu editor of a nationalist magazine to contribute one of his Urdu verses. Aziz wonders if his sort of poetry would go down well with 'nationalist' (i.e. with majoritarian tastes) readers, and the editor replies: "And for that reason, if I may say so, do not introduce too many Persian expressions into the poem, and not too much about the bulbul." Here, the phrase implies the outmodedness of Persianate poetry in Urdu, and its palpable detachment not just from society, but more precisely nationalist society. The ghazal form, from the perspective of an English writer looking at the Indian "situation" in the 1920s as a concerned observer, is a gesture of accommodation for Muslim sentiments, although without the full panoply of its sectarian identifying markings. Forster, *A Passage to India*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 251. (ii) In *c*. 1752, in his notice for the poet Tābāñ, Muhammad Taqi "Mir" assesses the former's poetry through the same identifying phrase: "har čand-e ʿarṣa-e suḳhan-e ū hamīñ dar lafẓhā-e gul o bulbul tamām ast" [Much as the expanse of his poetry (is), it's over with the 'rose and nightingale' words.]. In this case, ghazal composition is distinguished from its vignette-like imagery which may threaten to become, in the case of a weak poet, a self-enclosing conventionalism. In both instances, an external conceptualization of the ghazal turns its internal features (iconically stable) into historical notches through which political and aesthetic judgements can be made. Mir, *Nikāt ush-shuʿarā, yaʿnī taẕkira-e shuʿarā-e urdū* (Badāyūñ: Niẓāmī Press, n.d.), 115.

problem for historians of "early Urdu" is the geographical spread of its speakers that makes havoc of the strict correlation between community (Muslim) and linguistic usage. Moreover, the north-India centrism of ghazal histories has had to inevitably resolve the "southern" (Gujarat, the Maratha country, and the Muslim Deccan kingdoms) origins of lexical and grammatical forms that we now instantly recognize as Urdu. Paradigm-shifting arguments from Abu Muhammad Sahar and Shamsur Rahman Faruqi have questioned this north-India centrism arguing for a more participatory model for the development of Urdu. They have resurfaced older *names* of the language ("Gujrī," "Hindī", "Hindavī", "Dakanī" and *rēḳhta*) to describe the synchronous developments in a geographically expansive area from Delhi to Karnataka. However, merely acknowledging diversity has done little to tuck in the strands of counter-developments, undifferentiated unities and continuous non-standardized usages that are visible everywhere in the history of "early Urdu." Faruqi acknowledges individual instances of this problem of non-standardization, for example, in his view of *rēḳhta*, the splicing of Persian sentence structures with north-Indian linguistic forms, as an impediment to the development of "Urdu" proper in early eighteenth-century north India.[274] Confining linguistic intermixing to literary game-playing or to vagaries of larger historical forces such as the choice of a particular vernacular by mobile groups of Sufi missionaries (such as "Dakani" in the Deccan kingdoms in the fourteenth century) has meant the further desocialization of linguistic phenomena and practices of writing. To steer one's way through this premodern linguistic mélange, the sureties of the ghazal form provide a measure of historical stability although it is possible that the reiterability of its formal features could have been put to very different uses under premodern assumptions about linguistic unevenness and cultural identity.

[274] S.R. Faruqi, *Urdū kā ibtidāʾī zamāna: adabī tahẕīb va tarīḳh kē pahlū* (Naʾī Dihlī: Maktaba jāmiʿa, 2001), 116.

The domain of the erotic offers one kind of conception of the rhetorical power of these early poetic forms as disrupting their merger into a purely linguistic, disembodied moral essence. This power is attested in the prominently secular, non-religious, orientation of vernacular experiments among the earliest Hindi/Hindvi writers of the Deccan in the fifteenth century. The earliest extant poem from this period, the *maṡnavī* "Kadam rāʾō padam rāʾō" (*c*. 1421–1434), in Faruqi's words, may have "a moral of sorts, [but] it is basically a poem about kingcraft, miscegenation, worldly learning, magic and mystery." He considers it self-consciously "literary" due to the poet's interest in reflecting on the technique of his art: "A poem that doesn't have // Dual-meaning words, // Such a poem does not // Attract anyone at all — // A poem without // words of two senses."[275] This early emphasis on the enchantment of duality of verbal signifiers points to the value of rhetorical illusionism. The repeated use of twinned meaning in later Dakani and "early Urdu" poetry, as signs of poetic craftsmanship, hints at a commonly shared view of the enchanting properties of poetic language. The secular orientation of these early attempts at vernacular writing designates an intervening zone between the hard matter of language and its codification in the universalisms of religion and mysticism. This intervening domain, whose lineaments surface in the vernacularizing centuries as modes of enchantment, magic and social miscegenation, may be termed erotic, denoting both the worlding powers of rhetoric and the unreliability of worldly knowledges. While it is difficult to conceive of this term as a conceptual blanket covering the expansive din of premodern linguistic heterogeneity, I offer it here as one possible ground of interaction between "early Urdu" poetry and its discarded, uneven, and unpolished ancestors and siblings.

[275] S.R. Faruqi, "A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part I: Naming and Placing a Literary Canon," in Sheldon Pollock, ed. *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 825.

In the history of Urdu as the north-Indian literary medium *par excellence*, a historical window opens on to the elevated realm of poetry, only to shut very soon when the 'proper' form of literary excellence manifests in Delhi in the form of the 'outsider' Vali's *dīvān* which reached the city sometime in the 1720s. The two decades prior to this event are cause for some periodization worry as the *sui generis* poetry of Jāʿfar (d. 1713), written in the recognizable patterns of mixed speech (*rēḳhta*), and the small clique of *īhām* poets, who wrote witty pieces based on intricate word-play, obscure the lines of continuity between 'southern' specimens of the ghazal (both in its Dakani and more Persianate forms) and the ascendance of the assertive style of the "Delhi school" poets who became the masters of the Urdu ghazal as we know it. Neither Jaʿfar's heightened satire bordering on obscenity, nor the *īhām* poets' homoerotically charged double-meaning poetry quite fits the *zeitgeist* of linguistic purification and consolidated idealizing idiom of the 'classical' ghazal. I will now address the erotic spots in the relay of literary influence and linguistic standardization exemplified by these these two groups of "early Urdu" poets.

The first poet of īhām: Jaʿfar Zaṭallī

The political decline of the Mughal Empire at the centre after the death of emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, apart from being a historical fact, provides a cut-off point for nostalgic criticism to explain the making of a "classical" style in the cracked mirror of a "declining" cultural polity. The early eighteenth-century cultural scene is a tightly knotted composite of monumental historical events (the death of the last "great" Mughal emperor in 1707, the bloody succession battles that raged till 1719 and the founding of princely states in Bengal, Bhopal, Hyderabad and Awadh), their civilizational significance (decline of the Mughal political system

especially its organizational features such as the *mansabdari* system) and foundational cultural narratives (the arrival of Valī Dakanī's *dīvān,* which re-produced Persian poetic forms in the Dakani vernacular, at the Persian-oriented imperial capital of Delhi).[276] This fortuitous correspondence of history and its representation in this historical period helps the Urdu literary historian to describe the re-birth of the Urdu ghazal in north India in terms of both a social necessity and aesthetic logicality. The literary-historical correlative for the age of decline is the poetic style called *īhām*.

The *īhām* "movement" in Urdu poetry, which Jalibi calls the first literary movement in Urdu literature, is magnified through the narrative of cultural decline, losing its primary aspect as a rhetorical choice in the writing of *rēḳhta* poetry, and drawing on antecedents as old as vernacular poetry written across South-Asian literary cultures. The term "*īhām*" appears in *rēḳhta* ghazals of the early eighteenth century. There was clearly a consciousness of the importance of this term for poetic practice. Muḥammad Shākir "Nājī" (1695?–1735?), one of the most recognizable practitioners of the style and later remembered as an incorrigible punster, includes the following *shiʿr* in his *dīvān*:[277]

garči īhām kā ham kōñ hai salīqa Nājī
bāt ačč̲hī na milē ḳhūb suḳhan gō'ē tō hō[278]
[Skilled in *īhām* although we are, Naji
A good theme evades [you], but you're a fine poet]

The *shiʿr* seems to support Faruqi's view that the Urdu ghazal in the eighteenth century based itself on a foundational division between *maẓmūn* ("what is the *shiʿr* about?") and *maʿnī* (what

[276] See standard literary histories of Urdu literature such as Jalibi's *Tarīḳh-e adab-e Urdū*, Muhammad Sadiq's *A History of Urdu Literature* etc.

[277] It is difficult to date Naji's *dīvān* because the extant Mss. do not give a date of copying. See Iftiḳhār Bēgam Ṣiddīqī, "*Muqaddama*," in idem, ed. *Dīvān-e Shākir Nājī: ma' muqaddama va farhañg* (Naʾī Dihlī: Anjuman-e taraqqī-e urdu Hind, 1989).

[278] Ibid., ghazal "Dāna-e ashk kā pḫal mahr-e butāñ hoʾē tō hō", 307.

does the *shiʿr* express about its *maẓmūn* and what can be concluded from this expression?) which, he insists, was not present in traditional Perso-Arabic poetic theory.[279] This innovation in poetic theory opened the possibility of a specifically *poetic* craft that built itself on traditionally accepted *maẓāmīn* (sing. *maẓmūn*) or poetic set pieces but worked towards elaborating the figurative possibilities of those frames. Thus, while the poetic utterance arose from the fictional vignettes, poetic craft extends them by drawing out the figurative properties of the utterance. Naji's *shiʿr* does not directly build on this distinction here because it expresses a special kind of utterance called *taʿallī* (literally, a boast). It appears at the end of its ghazal and bears the signature of the poet's name. The speaker addresses himself as the poet Naji and uses this self-address to make a boast about his art. He says that although I am a master of *īhām* (the punning style), the trendy style of poetry, I may not always find "good themes" (literally, "good talk") to versify. Still, the boast announces "I am a fine speaker (metaphorically, poet)."

The distinction made between "good themes" and the skill/conduct of *īhām* shows one of the major contradictions within the *rēḳhta* ghazal. Poetry is expected to versify "good" ideas but also retain its artistry. While the *shiʿr* is in the mode of boasting and thus does not simply make a point in poetic theory, Faruqi's distinction between *maʿnī* and *maẓmūn* gives us a sense of the aesthetic distinctions being made in the utterance: someone who versifies good themes may be ideal but the one who extends themes through *īhām* is a poet.

The word *īhām* is certainly of Arabic origin and as a literary term has been in use in classical Arabic literary knowledge at least since the thirteenth century AD.[280] The craft/skill of *īhām* is mentioned in early Persian dictionaries and poetic handbooks. Muḥammad Ḥasan states

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[279] For the detailed argument, see S.R. Faruqi, "Īhām, riʿāyat aur munāsibat", in *Urdū ġhazal kē aham mōṛ* (Dihlī: Ġhālib Ikaiḍamī, 2006; third ed.) 45.

[280] In Arabic literary theorization, the more common term is *tawriya*. See entry for "*tawriya*" in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (second ed.) by S.A. Bonebakker.

that the earliest mention of the word appears in Rashīd al-Dīn Vaṭvāṭ's (fl. eleventh century CE) book on rhetorical figures (*badīʿ*) *Ḥadāʾiq al-siḥr fī daqāʾiq al-shiʿr* which gives the literal meaning of the word in Persian: "ba gumān afgandan" (to cast in doubt).[281] In the Urdu tradition, the word appears in the work of the *īhām* poets of the first half of the eighteenth century but is frequently discussed in its poetic context in *taẕkira* ("anthology of lives of memorable persons") literature. Mīr, the first *taẕkira* writer to map an anthological past for his own local (*rēḳhta*) tradition, gives a largely negative portrait of *īhām* poets.[282] It would be simplistic to read *taẕkira* evaluations as describing actual literary practice due to the mode of writing in these conventionalized biographies of poets. It is the arbitrary chosen collection of poet's biographies with representative quotations from their works mostly derived from memory that produces an insular world of literary appraisal not bound to a strict archiving principle. The *taẕkira* literature however does produce a map of terms and concepts around which this writing develops a literary historical reflexivity. It is through this map that a definition of *īhām* was arrived at: the use of a word in a poetic utterance that has two meanings; one nearer and the other farther. The poet intends the farther meaning and leaves enough traces to indicate the intended meaning. Only the farther meaning can be intended for the *īhām* to be successful.[283]

The *īhām* moment, characterized by this localized point in the ornamental constructions of the ghazal, undercuts any spontaneous relation to the idiom of the ghazal (as a collection of possible vignettes and set pieces), both within its period and for literary historians to come. In this sense, this moment becomes *historical* for ghazal writing. It breaks open the artificiality of poetry as a historical feature of its society, and if allegorized as the reflection of a society out of

[281] Muḥammad Ḥasan, "Dībāča" in idem, ed. *Dīvān-e Ābrū* (Naʾī Dehlī: Taraqqī urdū biyūrō, 2000; first ed.), 60–61.

[282] Mir Taqi Mir, *Nikāt ush-shuʿarā, yaʿnī taẕkira-e shuʿarā-e urdū* (Badāyūñ: Niẓāmī Press, n.d.), 187.

[283] Ibid. Also see Faruqi's introduction to *Urdū ghazal kē aham mōṛ* for a detailed definition and discussion of kinds. Faruqi, *Urdū ġhazal kē aham mōṛ*, 15.

joint, it insistently returns allegorical meanings to its doubled conditions of reference. In this sense, the artefactual prejudice (governed by literary-cultural essences) in writings about the ghazal now appears to be a historically determinate moment in which the idealized unity of the ghazal had to compete with local, occasional features of its figural language. As ghazal scholars have tried hard to turn these local features of rhetoric and figuration into the immanent gestuary of verbal movement available to all periods in the tradition, their historically situated practice, right at the purported origins of traditional continuity, makes us reflect on the conditions under which such 'external' features entered the bloodstream of the pure, high tradition.

In the classic account of the formation of the north-Indian standard dialect ("Kẖaṛī bōlī") for literary purposes, associated overwhelmingly with "Indo-Muslim" cultural forms, descent is traced to the earliest extant poem in mixed Persian and "Hindi", Afẓal's *Bikaṭ kahānī* (1625). The inexplicable silence between this early ancestor and the sudden explosion of vernacularly energized *rēḵhta* specimens in Jaʿfar's oeuvre almost a century later has led to readjustments in the basic account, most prominently by Imre Bangha in his recent theory about the intervening role played by "Nagari rekhta" (mixed speech in the Devanagari script) in the self-completion of the linguistic object called Hindi/Urdu from the early medieval to the late premodern period.[284] But despite the fine-tuning and widening of the assumptions about linguistic formation, particular literary objects (poets and their oeuvres) are turned into species-variations in a historical descent leading to stable morphologies of present linguistic forms. At each moment of arrival and departure of the line of descent, the historian of Hindi/Urdu finds reasonably stable variations, cultural selection as natural selection, from which the stronger strains pass on to fuller

[284] Imre Bangha, "Rekhta: Poetry in Mixed Language: The Emergence of Khari Boli Literature in North India," in Francesca Orsini, ed. *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2010), 26.

expressions of the species. The whole *īhām* moment, cordoned off in Urdu literary history as a small clique of poets working on unorthodox assumptions about linguistic use (more Indic "Hindi" forms, fewer Persian themes, idioms and images), gives a convenient label for the group of poets writing in Delhi a little before and during the reign of Muḥammad Shāh (r. 1719–1748).

However, as Naji's *shiʿr* shows, the consciousness of the distinction between poetry's meaning (good *v*. bad) and its artistry (the domain of *īhām*) was a constitutive fracture in ghazal writing of this period. We can restate this fracture in formal terms as the difference between an idealized form called the ghazal (the word almost exclusively meant Persian ghazals at this time) and the basic unit of figural/rhetorical elaboration, i.e. the *shiʿr* (couplet). In other words, the ghazal does not signify a unity of themes and scenarios (that it later emblematized in the erotic mode of its address) but a formal pattern on which the art of figuration is played out. This contradiction in the ghazal form can be observed first in Jaʿfar's (d. 1713) anti-ghazal poems.

The modern-day editor of Jaʿfar Zaṭallī's *kulliyāt* (which the poet is said to have named *Zaṭalnāma*, i.e. the Book of Nonsensical Chatter), Rashīd Ḥasan Ḳhāñ, points out that the poet's experiment of producing macaronic poetry using Hindi phrases and idioms constitutes the first literary attempt, much before Vali's *dīvān* became the fashion in north India, to include the common language in high-classical written form.[285] But Jaʿfar's work has been difficult to incorporate in the mainstream of Urdu poetry because of three reasons: it is overwhelmingly written in Persian; its contents are parodic, satiric that mainly involve raillery and abuse; and he does not speak in the ghazal mode at all. The designation of *īhām* for the group of ghazal poets suggests that rhetorical play was something unique to this set of poets. Jaʿfar's work shows that the art of rhetoric was put to strenuous use in the early eighteenth century to produce the

[285] Rashīd Ḥasan Ḳhāñ, ed. *Zaṭalnāma: kulliyāt-e Jaʿfar Zaṭallī* (Naʾī Dihlī: Anjuman-e taraqqī-e urdū Hind, 2003), 18, 19.

possibility of a mixed language of expression that was neither Persian nor purely Hindi. Indeed, the name for ghazal poetry written in north-Indian speech forms was *rēḳhta* (used both as the name of a genre of poetry and the language in which it was written).

There are very few monolingual moments in Jaʿfar. The instances of 'vernacular' speech forms are firmly couched within larger Persian distinctions of form and genre: narrative *maṡnavīs*, satiric poems in the *hazl* mode, mock-didactic *qaṣīda*s, occasional pieces in the *hajv* or invective style, parody of prose genres such as official documents, court notices and imperial newsletters, parodies of divination poems etc. The effects of parody and satire in Jaʿfar's poetry primarily arise from the unexpected grafting of a "low" linguistic register with the elevated diction of Persian prose and poetry. The grafting mostly occurs through the thematic mixing of "low" themes of genital sexuality, bodily processes and fluids with the elevated genres, representational codes and erotic protocols of Persian. For example, one of Jaʿfar's prose works parodies the official *aḳhbārāt* documents. These were imperial newsletters written by scribes in Persian recording the daily courtly proceedings, petitions, judgments, proclamations and words of the Emperor, which could be obtained by interested parties and were sent to the peripheries of the empire for guiding governance. In one of his topsy-turvy *aḳhbārāt*, the sixteenth entry reads:

ba ʿarẓ rasīd ki dar ʿahd-e ḥaẓrat-e aʿlā kus kam-yāb būd va ālat-hā bisyār būd, va dar ʿahd-e ḥaẓrat ālat-hā kam va kus-hā bisyār. farmūdand: qillat al-lauṛāt[i] va kaṡrat al-čūt[i] min āṡār[i] al-qayāmat.[286]
[It has come to notice that in the reign of His Supreme Majesty (i.e. Shāh Jahān) cunt was scarce and cocks were aplenty while in His Majesty's reign (possibly Aurangzeb or one of his immediate successors) cocks are few while cunts many. (His majesty) pleased to reply: the scarcity of cocks and the abundance of cunt is among the signs of the Day of Judgement.]

[286] Jaʿfar Zaṭallī, "Aḳhbārāt-e siyāha-e darbār-e muʿallā," in ibid. 63.

The faux-*aḳhbār* is a determined parody of the *aḳhbārāt* written according to Persian *inshā* (belles-lettres) conventions in which the emperor sits listening to petitioners and pronounces a judgement to resolve social disruption with the unilateral force of his utterance. Instead of scarcity of resources or food, here is a petition about the scarcity of male genitals in the realm, compared to the abundance of female genitals. The comparison with the previous emperor's reign sets the tone of complaint within a larger procedure of bemoaning social decline from an age of plenty to scarcity and chaos. Social decline is figured here in terms of lack of male genitality, presumably unable to meet the demands of the abundant number of female genitals in existence. The emperor's response to this unbalanced sexual economy subverts his voice of authority by first parodying its reliance on a faux-Arabic formula (further subverted internally by using Hindi words for "cock" and "cunt", complete with Arabic case endings and pluralization) and showing up its self-parodying recourse to eschatological prediction. What then is the polemical intent of this parody?

Genital explicitness draws attention away from the layers of parody and linguistic admixture in this prose fragment. The parody of an officially repeated form suggests the inherent repeatability of all ritualized forms of linguistic use, whether religious or official. The structure of communication behind this official document is also up for parody because of its arbitrariness: a social plaint is met with the imperious finality of a few words of the emperor. Theoretically, the emperor could dispose any matter at hand any way he liked. This ludic element in official discourse is brought forward in the emperor's parodied sentence in which street language (the slang words for genitals) peeps through the pious sententiousness of his Arabic proverbialism. But there is no butt to the joke: a logically ordered social interaction is shown to proceed happily along with the grotesque references to genitals as social resources. The laughter is not directed at

any single personage, if we can even read the petitioner and the emperor as singularly delineated personages, but rather arises from the re-circuiting of official discourse through the bare referentiality of 'obscene' words. The parodist does not seem to be pulling down the protocols of the original text, but taking the routinized pattern to the extremes of nonsensicality, stopping at the explicitly obscene synonyms of genitality.

The differentiation of the original text from the parodic also takes place, again through the signifiers of genital explicitness, through the infusion of alien linguistic matter in the Persian ecology of the fragment. The Persian terms "*kus*" (cunt) and "*ālat*" (cock) stay within the basic linguistic ecology, but the emperor's words delivered in Arabo-Urdu slang set up a relay between the conventionality of the former and the novelty of the latter. Making new is thus another aspect of this parody. It is not a simple matter of the new being subordinate to the old, being based on hybridity; the original's relation between Persian and Arabic is itself spelled out as a hybrid extravagance in the mirror of the vernacular spectres peeping through the Persian prose. In this sense, the linguistic joke is a serious statement about the substitutability of lexical forms such that no single language can lay claim to social precedence. The common yardstick for demonstrating this is the idiom of street-level speech, sexualized abuse and invective.

The particularity of parodying official speech forms does not constitute an absolute critique of power structures: the mode of the bawdy parody relies deeply on a gendered conception of social decline. The valuation of the penis as a sign of social cohesion and royal power (there is an internal 'dirty' pun in the *aḳhbār* between the sounds of "*ḥaẓrat-e aʿlā*" and the juxtaposed sound of "*ḥaẓrat ālat-hā*" possibly signifying the phallic power of the previous emperor and the detumescent status of the current one) is contrasted against the proliferation of vaginas as a sign of social decline. It is at the level of the gendered joke (the metonymic

disembodiment of genitals from their bearers) that Jaʿfar's writing achieves the frivolous coherence of a joke rather than a serious critique of power structures. This is perhaps why the poet managed to write with such offensive flair for almost four decades and was executed by the emperor Farruḳh Siyar only around his sixtieth year apparently for mocking the royal *sikka* (the occasion when the new regnal coin is minted) in 1713. The obviously parodic features of these prose fragments show a keen ear for the ritualized aspects of speech in public discourse. Poetry is another form of ritualized speech practised on the set patterns of Persian versification. It is in the poetic genres that Jaʿfar's distinctive voice emerges re-tracing the routinized features of poetic form to reveal these social conventionalisms.

The recurrence of sexualized abuse and corrosive invective on the ideal surface of conventional writing styles forces us to ask: why is sexuality dangerous for social organization? The *sexualized* inversion of social conventions marks the sexual as a specialized idiom expressing the realm of human actions which is not preceded by legal–theological regulation, but is the ground on which the law attains its worldly currency. The particularity of the sexual in this idiom is not due to a fluid, unruly jouissance, but due to its implication in the categorizations of the law as a persistent aspect of social interactions. Thus, the sexual is subversive not because of its essential difference from social order, but due to the duality in its terms of reference: on one level oriented towards pleasure for its own sake, and the other towards the realization of codes of legality and right action. Sexuality in this period is most certainly not a discourse of privation, except denoting a pleasure which itself is always particular and socially distinguished, in which a person's truth may be inscribed in his innermost thoughts and desires.

Its idiomaticity makes available details of sexuality not as a substance but in the socially marked modes of its appearance: particular acts (backwards, forwards), sexual morphologies

(*hījṛā*, *hīz*, *nā-mard*, *launḍā*, *čapṭī*), social roles (slave, wife, disciple, servant), each operating in determinate contexts of social interaction. 'Homosexual' relations are the special terrain of male–male *public* contact; a heavily socialized terrain in which pleasure is transacted through social hierarchies, rather than dissolving them in its uninhibited expression. Jaʿfar plays this social visibility of homosexuality to hypervisibility in his satirical poem "Ganḍ-maravvā nāma" (The Book of Arse-fuckery). In its opening lines,

pān kẖā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē // bāġh jā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē
bādshāhī hai Bahādur Shāh kī // ban banā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē[287]
[Have a *pan* (betel leaf) and play arse-fuckery.
Go to the garden and play arse-fuckery.
It's the reign of Bahadur Shah:
Doll up and play arse-fuckery.]

two functions of the homosexual act *par excellence* (anal penetration) emerge: a self-sufficient activity (beyond duty, obligation and aesthetic compulsion) and a transitory, end-oriented pleasure. Since kingship has withered, the only sensible form of social intercourse is homosexual intercourse. The poem signals awareness of the absurdity of the proposition not by winking at the audience, but straight-facedly telling them to "doll up" (*ban banā kar*) and then go play this game. As the end-product of social breakdown, homosexual sex marks the futility of even trying to set things right, and as the self-sufficient pursuit of pleasure it announces an alternative, secular, desublimating resolution of all social endeavours.

The speaker shifts to the conditions under which this new social resolution should be achieved:

bē-takalluf dar miyān-e ḳẖāṣ o ʿām // ḍẖul bajā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē
ai javānāñ! hast daur-e bē-ḳẖabar // hāṭẖ uṭẖā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē[288]
[Unceremoniously amongst the high and low,
Beat the drum and play arse-fuckery.

[287] Jaʿfar Zaṭallī, "Ganḍ-maravvā nāma," in Khan, ed. *Zaṭalnāma*, ll. 1–2, 149.

[288] Ibid., ll. 3–4, 149–50.

Listen, men! This is the reign of the Witless,
Raise your hands and play arse-fuckery.]

Social hierarchies that mark pollution barriers in social intercourse should come down as those hierarchies mingle with each other in the sexual act. The Persian interjection in the third hemistich above raises the poem to mock-heroic heights, witting on the popular nickname for Bahadur Shah I ("the Witless"), asking the high-born to stand up and be counted while playing the game. If there is any doubt that the speaker's call is merely symbolic, he goes on to say:

dar miyān-e Jauharī Bāzār o Čauk // pān čabā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē
bẖagtiyē aur bẖānḍ o naṭviʾē rāt din // gẖar bulā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē[289]
[Between Jauhari Bazar and the Chowk,
Chew *pan* and play arse-fuckery.
Mimics and clowns and dancing boys day and night,
call them home and play arse-fuckery.]

The geographical detail (localities near the imperial fort in Delhi) evokes immediacy in the poem's references. This is no generalized lament for the general times. An effect of this social detailing is felt in the travesty of the home as the constant den of cheap entertainers and performers. The home has become the point of transaction of worldly desires and entertainment. Establishing the believability of the literal call to anal sex, the speaker dispels any hopes left for a new morality to emerge:

ḥukm-e qāẓī, muḥtasib zāʾil shuda // dil baṛẖā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē
pīr sē aur bāp sē ustād sē // čẖup čẖupā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē[290]
[The qazi's order, the policeman have lapsed,
Put your heart in it and play arse-fuckery.
From your preceptor and father and teacher,
Hide and play arse-fuckery.]

On the one hand, traditional authority has passed on, and the speaker informs his hearers that now is the time to uninhibitedly indulge in rambunctious play. But on the other, he advises

[289] Ibid., ll. 6–7, 150.

[290] Ibid., ll. 8–9, 150.

against an all-out coming out, for the pleasure of unorthodox sex is found in subterfuge and clandestinity. The new dispensation acknowledges subterfuge and bad faith as remnants of the old order on its way out. But it doesn't call for a violent overhaul of old social symbolisms with new ones. There is the added hint, in the figure of the patriarchs, that we should play it safe since old symbolisms die hard. This message is concretized by inverting the transcendental promises of the old order in the last three couplets of the poem:

čūñ jahāñ fānī ast āḵhir murdan ast // hañs hañsā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē
hast īñ dār-e fanā pur dard o ġham // dukẖ bẖulā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē
Jaʿfarā! ab naukarī kā ḥaẕ nahīñ // čit lagā kar ganḍ-maravvā kẖēliyē[291]
[Since the world is mortal, finally it must die,
Laughingly, play arse-fuckery.
This mortal place is full of pain and misery,
Forget your troubles and play arse-fuckery.
Oy Jaʿfar! serving has now no delight,
Floating on you back, play arse-fuckery.]

The rousing cry of "arse-fuckery" has brought us to the crescendo of realization. The old Persian adages now appear literally true: since the world is transitory there is nothing beyond it. The exposure of transcendental systems as false promises becomes one more reason to enjoy the bodily expression of happiness. In his signature couplet, Jaʿfar implicates himself in the poem's address ("you") by identifying himself as one of the minions in the service (*naukarī*) of the powerful now realizing that active effort is no more socially productive and one might as well supinely accept one's penetration by the world.

Jaʿfar presents a world in which the breakdown of the social value form (the monarchy, the judiciary, morality and statecraft) results *neither* in a flight into golden ages of the past *nor* into a morbid turn inwards to repair the broken world within. The vaporization of value forms in this society on the verge of unravelling, is countered remarkably by the unmediated grunts of pleasure as the realization of the social spirit. The negativity of homosexuality (it is undeniably

[291] Ibid., ll. 14–16, 151.

negative albeit fun) is also inverted, following its topsy-turvy vision of society, as it becomes the symbol of a new, disenchanted, worldly-wise dawn, in the form of a play in which there are no traditional tops or bottoms. In fact it is unclear throughout the poem what orientation is being prescribed in "arse fuckery": legalistic descriptions of the "doer" (*fāʿil*) and the "done" (*mafʿūl*) are no longer relevant here. Homosexuality in this context appears "grotesque", in Bakhtin's sense, of the renewing properties of the whole social body conceived of as a penetrable orifice. The rectum, in this instance, is a rejuvenating grave.

Historicist studies of Jaʿfar's oeuvre immediately understand his topical references to political instability and the breakdown of the elite service system (*mansabdārī*) as definitive statements on the "decline" of the Mughal empire. I.e. he means what he says. However, as I have shown this is a dangerous assumption in the context of a master satirist. Fredric Bogel has argued against New Critical conceptions of satire as a stable generic mode in which the object of satire preexists in the world, and the satirist and the audience relate to it and to each other in pre-given combinations. Instead he shows a double structure in satire: this fixed, stable genre is internally imploding by its working against that same generic fixity and stability. It this structure that puts language to work in order to "produce a difference between two figures whom the satirist… perceives to be insufficiently differentiated."[292] In taking on the full force of this differentialism, satire is always closing on similarity with its object even as it insists on its dissimilarity. In Jaʿfar's poem, the trivial register of homosexual horseplay contrasts against the breakdown of the moral city. But as its raunchy chant rises in repetition, the satire begins building on the serious implications of its mock-advice for a new way of conceiving social values. Yet the dominant image of homosexuality, as a form of the grotesque, opens an orificial

[292] Fredric V. Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 42.

abyss into which all manner of social effort is spent and left unrewarded. But as I suggested in my reading, this opening up of the impenetrable old order offers distinct possibilities of reordering dominant values such as patriarchal control, ascetic posturing, pollution barriers and, to an extent, private reproductive sex.

The imploding nature of the satiric mode also offers a space for flexing the boundaries of a new poetic language. Jaʿfar uses all-Persian sentences sparingly, confined to their own hemistichs. The Khari boli/Hindi lexical forms are allowed to breathe and develop throughout the poem. At a deeper level, vernacular speech styles embody the grotesquerie of homosexual sex while the brute reality of social institutions is given in Persian. Street speech steps on the robes of power to reveal the underlying bare bruteness. Its power derives from unexpected, unorthodox coupling with words and idioms from the dominant language. The poem acknowledges this imbrication of vernacular speech and elite languages, not only by using Persian adages strategically to highlight their hollowed terms of address, but also by constantly imploding any notion of purity of linguistic usage through its inverting the seams of languages of tradition and power. The most important historical point to be gained from Jaʿfar's linguistic experimentation is that the process we call vernacularization (for Urdu scholars the teething troubles of "early Urdu") *has already happened*. We may not have documentary evidence showing the precise moment of coming into being of Urdu-like features, but Jaʿfar's oeuvre announces the strength of a social discourse through which the traditional sureties of society are being retold and in the process reassessed and reinflected. Jaʿfar's poem differentiates its vernacular spirit through the sharp lines of erotic division between idealized sentiment and grotesquerie. It has broken the cordon of aestheticized archaisms, but the structures of power still lie at a distance from vernacularizing tendencies. Patriarchy, masculinity and the broad hierarchy

of castes is maintained in the poem's nods to immediate codes of authority. Lexical structures in the vernacular accumulate in the poem, often repeated across verses, without undergoing standardization. But this is not a cause of anxiety because the larger realization in the poem appears to be that mortal world is divisible into languages, which live and die and they are not be mourned. Those who heed this challenge will survive the loss of descent and authority. Finally, the only thing left to do in a world where language has escaped our control is to let it speak through you.

The serrated style of Jaʿfar's poetry, its deliberately shifting linguistic boundaries, its abusive and abrasive tone and its non-idealizing idiom, shows clearly the marks of its social circulation. The imaging of erotic sentiment in the genitals of its bearers hints at making poetic images commensurable with realities outside of them. Similarly, the inversion of dominant sources of public and moral expression points to their normative force. Finally, the debunking of rules of poetic morality, embodied in the 'high' tradition of the Persian ghazal, is carried out through recognizable genres such as the *qaṣīda*, *maṡnavī* and the *qiṭʿa*. The immediate effects of this riotous poetry are indeed normative and moralistic in so far as the vehicle of poetry is still its regularized social forms. This is not surprising because the ground on which this debate about poetic values is conducted comprises of the currents of misogyny, fears of caste breakdown and sexual taboos, prefiguring the particular *shahrāshōb* mode of Urdu poetry which bemoans the breakdown of the moral city. The crossing of linguistic boundaries, in this poetry, is no less transgressive than rejecting heterosexual domesticity or breaking rules of inter-caste relations. The fear of social disintegration and chaos (once again expressed in the *shahrāshōb* mode) becomes an occasion for deepening social prejudices through the medium of poetry, while at the same time enabling an unselfconscious deviancy to develop a multidimensional view of the

world. This specimen of "early Urdu" writing shows the working out of social fractures and individual discontent through an observational space opened within poetry in a historical period when language is felt to fall short of social expectations.[293]

Declension of Beauty

The hypervisibility of homosexual sex in the linguistic barrier-crossing style of Jaʿfar reveals the ground of interaction on which this movement of languages and bodies takes place. While we can differentiate theoretically the interlocking processes of linguistic differentiation and sexual explicitness, it is not obvious why linguistic play takes on the features of sexual play. The correlation of vernacular forms of speech with a carnivalesque sexual expressiveness is visible in the choice of themes in this 'early' poetry. However, this does not account for the coexistence of 'high' and 'low' forms producing that memorably doubling effect in which a historical transition appears constantly underway. The sexual theme moreover has deeply particularizing effects in the generalized field of vernacular poetry. These effects over time attain the status of historical narrative elements in the reiterability of outer, formal features of the ghazal through which a submerged continuity of history is constructed. The *īhām* poets offer an exemplary instance where sexualized images express the consolidation of vernacular speech forms within the apparent continuity of the ghazal form. It is to this body of writing that I now turn.

As described earlier, the designation *īhām* appeared to its practitioners as the constitutive tension of ghazal writing. It demarcated the discourse of poetry from its enunciation through the

[293] These concluding statements about the social potentialities of satiric writing are influenced by Edward Said's recovery of Swiftian satire, not as a sadistic, deconstructive gesture, but an intellectual and political one. See Said, "Swift as Intellectual," in idem, *The World, the Text and, the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 72–89.

various rhetorical techniques of elaboration, condensation and dispersal. The instability of punning arises from its double effect on the solidity of poetic statements/propositions and the resulting multiplication of meaning, which for these poets, was the key aspect of the poetic craft. This became the cause of its condemnation in later literary history, ostensibly due to its inability to hold together the form in its essentially introspective function, but really showing up the inability of the linguistically identitarian scholar to comprehend the poetic form as part of a historical struggle between the weight of tradition (in the form of Persian poetics and the influence of established poetic styles such as Brajbhasha and Sanskrit poetry, *sabk-e hindī* poetry and exemplary Arabic genres) and the process, already underway, of vernacularization of north-Indian literary languages. It comes as no surprise that the story of Urdu's birth can only exceptionalize the linguistic choices of Jaʿfar (not willing to give up his energetic composition despite his abusive commonness) and quietly pass over *īhām* poetry as a transitory phase, imbibed and corrected by later poets with better artistic sense.

After Vali, and in the absence of other extant manuscripts, Najmuddīn Shāh Mubārak "Ābrū" (1683–1733) is considered the first north-Indian poet who composed a *dīvān* of ghazals in the mixed language (*rēḳhta*).[294] Like several other "Delhi" poets, Abru was not born in the city but in faraway Gwalior, where his maternal family resided claiming descent from the Sufi saint Ġhauṡ Gvāliyarī. While literary history relates his worldview, particularly his interest in dandyism (*bāñkpan*) and the salon culture (*majlisiyyat*), to the decadent and artistically vibrant court of Muhammad Shah, Abru had already spent a major part of his life under the various succession-related civil wars preceding Muhammad Shah's reign that began in 1719. Still there are enough references in his poetry to artists and personalities at Muhammad Shah's court to

[294] Muhammad Hasan, "Dībača," in idem, ed. *Dīvān-e Ābrū*, 20. The recent discovery of a partial manuscript of Shah Hatim's 'old' *dīvān* has somewhat weakened this claim. See Abdul Haq, "Pēsh guftār," in Shaiḳh Ẓuhūruddīn Ḥātim, *Dīvān-e Ḥātim: intiḳhāb-e dīvān-e qadīm*, ed. Dr. ʿAbdul Ḥaq (Dihlī: Self-published, 2008), 1, 22.

show his participation in the courtly culture of the time. *Taẕkira* sources also mention the loss of an eye and his singular devotion to a younger man and poet Mīr Makkẖan "Pākbāz." It is the latter detail which goes some way in explaining his keen interest in writing about the theme of loving boys (*amradparastī*).

The down on the boy's cheek is the most widespread image under the theme of boy-love. Here is an exemplary *shiʿr* from Abru:

dōnōñ ṭaraf sē dāṛẖī ḳhurshīd rū kē dauṛī // dēkẖō zavāl yārō āyā burā zamānā[295]
[On both sides of the sun-face fuzz broke out //
Behold, friends, the fall/after-noon: bad times are at hand]

The vignette describes the perilous moment of downing when the boy's beauty is both in decline and at its most attractive. The speaker addresses a group of friends (*yārō*; possibly other connoisseurs of adolescent male beauty) turning the image into a 'public' statement. The poetic fiction is heavily influenced by the salon culture of the court where artistic virtuosity was on display for the emperor and other elite officers. The poem bears witness to this implied 'public.' The statement however is only the outer presentation of the verbal artistry on display. The boy is referred to metonymically, his face/*rū*, which is then metaphorized, compared to the sun/ *ḳhurshīd*, to produce the conceit on which the poem turns: the beauty of the boy is like the brilliant sun. The face–sun metaphor is demetaphorized by the reference to the face's beard or fuzz (*dāṛẖī*). But then the verb "ran" (*dauṛī*) personifies the beard and the two poetic objects thus constructed (the sun-face and the beard) are united in the common logic of the dark beard shadowing the sunny surface of the face. The second hemistich takes the image thus constructed and creases it with the layers of *īhām*. The word *"zavāl*" means both "decline" and the "setting" of the sun. Through the *īhām* word, on one hand, the speaker foregrounds the image of the sun

[295] Ḥasan, ed. *Dīvān-e Ābrū*, Gh. 44: 94.

(behold the noon or the approaching setting of the sun), and on the other, negates this image by the "farther" meaning of "decline." He insures this intended meaning by using the word *zamānā* (era) which connects immediately with the farther meaning of the punned word (*zavāl* i.e. the decline of an era). The *īhām* dispels obviousness of meaning, but it also creates the ground on which disparate images can be related. It builds an instant connection between the boy's incipient fuzz and an ideal situation's coming to an end, symbolizing the fear of the boy-lover in the fear of the routine descent of society into chaos. These two routinized images are evenly balanced in the poem and we cannot simply take the social meaning to be a reflection of historical conditions while ignoring the erotic meaning as mere convention. It is not just the boy who is objectified in an image but his objectification presumes the coherence of an ideal realm whose decline *becomes* the decline of beauty itself.

Despite the idealization of a single boy, as in the above example, the boy-image displays the concentration of erotic energies either in one person or in a collective hoard, connoting the de-idealized, substitutable nature of this kind of attraction. The formation of the boy-image also lies at the crossing of the Persian *shahrāshūb*, the city-poem describing vignettes of peace-disturbing alluring boys (often differentiated according to their professional guilds) of the city, with the *rēḳhta* version of the city-poem (*shahrāshōb*) playing on these vignettes to intone a lament about the good times passing into chaos. Ḥātim (1699–1783) is one of the early practitioners of the *shahrāshōb* and according to ʿAbdul Ḥaq, compiler of the poet's divan in the 'old style' of *īhām* (which Hatim abrogated and re-edited as the *Dīvānzāda* in 1755), wrote a *muḳhammas* in the *shahrāshōb* mode. In the following strophe (*band*) from the poem the speaker echoes the biting tone we encountered in Jaʿfar's poetry:

raṅgīlā sab satī rangrēz kā ban ātā hai // dh̲ōbī kā aur kē kapṛōñ pa saj dikh̲ātā hai
saqqē kā muft bihishtī dēkh̲ō kahātā hai // čamār čh̲ōṛ čarm khamr aur madh kā mātā hai

čẖināl o gāṇḍū o bẖaṛvē kā garm hai bāzār[296]
[The dyer's [son] dallies colorfully with everyone
The washerman's [son] preens in others' clothing
The water-carrier's [son] is not worthy of the name
The tanner gives up hides, drinking wine and spirits
The trade of whores, faggots and pimps is brisk.]

The reference to the sons of the various professions emanates from the voice of an elite observer[297] from whose vantage point social differences appear to cohere into an organic whole. The lament is for the loss of this organic wholeness. The strophe's final verse, which carries the *mukhammas*'s outer rhyming syllable, summarizes the breakdown process as the popularity of male and female prostitution. The city-boys (the image lingeringly echoes the city-wrecking beauties of such boys in the Persian convention) and their renegade behaviour is gratingly presented in terms abusing the scum of social life: prostitutes, 'homosexuals' (*gāṇḍū*), and pimps. This inverts of the normal economy of caste-differentiated professions and services into the exclusive sexual economy of prostitution. As we will see in the case of the *īhām* poets' ghazal this inverted image becomes a part of the de-idealizing tropes of boy-love.

Muḥammad Shākir "Nājī", a contemporary of Abru (the latter mentions him fondly in his poetry), has been described in *taẕkira* literature as a *hazl* poet, in the manner of Jaʿfar. However, this is not borne out by his extant *dīvān* which is an early specimen of a multi-genre collection of the poet's work (ghazal, *marṡiya*, *qaṣīda*, *vāsoḳht* etc.). He was closely attached to a noble (as the 'kitchen steward' or *dārōġha-e maṭbaḳh*) at Muhammad Shah's court. Like Abru, he is best remembered as an incorrigible versifier of themes about the beautiful boy in the *īhām* style:

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[296] "*Mukhammas shahr-āshōb*" in Ḥātim, *Dīvān-e Ḥātim*, ed. Dr. ʿAbdul Ḥaq, 247.

[297] The style of address, calling the sons of the various caste groups by merely the caste's name followed by the possessive particle (*kā*), is heard in contemporary South Asia from the mouths of 'upper' caste people to abuse and differentiate 'lower' caste groups in situations of social and economic interaction. See, for example, Omprakash Valmiki's account of his childhood in the 'untouchable' (*čūhṛā*) quarter in a postcolonial north-Indian village and the colloquial customariness of such verbal violence in his Hindi autobiography, *Jūṭhan* (Naʾī Dillī: Rādẖākrishna Prakāshan, 1997).

jō kiyā sō ẓulm mujẖ par bādshāh-e vaqt haiñ
ʿadl kī inṣāf kī laṛkōñ sēñ sunī naʾīñ ēk bāt [298]
[Nothing but cruelty against me; they are the emperor of the age.
"Fairness" and "justice", boys don't care for all that.]

The collectivization of boys (*laṛkōñ*) stands against the singular emperor of the age (*bādshāh-e vaqt*). At first glance, there is no obvious *īhām* here. The equation between kingship and adolescent male beauty is made possible by their shared qualities: boys hold the power to be cruel because they possess beauty just as the king may be cruel because he holds power. The tone of the self-pitying lover (*ʿāshiq*) highlights the narrative fiction of a harried boy-lover. However, "*bādshāh-e vaqt*" could be read as a double entendre: it refers to the general idea of an unjust reigning emperor as well as the currently reigning one. In the latter case, the self-pitying lover becomes, for the moment, a social commentator who, by comparing boys' essential cruelty with the giveaway image of the unjust emperor of the time ("the boys in a cruel king's realm are bound to be cruel"), literalizes the metaphorical comparison. The second hemistich uses the literalized metaphor to switch to the boys who, if they are really kingly in their arbitrariness, should at least know about justice and fairness, the cornerstones of ideal kingship. The boys show no awareness of these ideals. Thus one strand of interpretation would see the boys as hypervalued objects of desire whose power is signified by the vehicle of the "emperor" image. But the boys themselves can be the vehicle for the idea of the emperor's arbitrary rule and so the speaker's relationship with them (lover–beloved) stands for the relationship between the people and the emperor. Both interpretations can be defended but it is the changeability of the boys (their inconstancy in love and their physical changeability) that enables this erotic reference to double up as a mode for self-questioning and social comment. The *īhām* structure enables this doubling, but as we have seen in this case, the "closer" meaning is not annihilated in the

[298] Gh. "aur bẖī rah tū ġhanīmat jān pyārē āj rāt", in Ṣiddīqī, ed. *Dīvān-e Shākir Nājī*, 185.

recovery of the poet's "farther" meaning. The image of the boy can function both as the tenor and the vehicle of the metaphorical connection because it connotes beauty, the realm of poetic themes and images, as well as the literally gendered object of desire.

The gendering of the boy is not a simple matter of genital sexuality. The difference between *gānḍū* (faggot) in the *shahrāshōb* mode and *laṛkā/laṛkē* (boy/boys) in the ghazal reveal distinct perceptions about male sexuality in this poetry. It would be wrong to assume that the premodern centuries were relatively more or less indifferent to phenomena of same-sex desire than modernity. The aesthetic distinction between *gānḍū* and *amradparast* is not a simple one between a word of abuse and the name for a style of erotic expression. The genital specificity of both "identities" shows two related associations in the practice of boy-love. An example of the first sort is exemplified by a verse in Jaʿfar's satire, *Hajv-e Fataḥ ʻAlī Ḵhāñ*, that lampoons the eponymous subject, the purse-keeper of an aristocratic lady, who did not compensate the poet as directed by his mistress:

na hō zinhār gānḍū sē bẖalāʾī
ki jin bin tẖūk sab jag sē marāʾī[299]
[A faggot can do no good //
who, without spit, gets himself fucked by the whole world.]

The subject of this satire is not a homosexual, but someone who didn't pay Jaʿfar his dues. The addressee's unlubricated arse signifies his miserliness and love for pleasure at minimal cost. Homosexual abuse offers a clear link between two devalued manifestations of sexuality: the passive role in anal intercourse (also the position of the boy in the *amradparastī* relationship) and the man who exclusively derives pleasure from same-sex acts. The passive sodomite in the

[299] Jaʿfar Zaṭallī, "Hajv-e Fataḥ ʻAlī Khāñ", in Khāñ, ed. *Zaṭalnāma*, 167.

verse above fails both morally[300] and aesthetically (not only does he engage in passive anal sex, he does so at the expense of his physical comfort).

The abrasive sentiment in Jaʿfar's verse is not a sporadic, accidental occurrence confined to the genres of *hajv* and *hazl*. Here is an example from an Abru ghazal signifying the second, habitual aspect of this sexual practice:

taʿajjub nahīñ agar nāmard-e ḳhaṣṣī mard pḫir hō jā
magar jō ʿādatī hō us kē ačraj hai agar ḳhū jā/ḳhōjā [301]
[It is no surprise if a castrated man becomes a man again,
but it's a wonder if the inveterate/catamite loses his habit.]

The appearance of such a *shiʿr* in the middle of a mainstream ghazal *dīvān* looks odd only if we assume the ghazal to be an aretfactual unity based on sublimated sexual themes. It forms the *maṭlaʿ* of a ghazal (where both the hemistichs end on the same rhyming syllable) and for this reason is considred largely ad hoc (*barā-e bait*) versification. But the theme chosen for the ad hoc presentation runs throughout the premodrn ghazal: upholding the values that make a *mard* (not just man, but also brave, valorous man). The idea is simple: you can turn a castrated man into a real man sooner than you can get an incorrigible catamite/sodomite change his tastes. The *īhām* appears in *ḳhōjā*: Persian *ḳhū* or "habit" pronounced in the Indian way *ḳhō* added to the verb *jā* gives *ḳhōjā* i.e. the castrated keepers of the women's harem. It creates an ironic play on the passive sodomite unchanging in his habits, but who rhetorically does transform into the castrated eunuch. The category of the passive sodomite as habituated (*ʿādatī* from *ʿādat* / habit) to his desire refers to the opposite of the boy who threatens to grow out of his sexualized

[300] Indrani Chatterjee cites eighteenth-century royal chronicles from Orissa which use the abuse "*gandu*" not exclusively in its homosexual connotation but signifying a larger theme of free masculinity versus servile, slave status. Sexual abuse gains its social relevance through the relations of power in a slave-owning society. I. Chatterjee, "Alienation, Intimacy, and Gender: Problems for a History of Love in South Asia," in Ruth Vanita, ed. *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 72–73.

[301] Ḥasan, ed. *Dīvān-e Ābrū*, Gh. 8, 78.

identity. In this logic, anatomy may not be destiny but a compulsive habit implies a devalued condition exemplified by the the passively sexual man.

Repeated references to the boy and his attributes, along with a de-idealized depiction of the passive homosexual and his tastes, belong to the same constellation of boy-love in the ghazal. Pulled into historical light by the net of punning (*īhām*) this constellation connotes both linguistic and sexual play, which hinders any spontaneous relation between readers and the ghazal idiom. It invites contemplation about the workings of language, but does not let it pass into the realm of transcendental unity. The boy-image, especially connoted by the habituatedness of its practitioners (the "faggot" and the "boy-lover"), offers an artisanal rhythm to poetic craft through which the monotone of language beats inside the speaker's words. It allows for the intricate production of patterns manually woven into the basic unit of the *shiʿr* and which, in time, would come to define the abstract unity of the ghazal form.

In this way poetry writing is brought forward into conversation with the artistic practices of the Muhammad Shahi court and salon culture, in particular: music (*ḳhayāl* as the new mode of musical elaboration and presentation of the *raga* codes[302]), dance (interpretive dance styles involving the refinement of rhythmic patterns of movement, which developed into *kat̲hak*[303]), and painting (the revival of the miniature style in the production of *rāgmālā* paintings, which presumed the inerlocking of artistic media, and of conventional Mughal portraiture[304]). The *dīvāns* of Abru and Naji are strewn with images and themes of musical and dance performances,

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[302] Zahir Uddin Malik, *The Reign of Muhammad Shah: 1719–1748* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1977), 403.

[303] Dargah Quli Khan mentions the dual performance abilities of *naqqāls* (mimics), boy-dancers and courtesan women who could sing *ḳhayāls* and dance. Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqa-e Dihlī: Fārsī matn aur Urdū tarjuma*, ed. Ḳhalīq Anjum (Dihlī: Anjuman-e taraqqī-e urdū Hind, 1993), 97, 99.

[304] Malini Roy, "The Revival of the Mughal Painting Tradition During the Reign of Muhammad Shah," in William Dalrymple and Yuthika Sharma, eds. *Princes and Painters of Mughal India, 1707–1857* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 17.

deploying ekphrasis as a new mode of observation in the ghazal. Thus, rather than signifying a turn away from social consciousness into the labyrinth of language, the linguistic experimentation of *īhām* poetry insists on the social materiality of language and its malleability into the arabesques and curlicues of poetic form. While this may not be anything new (after all Persian, Arabic and Brajbhasha poetry present long histories of linguistic ornamentation in the context of late Mughal courtly culture), the *īhām* poets shared in the emerging view of the world as divisible into linguistic spheres. The self-consciously clever air in *īhām* construction points to the social mobility brought by vernacularization within 'traditional' forms such as the ghazal. However, the tissue which connects linguistic play with existing bodies of poetic writing is the erotic repertoire of images, including the image of the boy and his correlates. It would be difficult to understand the literary logic through which, for example, a *bayāẓ* from Muhammad Shah's reign, still extant on Muhammad Hasan's authority, could include Persian and *rēḳhta* verses along with Brajbhasha specimens of the courtly *riti* poems of Bihārī and Gẖanānand, except as the socializing force of literary eroticism. While critics like Faruqi assert that the *īhām* device was an intrinsic part of the poetic armature proposed centuries ago by the Indo-Persian poet Amīr Ḳhusrau, its resemblance with the Sanskrit and Brajbhasha rhetorical ornament (*alañkār*) of *slesha* (punning) points to the comparativist tendencies of artistic practice in Muhammad Shahi court and salon culture.

The de-idealizing properties of the boy-image have as much to do with the vernacularizing energy of the *rēḳhta* ghazal as the impression of social ideologies of gender and sexuality on poetic imagery. The sublunary emphasis of *īhām* poetry shapes poetic language on regularized features of social ideology such as the masculinity of self-expression and self-stylization, the feminization of domesticity and the non-transcendental, the destructability of

temporal formations and the indestructability of the substance of royal sovereignty. The long tradition of making poems around this image (predominantly in Persian and Persian influenced poetry) made available an abstract gender typology which, in comparison with other local traditions deploying feminine speaking voices (e.g. in *bhakti* poetry) or feminized idealizations (e.g. in Brajbhasha *riti* poetry), provided an external principle of genre and linguistic differentiation. However, its abstract nature (the ghazal's boy is no more real than the stylized heroine [*nāyikā*] of Brajbhasha poetry) allowed the sharing of poetic space with these other styles and modes of writing poetry so that Abru and Naji's ghazals impersonate female speakers, while still speaking in the idiom of the Persianate *ʿāshiq*. Sometimes even this convention is replaced by the explicit voicing of a conventionalized *virahini* (the woman-in-separation) as in Abru's *shiʿr*: "jō dukẖ paṛēgā sahā karūñgī jaisē kahōgē rahā karūñgī // tuman kōñ nis din duʿā karūñgī sukẖī salāmat rahō khudāyā"[305] [I will bear any suffering that befalls, live as you will have me // I'll pray for you everyday. May God keep you alive and happy!]. The boy-image is a fold in the erotic fabric of the ghazal which could be recreased, made crooked and even unfolded to leave the bare impression of a socially recognizable personage or practice. But notwithstanding this, its gender typology worked ceaselessly to produce the pressure behind its folds on the ghazal's erotic medium.

While he occupies the position of de-idealized, feminized objectivity in the boy-love vignette, in one sense the boy's attributes are unique to him. This is his short-lived beauty and his inherent changeability (in terms of age, looks and sexual function). His image, as I have shown through Abru's *shiʿr* about the sunny-faced boy, has a strong conection with temporality. This is not empty time but the expansion of poetry into the transitory aspects of social relations: exchange of goods, sale of bodies and animals, transfer of rights and obligations and the sharing

[305] Ḥasan, ed. *Dīvān-e Ābrū*, Gh. 73, 106.

of sovereignty with clients and subordinates. When he is not being described in his immanent beauty, the image of the boy recalls his world-disturbing ("*shahrāshōb*") aspect:

bāp sēñ us kē kahō us sañgdil kō rakẖ ʿazīz // mōl hai sārē Badaḳhshāñ kā yi bēṭā laʿl sā[306]
[Tell his father to hold that stonehearted one dear //
He's worth the whole of Badakhshan, this ruby-son/greedy son]

Naji's *shiʿr* presents the boy as a luxury good (the *īhām* word *laʿl* means ruby and is linked with Badakhshan as the ruby-producing region) and shown to desire his own purchase (the Hindi word *lālsā* or "greed" is formed by putting *laʿl* and *sā* together). In the "nearer" meaning, the beauty of the boy is worth more than all the rubies of Badakhshan, and so his father is asked to keep him precious and protect him. But the farther, 'authorized', meaning contradicts this valorizing sentiment by suggesting that the boy is hard-hearted not because he is precious like a precious stone but because he wants the right price for his favours. The father, in this sense, is asked to keep him under protection because he is eager to sell his favours to the richest buyer. The *īhām* structure in the example ironizes the idiom of the boy-theme. The boy's fickleness is particularized as his readiness to sell his favours. But the appeal to patriarchal authority (in the legal sense the father is the custodian of the adolescent boy) hints at criticising this self-trafficking. The right to exchange himself, his conceited possession of his own beauty, is counteracted by the primal right of the father over his son. Thus, the duality of the pun holds together all these possibilities on the ground of existence of the economy of buying and selling slaves (often for their looks and skills in the arts), disposability of family members under the guardianship of the patriarch, and the quantification of beauty through poetic conceits. This latter aspect of the poetic economy suggests the nature of value implied in such imagery. The boy's beauty is not merely a qualifying attribute but rather the ability of the object to represent

[306] Gh. "ṣaid hō pẖir čẖūṭnā ṭuk dil kō hai ashkāl sā", in Ṣiddīqī ed. *Dīvān-e Shākir Nājī*, 131.

something more than itself. This hypervalorization suggests a desire to outdo the state-enforced production of values by surplus extraction,[307] by creating a value that is more than the sum of its attributes. It is through such erotic hypervalorization that poetry, as an institution, claims social relevance by recognizing social authority of the family and kingship, *and* designating a value form parallel to the mundane, manual-labour based production. This ensures the ghazal's institutionalization as the urbane art *par excellence*. Poetic art draws its immediate sustenance and ideological worth from its proximity to high courtly culture. Indeed the ability to write in such courtly forms as the ghazal and the Brajbhasha forms gave the literate and scribal classes access to the means of representation.

As if to concretize its luxuriant value form, in the boy-image, the discourse of moral disapprobation of worldly desires and secular, market exchange is presented in a half-mocking tone:

jō launḍā pāk hai sō ḳhvār hai tukṛē kē taʾīñ ʿājiz
vohī rājā hai Dillī mēñ jō ʿāshiq kē talē paṛ jā [308]
[The pure lad helpless for a morsel is thus debased,
the one who falls under/lies under the lover is the king in Delhi]

The pejorative sounding "lad" (*launḍā*) is yet another manifestation of the boy-beloved on the scale between the despised passive male and the venerated *amrad*. This boy is placed in a topsy-turvy world where top has become bottom. Virtue does not bring food to the table and so the boy is presumably forced to sell himself to make ends meet. The rewards for the boy are not minimal, If he submits to the lover's desire he is a virtual king of the realm (the punned phrase *talē paṛnā* means "to be under the influence of someone" as well as "to physically lie under someone").

[307] The classic account of the dominant system of economic exchange and social organization of Mughal India remains Irfan Habib's *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556–1707* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999; second ed.). I draw on his description of the "agrarian system" as not just land revenue administration, but as the structure within which a precapitalist agrarian economy coheres around a distinct social structure.

[308] Ḥasan, ed. *Dīvān-e Ābrū*, Gh. 72: 106.

Social topsy-turviness is literalized through the image of the boy passively lying under the male lover. The traditional prejudice against passivity in penetrative sex is used to figure the vanquishing of virtue in the sale of beauty. But this does not hide the mild tone of enjoyment in the speaker's voice. He ironizes the institution of kingship through the economic mediation of the substance of sovereignty. The economic aspect does not refer to a widescale mobility of non-elite classes, but the debasing of moral capital in the immediate needs of survival. This is expressed in terms of the pollution barriers of caste society (*pāk*/pure and *ḳhvār*/vile) through which social and political chaos is imaged. Thus what appears as a mild criticism of the debased times of purchasibility of sexual favours, emerges as criticism of the hollow moral order which valorizes purity of action without any concern for the real conditions of existence. Significantly, it is the male lover (*ʿāshiq*) representing a class of buyers who exposes this hollowness by acting on purely sexual motives. The space of social comment that is opened in this double structure of enjoyment and moral criticism is a coded language of erotic contact between the lover and the boy. The pointedness of observation thus arises from a predetermined morality of erotic contact and does not attempt to describe the structure from outside. Such self-consciously social commentary underlines the quick connection between elite complaints about social upheaval and the state of sexual morals. As we saw in Hatim's *shahrāshōb* extract such intuitive connections assume the de-idealizing effects of the boy-image to express the naturalness of social hierarchies.

The hypervalorized physicality of the boy as an object of desire puts particular pressure on the transcendental systems of religion and mysticism, particularly since it appears also in religious imagery and mystical categories. The semiotics of idol worship, symbolizing 'Hindu' religious practice, strongly adds to this pressure. The ground of the erotic allows for the

inversion of sacrality into profane heterogeneities, but only through the static core of the boy-image. Abru writes:

kuhna ʿāshiq pē nauḳhaṭāñ sēñ zaḳhm
ḥusn kī sharaʿ bīč bidʿat hai[309]
[The old lover's wounding by the newly-bearded/newly written,
is an innovation in the rite of beauty]

The de-idealization of the erotic modes of poetry is presented here by the metaphorization of the terminology of legalistic piety. If beauty is the normative path (*sharaʿ*) and the adolescent boys its followers, then the cruel treatment of the grey-haired lover is a rewriting (*īhām* in *nauḳhaṭāñ*: newly bearded boy and newly written) of the codes of that path. The logic of the conceit brings us to the idea of the beloved as *kāfir* or infidel. This is a conventional epithet for the beloved in the ghazal. The marginalization of the boy helps raise the ethics of boy-love above legal morality. It is the changeability of the boy that inaugurates another rule of love that subverts the traditionally accepted code of love (the metaphor of *sharaʿ* leaves no doubt of the normative force of this code).[310] The boy himself is the point on which this anti-piety turns so that the lover appears as the follower of the "old" (therefore authentic) dispensation while the boy is the ruthless innovator. The *īhām* phrase clarifies that the boys are not active agents of subversion but their essential inconstancy, written on their face, keeps producing deviations from the normative text (of love and legality). Thus, the boy does not denote an *alternative* sexual practice. His

[309] Ḥasan, ed. *Dīvān-e Ābrū*, Gh 87: 271.

[310] Farhat Hasan argues against the assumption of a rigid, legal-sacral "ideological framework" of the *shariʿa* in local arenas of social life under the Mughal Empire up to the eighteenth century. From his case study of contact points between imperial authority and local institutions at the level of the town and the *muhalla* in the Gujarat *suba*, he concludes: "[The *shariʿa*] was actually an ambiguous system, characterized by a high degree of flexibility that allowed it to steadily assimilate local norms and customs. It was for this reason not even restricted in its application to Muslims alone, but came to be appropriated by all sections of the local society, as constituting a shared normative system." Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; South Asia ed.) 72. This historical picture of the adaptability of the *shariʿa* to local contests for power shows that the subversiveness of anti-piety themes is not an essentially aesthetic function of the ghazal but is made possible historically by the operation of normative frameworks (of piety etc.) in social relations.

inconstancy is the justification for an aesthetic practice which demands justification from an unchanging, established legal norm. The theme of anti-piety therefore does not question the normativity of rules as much as position the aesthetic as the unchanging, elevated discourse of sovereign male desires.

Both the elements of vernacularization and the socialization of erotic scenarios are historical elements operating within the rhetorical features of *īhām* poetry. The *īhām* structure is not merely a rhetorical device chosen at random from Perso-Arabic poetics but reflects the formal flexibility open to the poet of this period to choose between competing figural and linguistic possibilities. Apart from the obvious virtue of increasing the vocabulary base of the north-Indian literary vernacular (for which critics half-heartedly commend the *īhām* poets), this process shows thinking about language as an already socialized medium, and not gripped in the artefactual certainty of traditional poetic authorities. The *īhām* poem insists on the demonstrability of making poetry. There is little attempt to craft an illusion that loses sight of its own illusory nature. It chooses to follow the instances of doubled speech not just in a rhetorical sense but as features of social life. The poems show an awareness, indeed a desire to demonstrate, the implication of abstract social symbols, such as kingship and morality, in their operation in social and economic processes. One important source of social irony emerges in the changing notion of kingship, which Habib has shown, marks a shift from the taxation-based model of kingship (where taxes were a remuneration for the king providing security and justice to people) to a rent-extracting model (where the king is the proprietor of all land in the realm) in the eighteenth century.[311] The neatness of these models however should not be taken to mean a rationally arranged social and economic arrangement in which the king actually owned all the land. This had to *appear* to be so in order for the state authority to claim a larger and larger share

[311] Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 123–24.

of the surplus produced in this society. The early ghazal poets in their interest in the compromised states of abstract sovereignty and morality appear to note this shift by valorizing forms of value that are simultaneously socially material and exceeding such determinations. The various scenarios of the boy's sexual subordination and immoral sale point to the compelling need to shore up ideals (of morality and romantic etiquette) while imagining their contamination in social processes and interactions.

In this sense, the erotic idiom of the ghazal is not an *a priori* idealizing medium upholding the superiority of aesthetic thought against the disenchantments of the world. It is a medium of contemplating and figuring precisely that space demarcating social reality from its idealized forms. It marks the grid lines for a space of reflection in which the playfulness of linguistic patterning attains the semblance of routine, codified practices. The image of the boy plays an integral part in the production of a repertoire of erotic images and scenarios that opens this space of reflection in the ghazal. The aesthetic unification of the ghazal form in later poets such as Yaqīn and Mir, the bearers of the standard of literary tradition, makes it look as if the ghazal's interiorizing idiom (*dāḳhiliyyat*) was invented by them. But even in their work the tropes of boy-love retain their de-idealizing functions, keeping the space of observation open. We can notice and account for these shifts if we dare to step outside the mainstream of a unified ghazal tradition with an essential philosophical core. The notion of the erotic helps us do that by focusing attention on the internal creases of poetic language which define and delimit its scope. The pressure of the erotic is sometimes historical (enabling the exploration of linguistic possibilities and unevenness in "early Urdu") and at other times topical or personal (for expressing particular desires or railing against particular irritants in society). It is what creates

the sense of a continuous textuality of the ghazal tradition by consistently implicating social and sexual life in the innermost patterns of poetic art.

Chapter Four

A whip on the posturing steed: Mir's boy-poems

In this chapter, I will examine a well-known aspect of Muḥammad Taqī "Mīr"'s (1722–1810) ghazal oeuvre, the boy-love poem, for its socio-historical dimensions. But before the exposition, I will recount in brief the modern discovery of Mir as a premier "classical" ghazal poet and through it show the shifting frames of reference for reading the ghazal, and in particular its erotic contents, and what these tell us about our historical relationship with a premodern poet and his writing. I will then delineate the structure of rhetoric and thought as it emerges in a selection of Mir's *shiʿrs* on the theme of *amradparastī*, working out at each moment of this structure the nature of *social unconcern* embodied in the ghazal. My aim is to understand aesthetic choices and poetic conventions as expressing social compulsions even when, and especially when, they disavow them. My selection of these few poems from Mir's vast oeuvre (based on six *dīvān*s) engages with a narrow theme, but I hope to dissolve this exceptional looking colour of Mir's particoloured universe into the generality of observations about idealized language, the ideology of masculinity, political sovereignty and the social vistas imagined in the premodern ghazal.

The Ghazal in Mir's Mirror

The influential model of placing cultural artefacts within one or the other dominant historical current to understand their production and reception is a far cry from the situation on the ground of South-Asian eighteenth-century historiography. The very definition and singularity of such a current are issues of intense, often polarized, historiographical debate. The generic and thematic consistency of the ghazal and the high-cultural reception of its writing give the impression of at

least one stable social institution in the shifting sands of post-imperial 'decline' or regional autonomization. Yet the status of poetry as a social institution is itself uncertain because very little in the ghazal can be read as statements or reflections of social conditions. Handy aesthetic concepts that denote a movement within poetry away from linguistic surfaces towards a 'making' (*poiesis*) of new thoughts and social possibilities, such as imagination and fantasy, are inimical to the ghazal, not because of cultural dissimilarities between western poetics and oriental poetry (oriental poetry is not a monolithic sign system operable only by its own cultural manual and demonstrably includes enough categories and assumptions of premodern 'western' provenance), but because they presuppose, rather than explain, the nature of subjectivity reflected in poetic utterance. Such misalignments between concept and historical forms of subjectivity are barely hidden in the writing of reformist critics who are accused, in our era of nationalism, of trying to impose terms like "nature" and "imagination" (*taḳhayyul*) on the ghazal. For example, Hali understands *taḳhayyul* as an image-producing faculty, strictly understood as a medium of transcription of the speaking subject's discrete, objective certainties of a socialized natural world (*nēčar*).[312] Both these troublesome aspects of writing a social history of the ghazal, the historical–extratextual and the interpretive–textual, however, may be connected under the problem of historical forms of subjectivity, that micro-level question of historical determination of social agency, which I will describe in this final chapter as a tension *internal* to the ghazal.

Ghazal studies conventionally begin with a statement of the definition of the genre. This inaugural gesture repeated in innumerable studies fixes its themes and formal limits, establishing its bases in unchanging objective features. Here is Jamīl Jālibī's founding definition from his book on Mir Taqi: "ġhazal dāḳhilī aur ġhināʾī ṣinf hai aur ʿishq is kā ḳhāṣ mauẓūʿ hai" [The

[312] Altaf Husain Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, ed. Vaḥīd Quraishī (ʿAlīgaṛh: Ējūkēshnal Buk Hāʾūs, 2011), 113–15.

ghazal is an introspective and lyrical (literally, melodious) genre and love is its specific theme.].[313] It distinguishes the generic properties of the ghazal (introspection and lyricism) from its content and thematic occasions ("love"). While all the components of the definition seem to be unvarying, essential properties, a subtle distinction is set up between exterior theme and interior affect. Even more so, the lyric property becomes an internalizing property (the ghazal involves a lyrical introspection) while love or the erotic realm appears as primarily external to the generic properties. The conjunctions in the definition may be then read as eliding these definitional gaps in order to give a smoothly comprehensive definition of a genre. In other words, within its terms, no internal account is possible for the *relationship* between lyric introspection (how does the poem work?) and its eroticism (what is the poem about?), which is not merely descriptive or formalistic. This compressed definition leaves enough room for catching quite divergent examples of the ghazal, ranging from the particularly erotic to the self-consciously philosophical or universal, adequately describing the heterogeneity in the ghazal corpus. But this description fails to enter a realm in which such extreme polarities, under different historical conditions, could have had a social function and a justification not just aesthetic but socially necessary. This foundational gesture of modern ghazal studies then does not so much describe an actual unchanging poetic tradition as highlight the conceptual gap between modern readers and this instantly recognizable tradition.

The exteriority of themes of love and desire eventually supports an externalist view of history as that which happens outside the ghazal's world from which histories of sexuality, homosexuality and desire, parallel to an unchanging history of the internal machinery of lyrical introspection, have been recently proposed. Their primary job is studying and comparing representations. This has been an easy, self-fulfilling task as representations are meant to be

[313] Jamil Jalibi, *Muḥammad Taqī Mīr* (Dihlī: Ējūkēshnal Pablishiñg Hāʾus, 1990; extended edition), 89.

'read' and a gathering of such 'readings' is assumed to conjure the historical spark that lies dormant in representative instances. This enthusiasm for the history of surfaces, no doubt partially a remnant of colonial modes of positing cultural difference through representative textual markers, is matched by literary critical philosophizing about the invisible interior of such hoary literary traditions as the ghazal. The latter base their arguments on the measure of abstraction and introspective depth in exemplary poets (mainly two, Mir and Ġhālib) whose singularity appears to break the external continuity of genre and thematic consistency both of which, as we saw above, define the ghazal. Thus, for example, Sayyid ʿAbdullāh, a prominent critic of Mir in the twentieth century, glosses the introspective (*dāḳhilī*) aspect of Mir's poetry with the term *taġhazzul* (ghazalness). A tautological description of the ghazal's essence (it is like saying the lyric is lyrical), the term stresses the unqualified expanse of this internal dimension of Mir's well-wrought poetry. The internal (*dāḳhilī*) cannot be enounced and it is this quality of the ghazal (i.e. its *taġhazzul*) that motivates poetic language to use words, images and motifs that signify a whole chain of associations without needing to lay down the step-by-step construction of thought or the proposition. However ineffable they appear, these interiority effects are inevitably ascribed to abbreviation (*ijmāl*) and symbolism (*īmāʾiyyat*), thus denoting a condition of descriptive language.[314] We know that a Mir ghazal has an introspective aspect due to features of his language like stark compression which shows that interiority is achieved through the strictures of poetic form. In this vernacular, 'non-political' view of poetry, history is rather unconvincingly jettisoned by holding on to a self-manifesting notion of the inner essence of the ghazal. Yet the critic wants to inventory, explain and summarize this essence through its after-effects, as if poetic interiority were a black hole knowable only in its surrounding effects. The

[314] Sayyid Abdullah, "Mīr kā andāz," in idem, *Naqd-e Mīr* (Lāhaur: Maktaba-e ḳhiyābān-e adab, 1968; third ed..), 41.

need to qualify this unqualifiable mystery through such abstractions as *tāśīr* (effect) and *kaifiyyat* (affective response) points to the larger question of explaining the social reception of the ghazal. For all its hermetic interiority, the master poet's ghazal must bear the impress of the external hand of the poet, using the hard-coding of symbolic language to constantly produce these unquantifiable effects of "great" poetry. Thus, the ideology of the lyric parades under the trailing cloak of interiority in ghazal studies and it is time now to step on this cloak to historically situate the relations between interiority (imaginative space) and exteriority (figuration and theme). This intervention is necessary also to reformulate the political questions raised by the historians of surface (such as LGBT historians) whose 'western' categories are debunked by Urdu literary critics, disavowing their own reliance on globalizing literary categories as the lyric, novel, imagination and criticism.

These contemporary debates in ghazal criticism are not incidents of a recent, postmodern situation. The ideology of the lyric sat heavy on the literary–theoretical project inaugurated by Hali in the late nineteenth century. Despite the doctrinaire tenor of his views about the moralist execution of poetry, Hali ascribes specific lyric properties to the ghazal, not replaceable with mysticism or moral didacticism. The differentiation of traditional thought into "science" (*ʿilm*) and morality (*ḥikmat*) had a direct impact on such liminal cultural forms as poetry that had claimed a vaster epistemic reference before. The adoption of lyricism as the intervening term in the changing definition of poetry by bourgeois reformism in its bid for rearticulating its own class influence in terms of colonial institutions and vocabularies, made available a language of abstract, de-cultured reference for intimate but culturally loaded matters such as women's lives, sensuous feelings and sexual acts. In the first few sentences of the section on the ghazal in his *Muqaddama*, Hali actually recommends the ghazal for private, personal reminiscing and note-

taking for an everyday consciousness. He argues that the brevity of the form fits well with the frenzied, episodic span of everyday modern life.[315] He finds its fragmented form useful for capturing and preserving disconnected, unharmonized thoughts. While in relation to the thriving, intricate and often cerebrally challenging practice of ghazal writing Hali's recommendation appears belittlingly utilitarian, its attempt at squaring poetic form with states of consciousness signals a new kind of thinking about subjective interiority inscribed in the linguistic act of poetry.

It identifies an essential asymmetry in the ghazal's propositional structure in which thought need not correspond with its correlatives but may move through weak, non-contiguous associations. The surety of representation in the ghazal, albeit in the reduced domain of poetry, grates for a consciousness alienated from its social and cultural moorings and thus itself represents the colonized subject's distance from his textual past. Hali may very well be misreading the "classical" ghazal and its assumptions but his stated relevance of the ghazal reveals a new form of historical consciousness for which even disconnected, evanescent thoughts could be of value and their writing down part of the same creative process which is expected to attempt a linguistic mapping of the world enveloping the subject of consciousness. Finally, he recommends the ghazal, in its diminished form, notably for a poetry which predominantly includes the discursive mode of the *naẓm*. In this unity of poetry, two moments are proposed: the recording of flitting impressions in the tranquil simplicity of the ghazal, and the effortful, declarative power of socially mobilizing poetry (*naẓm*). This relation is spanned by the vocabulary of interiority and exteriority (the twentieth-century critic is then merely restating the colonial problematic), however, whose concrete manifestation is the not so incidental erotic excessiveness of the ghazal as the traditional form of poetry. The ghazal participates in the

[315] Hali, *Muqaddama-e shiʿr o shāʿirī*, 178.

banishment of the privileged Urdu reader from his literary tradition because it symptomizes the larger cultural dislocation of colonialism: sexuality, which should be a private, hidden affair, in poetry has not just gone public but in its perverse modes signifies one's cultural identity. The hand-wringing about the absence of a proper 'western' spontaneity in Urdu poetry can thus be re-understood not as a desire for a properly 'western' lyricism but an effort to reimagine poetic inspiration and craft as internal, private acts that should appear only after receiving the generalizing daubs of socialized poetry (for Hali, both the *naẓm* and the ghazal). At stake in this reimagination is not the repression of sexuality and its heterogeneous manifestations but the strengthening of an interiority in which social inscriptions of the self, like gender, caste, sexuality and class, could be naturalized and shielded from social contestation. One example will have to suffice here. Poetry's uninhibited references to feminine attributes and gender, to Hali's mind, disrupt its credibility and yet the new prose texts fashioned by reformists (Hali himself wrote one: *Majālis un-nisā* [*c.* 1875]) during the same period demonstrate a precise narrativizing of the formation of good female subjects in the domestic sphere. Poetic references are unable to bear the risk of social correlatives, not for any deep attachment to 'European lyricism,' but because poetry embodies, in its rule-bound, traditional façade, the sureties of "traditional" (caste and patriarchal) society that have historically suited the aristocratic and courtly classes (*ashrāf*) whose demoted members were now desperately defending their bourgeois privileges. The lyric transformation of the ghazal was therefore neither a purely interior, aesthetic phenomenon nor an external, ramshackle overhaul of poetic terminology. A precise historical subjectivity emerges from the poetics espoused by reformist intellectuals within whose coordinates we are still grappling with the interior/exterior formula of ghazal criticism.

Due to such epochal theorizations by Hali and the reformist writers, it is easy to forget that the Urdu ghazal tradition was not available to them in the form of a dossier of critically edited texts and commentaries on the 'classical' poets. This was formed in part by the pioneering efforts of early anthologists like the French Orientalist Garcin de Tassy and following him Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, whose idiosyncratic opinion of individual poets, currently canonized (particularly Mir and Nāsiḵh), shows the seminal role played by early twentieth-century figures such as ʿAbdul Ḥaq in resurrecting poets in the now familiar mould of the reformed lyrical ghazal. Mir studies were singlehandedly established by Haq's edition (1929) of the selected Urdu ghazals and his editing and publishing Mir's occasional Persian pieces, including the memoir *Ẕikr-e Mīr*. Mir's elevation to the status of the god of poetry (*ḵhudā-e suḵhan*) while echoing nineteenth-century hyperbole typical of *taẕkiras*, and perhaps strengthened by the early colonial recognition of his poetry (a printed edition of his *Kulliyāt* was allegedly brought out from the Fort William College press soon after the poet's death in 1810), is a distinctly twentieth-century trend, steered by Abdul Haq and his followers.[316] Mir's exemplarity therefore for 'classical' poetry presents a comparatively recent phenomenon of canonization and shows the short-duration exigencies of classicization of premodern artefacts.

The inter-war rediscovery of Mir and the ascendance of New Criticism in Euro–America in the same period of the twentieth century brings our story of the foundational definition of the ghazal into the clear perspective of late-colonial Anglophone literary developments channelized in the colony through the teaching of English Literature. The effects of this influence, while deserving a separate detailed study, are visible in this period across studies of the classical poets, particularly Mir. The repeated invocation of T.S. Eliot's essays, I.A. Richards, William Empson,

[316] Maulvī ʿAbdul Ḥaq, "*Muqaddama*," in idem, ed. *Intiḵhāb-e kalām-e Mīr: jis mēñ Mīr kē kalām kī khuṣūṣiyāt par bahaṡ kī gaʾī hai* (Dillī: Anjuman-e taraqqi-e urdū (Hind), 1975; second ed.), 7.

Allen Tate et al. and citing their views without any visible resistance against borrowing poetic concepts and terms from a 'foreign' critical tradition shows the deep imbrication of Anglophone literary study in the formation of canons and critical tastes in South Asian languages. The long shadow of this influence of New Criticism on Mir studies in particular may be observed in such late twentieth-century milestones of criticism as Qāẓī Afẓāl Ḥusain's *Mīr kī shiʿrī lisāniyāt* (1983) and even in the self-avowedly return-to-the-basics classicizing study *Shiʿr-e shōr angēz* (1990–1994) by Shamsur Raḥmān Fāruqī. In both studies, and a host of minor ones, the close-reading, practical criticism formulae of Richards and others are the driving force of interpretation. Husain is interested in presenting the movement of language in Mir's ghazal by extrapolating concepts from structuralist linguistics, abstaining in the process from authorial intentionalism and autobiographical reading.[317] Faruqi, on the same hand, treats the ecology of the selectively pared Mir ghazal as the unity of classical rules of versification and subjectively controlled performance in poetic language. While approaching Mir from almost opposing positions of linguistic determination and historicist aestheticism, the Mir poem in their analyses betrays the lineaments of the modernist crisis of signification to which early New Critics such as Richards were responding. The effort in Faruqi's work is to yield meaning from a notoriously recalcitrant text (most importantly because of the loss of the tools of "classical" reading in modern criticism) which has been overlaid with superficial existential and autobiographical readings of the poet's melancholic moods and straightforward linguistic use.[318] In Husain's case, the ghazal's language is given an autonomously referential function such that words in a ghazal do not refer to any of their conventional meanings but invoke discursive fragments of which they

[317] Qazi Afzal Husain, *Mīr kī shiʿrī lisāniyāt* (Dihlī: ʿArshiya Pablīkēshanz, 2012; second ed.).

[318] See the various introductory chapters to the first volume of his commentary on Mir, especially Chapter 9 "Shiʿr-e shōr angēz." Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Shiʿr-e shōr angēz: ġhazaliyyāt-e Mīr kā muḥaqqiqāna intiḳhāb, mufaṣṣil muṭālaʿē kē sāth*: *jild avval* (Naʾī Dihlī: Qaumī kaunsil barā-e farōġh-e urdū zubān, 2006; third ed.), 188– 208.

appear to be remnants. The modernist slant in both these readings of eighteenth-century poetry builds on a singular notion that the poem *has* a clear *communication* of meaning. Any historical distortions in meaning or textual variability are ignored by the almost prescriptive force of literary theorization. The historical context of Richards' social critique of the spiralling gyre of the modernist poem is sorely missing in these programmatic applications of the principles of practical criticism to premodern poetry. While the postcolonial Urdu critic (Husain and Faruqi are by no means representative of the Urdu critical establishment) notes the ghazal's elaborate rhetoric and image construction, his New Critical faith tends to flatten and smoothen its intricate verbal layering through the demand for a paraphrasable meaning of the poem demonstrable through close reading methods.

The creative uses of 'western' literary theory by influential voices in twentieth-century Urdu criticism is a testimony to the movable quality of literary concepts and theories which are not destined for the literature from which they emerge. This practice for historical reasons is a distinctive feature of the Urdu/Hindi literary complex formed as it is from the amalgamation of a vast swathe of contiguous and 'foreign' linguistic elements. But this creative commons of literary criticism, as we saw in the context of reformist literary criticism, does not work on a simple principle of free exchange of concepts and categories. The concept of "lyricism" did influence the reformist imagination of the poem's text and the introspective orientation of the speaking subject, but its viability was determined by precise demands of historical subjectivity under colonial conditions. Similarly, the twentieth-century enthusiasm for the New Critical credo in ghazal studies, finding in the ghazal an unfinished lyric quality (that needs interpretive tools for its completion and reception) and, contradictorily, a literary modernist recalcitrance (that must be brought to bear meaning), speaks of the colonial heritage of literary study of South

Asian languages which solidifies the signifier of Europe and America in literary theory while replacing the forms and ruptures of historical consciousness implied in those theorizations with the sterile stability of "our" texts and literary traditions. Undeniably the work of Mir critics, along with Ghalib critics at the helm of ghazal criticism, has contributed the most in fixing the ghazal's textuality for contemporary readers and criticism, but this has happened by delinking premodern poetry from, to use Empson's phrase in defence of Richards' *Practical Criticism*, its modern *poetic public*.[319] As in the case of the historians of surfaces, for the new Urdu critic history exists on the surface of texts: we study and cherish them because they signify antiquity and not because they are relevant to our social and literary concerns or signify some concrete relation with the past.

Yet it is paradoxically the energy and seductiveness of single-poet criticism, freighted with autobiographical and superficially historicist assumptions, that may offer one sort of release from the impasse in Urdu studies between the hunt for representations and the demand for illustrative meaning. One concrete example of a self-implicating critical gesture which tries to imagine the afterlife of literary texts long after their 'own' poetic public has died appears in Sayyid Abdullah's studies on Mir. He admits in an essay titled "Mir and I" (*Maiñ aur Mīr*) the oddity of writing about the critic's personal link with a poet's work.[320] He still persists, almost against the ideological convictions of ghazal criticism, to describe a personalist, but never the less historical, coming into being of a relationship between the poet's work and himself. As a politically conscious Muslim subject of British India, Abdullah charts this history from the Khilafat agitation after the first world war when his literary tastes consisted of the poetry of both the "classical" Ḥāfiẓ and the modern poets Iqbāl and Akbar, representing the unity of aesthetic

[319] Quoted in John Paul Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work* (London: Routledge, 1989), 530.

[320] Abdullah, "Maiñ aur Mīr," in idem, *Naqd-e Mīr* (Lāhaur: Maktaba-e ḳhiyābān-e adab, 1968; third ed..), 285–313.

expression and political aspirations of a collective movement. The nub of this poetic tradition (for it really marked a seven hundred-year-old tradition from the Persian Hafiz to the neo-Persianate Iqbal) was its purposiveness (*maqṣadiyyat*). In its utopic promise, this poetry signalled a world to come. But the events of 1947, national independences realized in the violent uprooting and murder of populations, for Abdullah, mark the exhaustion of this promise, as historical reality floods the neat worlding of utopias.

Prior to this historical disaster, Abdullah notes his gravitation towards the ghazal, which although a part of the Hafiz and Iqbal tradition, attained a political charge and contemporary piquancy in the work of Ḥasrat, an anti-colonial Muslim poet–activist. The "political ghazal" appealed to him because it showed the political possibilities of form, rather than its external assertions of utopic possibilities. It was this attractiveness of the perseverance of formal constraints that brought this witness of the horrors of Punjab in 1947 to the ghazals of Mir. Something broke in that moment, not just politically, but personally (*alam*) for the reader, and in that same moment fused personal and political disaster. This unbearable feeling of living the contradictions of an external world, nulled any faith in the reparative power of literature embodied in the great tradition of Hafiz and Iqbal. Mir's poetry now appeared as the symbol of continuity in fragmentation as its images and symbols, particularly the bell of the departing caravan (*jaras*) and the asocial wilderness (*bayābāñ*),[321] loosened themselves from their internalist signification to become outwardly personal symbols of pain and loss. This literalist faith in poetic fragments, which the rest of Abdullah's work is bent on pressing into the unity of the poet's work, forces the reader–critic to revisit the historical age in which such fragmentation thrived and was valued. It as if the affective relevance of Mir in 1947 has lit up from inside the historical world from which its internal, aesthetic movement always tried to escape.

[321] Abdullah, "Maiñ aur Mīr," in idem, *Naqd-e Mīr*, 293.

What follows in the essay is characteristic of psychic denial arising from trauma, as Abdullah delves into key periods of Indo-Muslim history to understand Mir's formation in relation to the long traditions of art and creativity under Muslim rulers. He comes up with a curiously idiosyncratic reading of Muhammad Shah's reign (the relevant political context of Mir's early writing) as a period of 'syncretic' cultural formation in which local strains were synthesized to form a 'national' culture, under the auspices of the court, to combat the dominance of "Hindu culture" (*hinduvānā kalčar*).[322] The usual clichés about syncretism as tolerance of the elements of alienness in dominant culture are overturned to rewrite the history of Muslim separatism as the real history of cultural unification and syncretism. The singularity of Mir as the transit point for these syncretic processes allows for the possibility of this overnight achievement of syncretism on the grave, as it were, of monocultural "Hindu" dominance. Never the less the reliance on historicism to rationalize the attractiveness of a poetry of unclaimed, unredeeming fragments unravels some of the stakes in reading poetry form the past. While the ideological pull in Abdullah's personalist account is clearly Islamist–nationalist, another force pulls this utopic programme in the direction of an alternative history in which coexistence and syncretism are real possibilities. Mir's poetry is a precipitate of such possibilities, and its fragmentary, non-purposive quality allows generous space for piecing together the broken constituents of the self even as the same space is not extended to the other ("Hindu"). This manipulability of historicism is both its strength and weakness. Abdullah reinflects the idiom of Mir's poetry, *rēḳhta*, the mixed-up language of north-Indian literariness, as a bulwark against "Hinduness." We can read this inflection as simultaneously distortive (for both Hindu and Muslim forms, not to speak of several subcultural ones, crystallized the Urdu–Hindi complex) and effective ("Hinduness", as much as "Islamic", as the name of a

[322] Abdullah, "Maiñ aur Mīr," in idem, *Naqd-e Mīr*, 298.

majoritarianism is indeed diluted by notions of mixed speech and syncretic culture). I offer Abdullah's rare personal account as a cautionary tale against both a faith in the strict boundaries of literary textuality and the instrumentalization of history as external to the relevance of our current desires. It also offers an internal account, from within criticism, of the subjective limits of the critic's work. The points of Indo-Muslim syncretic formation delineated by Abdullah – *rēḳhta*, Mir's poetry, the late Mughal polity – are contemporary stakes in writing the history of this period and its poetry. The figure of Mir will be our constant helpmate in this task, especially his poetic universe's iridescent, unfinished edges.

Mir's *amradnāma*

One consequence of the canonization of Mir in twentieth-century Mir studies has been the recognition of particular themes and colours (*rañg*) in his poetry that distinguish it from the generality of classical effects of beauty and ideal form. ʿAndalīb Shadānī's essay on Mir's homoerotically colourful poetry is an attempt to historically situate the greatness of this poetry in terms meaningful to its contemporary readers. The essay does not reach out far enough into the social lineaments of this particular theme but manages to bring out the repeated emphasis on the theme of the boy as an external marker of the Mir style. In the grand house of Mir's ghazal, Shadani asserts there is a special place for poems about the beauty and allure of the boy, which he calls Mir's "boy treatise" (*amradnāma*).[323] Saleem Kidwai rightly notes the homophobic charge of such excavation of the dead and deadening aspects of male homoeroticism, which for

[323] Andalib Shadani, "Mīr ṣāḥib kā ēk ḳhāṣ rañg," in idem, *Taḥqīqāt* (Barēlī: Jalīl Ikaiḍamī, 1968), 138. In this chapter I have relied heavily on Shadani's selection of 'homoerotic' (*amradparastāna*) *shiʿr*s in his essay, though not always observing his thematic sub-distinctions.

Shadani, need to be noted only to be excised from modern editions.[324] In his commentarial work on Mir, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi makes a subtler critique of Shadani's thematic analysis by pointing out the intrinsic relation between poetic craft and sexuality (*jinsī maẓmūn*) in classical poetry of the time. But, while the homoerotic image undergoes rhetorical refraction in the ghazal inscribing it in the poetic universe, Faruqi notes that it inevitably fails to attain the idealized (*ʿainiyyat paẕir*) aspect of the hypervalued objectivity of the beloved.[325] Faruqi arrives at this formulation not by reference to any contemporary or historical perspective on homoerotic love, i.e. as it exists/existed in society, but as a condition of poetic craft always striving for non-exceptionable referentiality. The boy-image is versified, according to him, for its precarious proximity to bare sexuality. Sometimes the poem manages to clear this realm of literal (sexual) reference into the ideal destination of figurative completion and when it doesn't the poem remains as a barely sexual reference appealing to vicarious tastes.

Faruqi's axiomatic distinction between sexuality (in its marked, *homoerotic* manifestation) and poetic craft, expressed as the idealization of exclusively non-homoerotic objects, offers a heuristic possibility for understanding the 'sexual orientation' of poetic language and the latter's naturalization of merely aesthetic assumptions about what deserves idealization. This possibility is missed in Kidwai's antihomophobic position which submits poetic exempla to a self-evident historical reality in which real men and real boys (insistently defended as being above the 'age of consent') desire each other, ignoring the conditions under which such desire could be understood as part of social reality and practice. Moreover, measuring homophobia only by the extremism of pronouncements against the practice of same-sex desire, blinds us to subtle

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[324] Kidwai, "Introduction: Medieval Materials in the Perso-Urdu Tradition," in Vanita and Kidwai, eds. *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2001), 121.

[325] Faruqi, "Čūñ ḳhamīr āmad badast-e nānbā," in idem, *Shiʿr-e shōr angēz*, 153.

mechanisms of heterosexist thought, visible in Faruqi's axiom, which confine the possibility of homosexuality to a self-contained realm of desire between men. In fact, we can read Faruqi's comment about the non-idealizable aspect of homoerotic objects as the very axis for his commentarial position on the purely figural properties of "classical" poetry, achieved by subtracting the scum of (homo)sexual references from its surface. Yet I choose to remain with Faruqi's formulation precisely because it allows us to heuristically posit a "sexual orientation" to the ghazal's idealizing tendencies, alerting us to its secularizing modes of imagining ideal conditions of law, morality, love, sex and desire.

Much of this modern investment in codifying and theorizing the idealizing tendencies of the ghazal, however, is based on treating literary-historical periodizations as internally established poetic axiomatics. The period before the grand plainspeaking (*sāda-gō*) style of poets of the Maẓhar school, i.e. of the *īhām* poets (discussed in Chapter Three) represents the rawness of poetry unable to escape its linguistic play. This shift from *īhām* to plainspeaking poetics, placed in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, is referenced largely to the axiomatic announcements by Mir in his *taẕkira* of Urdu poets, *Nikāt ush-shuʿarā*, one of the first of its kind, written in Persian around 1752.[326] At the end of this poetic anthology, Mir devotes some thought to the contemporary situation of *rēḳhta* (the ghazal in mixed north-Indian speech), enumerating its prevalent forms including *īhām*, various macaronic combinations of Hindi, Persian and north-Indian dialectal registers, and what he calls "*andāz*":

shashum andāz ast, ki mā iḳhtiyār karda-īm va āñ muḥiṭ hama ṣanʿat-hā ast. "tajnīs," "tarṣīʿ," "tashbīh," "ṣafā-e guftgū," "faṣāḥat," "balāġhat," "adābandī," "ḳhayāl" vaġhaira. iñhama dar ẓamn-e hamīn ast.[327]

[326] Abdullah, "Mīr kā andāz," in idem, *Naqd-e Mīr*, 36.

[327] Mir Taqi Mir, *Nikāt ush-shuʿarā, yaʿnī taẕkira-e shuʿarā-e urdū* (Badāyūñ: Niẓāmī Press, n.d.), 187.

[The sixth kind of Rekhta is *andāz*, and that is what we have adopted. It consists of all figures of speech. *Tajnis*, *tarsiʿ*, *tashbih* ('simile'), *safay-i guftogu*, *fasahat*, *balaghat*, *adabandi*, *khayal* etc. – they all come under (*andaz*).][328]

The sharp distinction from *īhām*, more precisely the latter's subordination to the larger concept and process of poetry, a shift articulated most clearly in Yaqīn's poetry and described in Chapter Two, posits an expansive poetic realm expressed as a unity of disparate elements from rhetoric (simile, paronomasias oral and written, word-mirroring etc.), conditions of discourse (unadorned, everyday), and abstract rules of poetic excellence (*faṣāḥat* and *balāġhat*) and proposition construction (*adābandī* and *ḳhayāl*). If this can be taken as an accurate description of his own poetic practice then the unity of *andāz* (from the imperfect stem of the Persian verb "to throw, caste, make, do") implies an enunciated style observable on the surface of verbal images. The break from *īhām*, apparently a condition of poetry caught in the knotting of only one kind of rhetorical display, i.e. the oral and written pun, releases poetry's referentiality to suggest surfaces, aspects and movement.

This reading of Mir's pithy theorization of *andāz* may be supported from his own verse:

andāz o nāz apnē us aubāsh kē haiñ qahr
sau sau javān martē haiñ ēk ēk ān par [329]
[The style and posturing of that rake of mine are afflictive:
Hundreds of men die at each of (his) ways.]

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[328] Translated by C.M. Naim in idem, trans. *Zikr-e Mir: The Autobiography of the Eighteenth Century Mughal Poet: Mir Muhammad Taqi 'Mir'* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 179.

[329] The text for all my Mir selections in this chapter is from the first volume of the collected poems edition: *Kulliyāt-e Mīr: jild avval (mukammal čẖa dīvān-e ġhazaliyyāt)*, eds. Ẓille ʿAbbās ʿAbbāsī and Aḥmad Maḥfūẓ (Naʾī Dihlī: Qaumī kaunsil barā-e farōġh-e urdū zubān, 2003; second ed.). I identify the *shiʿr* according to, first, its *dīvān* (in roman numerals), the ghazal number and then the *shiʿr* number (numbered continuously across the *divans*), followed by the page number. Thus, the above *shiʿr* comes from the fourth *dīvān*, ghazal no. 1386, *shiʿr* no. 10340 and page no. 689. From now on I will follow the citational form: IV.1386.10340: 689; *c.* 1794.

It is hard to determine with any accuracy the date of composition of individual *shiʿr*s but the approximate date of compilation of a *dīvān* (itself derived from vague internal evidence and the availability of earliest extant Mss.) can give a general sense of its chronological location in the poet's almost seven-decade-long career. Although this authorial chronology is not pertinent to my argument, for the sake of marking some historical chronology I give the approximate date (as given in Jalibi's *Tārīḳh-e adab-e urdū: jild duvum, ḥiṣṣa avval*, section V, chapter 2) of the respective *divan*'s compilation next to each *shiʿr*'s reference.

The appearance of the keyword "*andāz*" (style) conjoined with the succinct attribute "*nāz*" (haughty posturing) of the iconic beloved (*aubāsh*: the obvious gender marking also connotes a low-life rake) enunciates a link between literary stylistics and the erotic style of the fictional beloved's self-presentation. The poem (*shiʿr*) does not describe the contents of this style (of poetry and the beloved) but invites us to imagine them by abbreviating them in their effects. The abbreviation occurs in "*ān*", a synonym of "*andāz*", each of whose units are magnified by their hyperbolic, demi-divine effects on "hundreds" of men. The poem provides a neat allegory for the working of *andāz*, as the new style of writing poetry. However the allegorical function is enabled and enhanced only by the 'realism' of the vignette of the supposedly unidealizable boy-beloved. A relay is thus set up, much like the motion of light on water, between the declarative base (the poem's meaning or *maʿnī* or "what is the poem about?") and its figural undulation (the elaboration of the *maẓmūn* or "what is said about the theme?"), which lays bare the ideological pretence of achieving ideal form. This relay or movement, understandable in Faruqi's overpowering term *shōr-angēzī* ('tumultuation') as a "passionate yet impersonal comment on… the external scheme of things,"[330] achieves its effects through self-cancelling media like the boy-love vignette. But even Faruqi's handy definition has to presume an "external" sphere on which the effects of passionate comment are occasioned and registered. This secondary external world, inhabited by such surficial creatures as the boy, points to a duality hidden in the ghazal's structure of verbal reference: linguistic particularity and discursive generality. In the above poem, this is clearly observable in the conjunction of *andāz* (textual style) and *nāz* (physical style) that puts the boy in the place of poetry in order to say that each works its effects by being a

[330] Faruqi, "A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 1: Naming and Placing a Literary Culture," in Sheldon Pollock, ed. *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: Universtiy of California Press, 2003), 858. For a discussion of the term in Urdu see idem, "Kilāsīkī ġhazal kī shiʿriyāt," in *Shiʿr-e shōr angēz: jild sivum*, 128–29.

little more than itself. This is how the effects of singular acts may reach and affect hundreds of men. Both poetry and the boy delineate the iconographic process, precisely by desublimating sublimation, through which idealized iconic effects are achieved and maintained. The boy *is not* poetry per se, but precisely because he brings trailing with him a concern for the social (propriety, morality, masculinity and erotic etiquette), his story and its scenarios become unidealizable or desublimating; in other words, a means of imagining the ideal.

The boy is merely one thematically delineated motif in the ghazal's repertoire of objects of desire (e.g. the *gul* or flower, the ungendered *yār* or friend, Lailā, the veiled woman etc.). However unlike most of the objects in it, along with the veiled woman, it marks a point of coincidence between poetry and social practice. This itself is an illusion which gives the assurance of an external world blinding both the cultural historian and the historian of sexuality to the notches of the secular–historical visible in the ghazal's iconization of motifs such as the boy.

In the rest of this chapter I will pursue the theme of the boy in Mir's ghazals as it opens up a temporary observational space in the world of the poem, which is neither the attempted realism of early colonial literary writing nor the interiorized space of the disenchanted modern lyric subject. In the exposition of this space, I will attempt to answer the historical question about why homoerotic objects are unidealizable and what idealization might mean for real objects, emotions and people treated to the ghazal's *andāz*.

Boy-love as social observation

I established in the previous chapter that the erotic is not so much a collection of sexual themes or repertoire of sexualized object-images as an index of cultural knowledges which enclose the

ghazal's figural possibilities. This body of cultural knowledges and its indexical markings in ghazal poetry become a sign of continuity for literary historians. But as I've shown through Mir's inchoate literary theorization of his own style, and will substantiate now through his poetry, the erotic was used to demarcate innovations of style and reorient perspective within poetry.

The boy-vignette opens out on a social vista. Its consolidation as a theme and repertoire of images is based in large part on this sociable quality. For the self-conscious "Delhi school" poet, a quasi-mythological view of the imperial capital was hardened by the super-exclusivity of poetic cliques in that city, combining mystical exclusivity with casteist disdain for plebeian aspirants, of which Mir was a member and is perhaps the most vocal representative. Several of Mir's ghazals centre on a lapidary reference to the city, not always named Delhi, but generally the urban world (*shahr*, *ʿālam*, *jahān*, *rōzgār*), that engraves the social background on the poem. This inscription of the city signals distance from actual forms of urban life in the eighteenth century which were not always economically or culturally distinguishable from more regional centres (*qaṣba*) of economic and cultural production.[331] Indeed the stress on the boy-theme, its locale and attractions, might be one way to distinguish the truly 'urbane' aesthetic of boy-love from the innumerable *bāzār*-based towns, with their own burgeoning literary culture in both the Hindi and Persianate traditions.[332] Therefore their erotic attractions are metonymic extensions of

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[331] P.J. Marshall, "Introduction," in idem, ed. *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.

[332] Many of the so-called Delhi school poets were born in areas far from the precincts of the imperial capital. Mir himself was born in Agra, a major city at the time. His junior contemporary Mushafī (Ġhulām Ḥamadānī Muṣḥafī [1747–1825]), considered as a "Delhi" poet among the Lucknow aesthetes, was born in the *qaṣba* town of Amroha in Rohilkhand. But he cut his poetic teeth in the local courtly gatherings in similar provincial towns like Aonla and Tanda, before reaching Delhi in *c*. 1764. His first *dīvān* (*c.* 1785) which, according to Jamil Jalibi, consists of material he prepared in Delhi and before, displays a keen preoccupation with the theme of boy-love. The remarkable recurrence of its images and themes hints at the provincial poet's attempt to incorporate the urbane style and sensibility of a poet like Mir, whose impress appears clearly in Mushafi's first *dīvān*. For more details on Mushafi's

the city-sights. Thematically their 'infidelity' signifies their relatively free movement in the city (more specifically in the realm of exchange, i.e. the *bāzār*) but simultaneously this signifier congeals social knowledges such as morality, rituals of propriety and social conduct:

laṛkē Jahān-ābād kē yak shahr kartē nāz
ā jātē haiñ baġhal mēñ ishāra jahāñ kiyā [333]
[The boys of Jahanabad, a whole cityful they dally.
They come to hand, no sooner than a wink.]

As Faruqi points out in his commentary on this *shiʿr*, the untranslatable "*nāz*" connotes both affected posturing as well as love-talk and desire,[334] and thus the speaker appears to lightly mock the boys' coquetry, which lasts only as long as their admirers choose to remain aloof. The fact that this scene is based in the moral city of Jahānābād (shortened form of Shāhjahānābād, the imperial capital at Delhi) stresses the 'amoral' aspects of the boys, who though steeped in the art of seduction, appear to know and want to give themselves to their admirers. The speaker's vantage point is suggestive too: he watches from a high promontory, like the rampart of the royal Red Fort (note the echo of 'cityness' in the proper name as well as the idiomatic "*yak shahr*/cityful"), from where the world below appears as a pre-determined, socially differentiating hierarchy. Its declarative assurance also echoes the force of touristic knowingness, if not also moral observation. Thus the immoderate action of the boys centres a universe viewed as spectacle from the high ground, not of divine judgement, but secular, state sovereignty. This would explain the pliability of the boys not simply as a behavioural coding, but conjured by the peremptory power of summons.

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early career, see Jalibi, *Tārīḳh-e adab-e urdū: jild sivum* (Dihlī: Ējūkēshnal Pablishiñg Hāʾus, 2007), 180–81, 213–16.

[333] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, III.1079.8256: 583; *c*. 1785.

[334] Faruqi, *Shiʿr-e shōr angēz: jild avval*, 534.

Metonymically linked to a social vista, the boy's sexuality is indistinguishable from public visibility. Showiness is part of the boy's self-presentation. But culturalist assertions such as about the universal veiling of (aristocratic) women in public and the consequent visibility and availability of the young male erotic objects fail to note how the latter's desirability is causatively related to their mere visibility. It belongs in the *bāzār*, and attains its sexual edge precisely in being located literally in the social crucible. The obvious excitement of the observer harbours a deeper flavour of witnessing the enmeshing of a signifier from the caste–kinship based network with the comparatively freer network of artisanal trade and exchange. The actual practice of enslaving boys for their labour and sexual worth is also the unrecorded history of this causative connection between visibility and desire.[335] The publicity of the boy's actions in the ghazal perpetuate this ontological conception of desire, authored by the object, and overwhelming its unsuspecting observer:

kyā Mīr tū rōtā hai pāmālī-e dil hī kō
in launḍōñ nē tō Dillī sab sar pa uṭẖā lī hai [336]
[Mir, why cry for the mere heart crushed underfoot,
when these boys have made havoc of all Delhi!]

The substitution of the immediately 'personal' with the social vista suggests the extremity of the boys' destructive force, only to reconnect the ravaging of the individual heart with the city's troubles. This connection also reveals the socially consolidating effects of the boy-vignette, in which the two realms of poetry (*dil*) and social bustle (*Dillī*) (their parallel sounds enunciate this consolidation) are combined to reveal two contested sovereignties. But while the boys hyperbolically become the *cause* of this contestation, it is the destructibility of the centres of the

[335] See Indrani Chatterjee, "Alienation, Intimacy, and Gender: Problems for a History of Love in South Asia," in Ruth Vanita, ed. *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 61–76.

[336] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, I.584.4283: 392; *c*. 1752.

moral self (heart and city) that is contemplated by the poem's rhetoric. Once again, the allegorical temptation must be resisted here to allow room for the conceit to express an aspiration, rather than a social fact, to telescope the symbols of sovereignty into one's intimate, local surroundings.

The perspective from on high, ventriloquizing the power of a patrimonial state, is strengthened further, although from different agencies of empowerment:

ṣūrat parast hōtē nahīñ maʿnī āshnā
hai ʿishq sē butōñ kē mirā muddaʿā kuch̲ aur [337]
[Devotees of form aren't intimate with meaning.
I have, in adoring idols, some other design.]

maʿqūl agar samajh̲tē tō Mīr bh̲ī na kartē
laṛkōñ sē ʿishq bāzī hañgām-e kuhna sālī [338]
[Had it felt reasonable, then Mir too would've kept away:
Playing at love with boys in the age of advanced/beardless years.]

The first *shiʿr* utilizes the formulae of mystical writing while the second jurisprudential, with a distinctly desublimating effect. The mystical distinction between the metaphoric (*majāzī*) and 'real' or transcendental (*ḥaqīqī*) realms of experience is quoted in the metaphorics of idol-worship (*butōñ*) and face-gazing (*ṣūrat*), two activities marking controversial points of mystical practice for orthodox thought. The second hemistich delivers with a straight face, and a hint of supercilious piety, the exceptionality of the lover, who in the light of the previous line's allusions may stand guilty of esoteric practices. But the weightiness of this term "design" (*muddaʿā*), from logic and dialectics, appears to answer such criticism by instrumentalizing the standard response of mystical practice against its own literalist critics: "my motives are known best to me, for I am

[337] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, II.810.5943: 475; *c*. 1775–76.

[338] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, VI.1903.13817: 865; *c*. 1808.

a man of God."[339] Yet how can we be sure that the speaker intends this ironizing treatment of mystical terms? Its distinct possibility is implied in the deliberate opacity of "some other" (*kuchh aur*) in which the poem itself moves away from a declarative stand on the worship of idols (*but*; but also any non-unitarian point of worship). This opacity is somewhat clarified by Sayyid Abdullah's view that Mir's penchant for mystical propositions was more in the order of perspective (*nazariyyāt*) than praxis (*ʿamal*), and that he did not choose any of the available modes of self-making such as Dard's pedagogical discourse or Saudā's self-promotion in writing ad hoc, marketable long verse.[340] The two-line structure further delimits the interpretive uncertainty we face here to the extent that the keyword "idol" (*but*) in the second line, defended by the speaker's unorthodox reasoning, strongly evokes the earlier "devotee of form" (*ṣūrat parast*). Thus without doctrinal closure, withheld consciously or not by the speaker, the poetic proposition's weight falls on the unorthodox, physical side of the debate. This remainder present on the surface of the poem as verbal associations and rhetorical play I suggest is caused due to the topical visibility of the cluster of themes and doctrinal questions about physical love, implied in this *shiʿr*'s 'doctrinal' background, and which keeps reappearing whenever the poetic eye is turned inwards on the state of erotic desire. This reappearance denotes a persistent distrust of all metaphysical systems that need physical mediation to complete themselves. The immensely quotable mystical formulae, while denoting trends of intellection among the aristocracy and the gentry, further deepens this mistrust as they are churned out as yet another novel apologia for

[339] This same strategy is narrativized in one of Mir's bawdy tales appended to his Persian memoir *Ẕikr-e Mīr*, notoriously left out of the first modern edition by Maulvi Abdul Haq. Here's the text from Naim's translation of the work: "(9) A rogue was fucking a she-ass. Someone saw him, and exclaimed, 'What are you doing?' 'Move on!' the rogue replied. 'How would *you* know what Men of God [*mardān-e ḳhudā*] are engaged in?'" Naim, trans. *Zikr-e Mir*, 132.

[340] Abdullah, "Mīr kā rañg-e ṭabīʿat," in *Naqd-e Mīr*, 27.

poetry's erotic elaboration. As such this use of mysticism becomes a parlour game, its concepts turned into postures, whose knowledge becomes a part of the gestuary of elite assemblies.

The second *shiʿr* shifts the debate about physical love to the proper realm of legalist disputation. The speaker's incorrigible habit for romancing boys is cast in the irresistible logic of a categorical proposition, but the second hemistich on the face of it doesn't conclude the syllogism. In the first line the speaker claims his faith in the sciences of reason and deduction (*maʿqūlāt*, a category contrary to the *manqūlāt* i.e. revealed knowledge) on the basis of which he would've stopped this supposedly irrational activity. This makes us expect that the speaker will now give us a reasoning for this practice, *contra* reason, from the *manqūlāt* angle. But this doesn't happen. The second line merely describes this practice as that of romancing boys throughout one's lifetime. The enunciation of this description borrows the power of the missing conclusion of the syllogism, which gives us a justification from argument from the *manqūlāt*, without appearing to do so. As if this heretical suggestiveness was not enough, the speaker ties a neatly punned knot in the slightly modified idiom "*kuhna-sālī*" (lit. ancient years, when the more common idiom would be "*kuhan- sālī*") in which "*kuhna*" could mean both old/advanced and beardless. Taking the *shiʿr* as a whole we get a cheeky defence of boy-love not out of mere reason (which apparently would have decided the matter long ago *against* boy-love) but from the more influential, because free from human deduction, revelation. The latter suggestion is concretized in the reference to the selfsameness of the boy-love vignette in its relation to the lover of advanced years. The rhetorical illusion of the pun, which turns "advanced" years to "beardless" years, occurs on the *manqūl* side through a literal revelation of a signifier from behind another.

Through these two examples of the confrontation of boy-love with its ideological antagonists (mysticism and jurisprudence), along with previous examples of city-wide visibility of this theme, we can reconstruct the angles and accents of social observation embodied in the boy-love poem. With its fragmentary scenarios, the boy-vignette trails deep associations with social institutions such as the orthodox clergy, the mystical establishment, and state power, all of which identify this poetry not just for the consumption of the rank-holding nobility and the scribal classes, but also a mirror for imagining the ideal conduct of sovereign authority in its constrained relationship with other power centres as the *ḳhānqāh* (the mystical seminary) and the *ʿulamā* (the doctors of religion). Thus the final destination of the boy-image and its scenarios is not determined by any external pressure of institutions. The latter become a part of the poetic universe whether as symbols, iconographic traditions or perspectivizing logics, and the figure of the boy channelizes all these in order to produce a socially unitary surface for poetic art to build itself on. Sociologically speaking, in the fiction of the ghazal, the boy's unidealizable properties are an effect of the imbrication of secular affairs (*muʿāmilāt*), which include matters like gender and sexual desire, with devotion (*ʿibādat*), a perfect unity otherwise ideally demarcated and guided through the *ḥadīṡ* or the *sunna*.[341] In the ghazal's *discourse*, for it has a powerful statement-producing function, this ideal unity is forever leaning and oscillating between either side, and this swinging movement is what can be called the internal movement of this poetry. In this sense, the ghazal discourse shares the conceptual space of premodern "religion" (of ritualized practices and external justifications for social phenomena and contradictions), codified in the shared metaphorics of *ʿishq* (both "love" and "devotion"), albeit placed low in the hierarchy of social institutions because of its apparent use of language for non-referential ends as

[341] Mohammad Habib, "Early Muslim Mysticism," in K.A. Nizami, ed. *Politics and Society During the Early Medieval Period: Collected Works of Professor Mohammad Habib: Volume One* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1974), 254.

well as its subservience to aristocratic patronage. And therefore the seemingly social acceptance in it of man–boy relations is compromised by this theme's extension into the institutional logics of morality, etiquette and social exchange. The more the boy is valorized as attractive, cruel and omnipotent, the more this requires *restatement* of the excess represented in this socially observable erotic practice. The oscillation between carnal and extra-physical registers in the ghazal gives great mobility to the boy-image as it can be duplicated, generalized (e.g. the image of boys as a marauding heard), differentiated (in caste-based menageries of boys), iconized (through symbolism of physical and surficial attributes), made an example of (as the cruel, infidel beloved) and even satirized. There is thus no single, predetermined destination of this theme of boy-love in Mir's ghazals. Yet how are we to understand this secular movability of the boy-image, if we are not to read it as a simple correlate of orthodox injunctions against physical desire or mystical objectification of physical objects? In other words, how do we understand this frenetic movement in the boy-image in terms of contemporary modes of physical, emotional and social exchange?

"Why does the boy incite desire?"

One way of moving beyond the iconic simplicity of such motific themes as boy-love, couched in the notion of an ultimately aesthetic wholeness of poetry, is to reformulate that notion as a historically specific assertion of patterns of reading through which formal and thematic features are perceived. I don't mean patterns of reading in a straightforwardly sociological way, particularly because such patterns may not be applicable to a culture where the book primarily meant manuscript circulation and movable type was yet to come with the missionary and Orientalist pioneers only at the end of this century. Are there patterns encoded within the

movements of poetic language? To answer this I return to my definition of the erotic as the indexical marks of verbal-discursive knowledges which establish the ghazal's fiction, or looked at from outside, the self-referentiality of poetic language. In Mir's boy-poems these marks are visible in the image and vignette of the handsome boy, consolidated as such by persistent attempts to answer the question: why does the boy incite desire in the speaker/lover? A superficial answer is given in the varied iconic postures and rhetorical 'reasoning' of the theme I examined earlier. For sexuality studies, this question, since asked by the poem itself, is proof enough of the social visibility and historically durable importance of "same-sex love" in premodern South Asia. It is thus not surprising that much critical energy is spent in collecting similar sounding poetic exempla reflecting *ad infinitum* the inner truth and existence of homosexuality. This modern concern with justifying particular sexual object-choices is however irrelevant to the poem. I now turn to different poetic answers to this central question of the theme of boy-love, none of which come up with the simple tautology: because he is a (desirable) boy.

Static objects are almost never depicted or treated in the body of a *shiʿr*. Largely due to the single-meaning extraction process favoured in New Critical circles, a pictorialist prejudice has overshadowed modern ghazal criticism. Faruqi's commentaries on Mir gather together possible instances of rhetorical display in the poem. Accordingly, more the number of rhetorical moves, the more complex and "better" the *shiʿr*. But this helpful tool of unlocking "classical" poetics curiously splits the "classical" text into its theme (*maẓmūn*) and the rhetorical elaboration of its theme. Faruqi reminds us that the metaphorical process in classical Urdu poetics needs no external correlation with the real world, since "Indo-Muslim" poetic theory considers

metaphorization to have a reality unto itself.[342] This assumption is strongly belied in the "unidealizable" poem about boy-love in which there is always a *gesture* at hand.

The key question about why the boy incites desire is posed in this gesture, a figural gridlock, the way out of which lies in interpreting the poem's rhetorical enhancement of this basic gesture:

shahr kē shōḳh sāda-rū laṛkē
ẓulm kartē haiñ kyā javānōñ par [343]
[The city's saucy, clean-faced boys
Why! The cruelties they inflict on men!]

ḥusn tḫā tērā bahut ʿālam farēb
ḳhaṭ kē ānē par bḫī ik ʿālam rahā [344]
[Your beauty was very world-enticing
Even on downing, something of the world remained.]

The first example expresses a trite idea: the young, still beardless boy is capable of disproportionately destructive cruelty. However, a rhetorical point freshens the thought: the subtly delayed "why" (*kyā*) in the original gives two variants for the second hemistich: "behold the great cruelties they inflect on men [being themselves only young and saucy]!"; or "for what reason do they inflect cruelties on men [when the sight of their beauty is already deadly]?" This undecidability shows the poem's disinterest in discursively investigating why beautiful boys behave the way they do. Instead, the rhetorical play is based on the apparent situation of the men (*javānōñ*). While the boys symbolize singular forces of amorous cruelty operating in the city (*shahr*), their actions (left uncondensed as "cruelty" or *ẓulm*) bring about, both causatively and rhetorically, changes in the static appearance of their victim-objects. "*Javān*" connotes not just manhood, but masculinity as a culturally and morally valorized trait in terms of soldiery and

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[342] Faruqi, "Kilāsīkī ġhazal kī shiʿriyāt," in *Shiʿr-e shōr angēz: jild sivum*, 84.

[343] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, VI. 1822. 13137: 834; *c*. 1808.

[344] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, I.102.805: 221; *c*. 1752.

mystical self-mastery; in one word, the institution of *mīrzāʾī* ('gentlemanliness'). So the inaugural gesture of the boys' attractions flowing towards their unexpected (because they are men, in control of themselves) victims is *reversed* in the enunciation of the poem rendering the boys merely static and behaviourally uninteresting, the condition of the men proving to be the poem's nub. Desire attains salience only when it is viewed in its effects on unsuspecting, innocent targets.[345]

The second *shiʿr* above is located in another part of the boy-love topos (the liminal period when the boy's face begins downing and his beauty reaches its apogee) but expresses the same flow and counterflow of thought. The first hemistich invokes the world-enrapturing (*ʿālam farēb*) boy's beauty. A subtler mystical point about the 'veil' of earthly beauty is raised here as well. Next, the gesture *par excellence*, the appearance of down on the face, is inscribed on the "world" (*ʿālam*). But this world, the supposed recipient of the boy's "worlding" beauty, is duplicated rhetorically. In the first hemistich it signifies the world of appearances and phenomena, while in the second the poet utilizes its idiomatic meaning along with the literal one to mean literally, "even on downing, something of the world remained"; and idiomatically, "even on downing, there was an aura." Merely recounting this doubling and interpretive undecidability submerges the subtle relations operating between divergent readings. Instead we have the vision of an aura (*ʿālam*) evoking the down encircling the boy's face, as well as connecting back with "world" (*ʿālam*) in the first hemistich, and thus witting on the boy's world-deceiving physical

[345] Thus, C.M. Naim's influential thesis that the ghazal poet exaggerates the cruelty and power of the otherwise socially debilitated beloved (woman or boy) in order to maintain rules of masculinity under which a man could be subservient only before another man, ignores the deeper illusion governing this self-grounding code of masculinity: desire is caused by the world, and, directed at the powerful (men), it becomes another instance of the constantly assailed (because socially dominant), but eventually resilient, male subject. This logic doesn't turn boys and women into beloveds worthy of great men, but reduces them to static, neutralized qualities to concretize the man's powers of observation and action. As such this feature of the ghazal's referential structure consolidates the ideology of *mīrzāʾī*. Naim, "The theme of homosexual (pederastic) love in pre-modern Urdu poetry," in Muhammad Umar Memon, ed. *Studies in the Urdu Ghazal and Prose Fiction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1979), 129–30.

beauty, which is 'worlded' even more when his down appears. In other words, the boy *remains* attractive, albeit in a different flavour, when the down appears on his face. Once again, the physical features of the boy, transitioning from a higher state to a baser one, remain part of the same gesture, the movement discernible only in its effects on the observer. These effects are registered on the world, but the play on the word "world" relays an opposing meaning: the world, by extension the lovers in it, incorrigibly adores the boy's physical beauty. The poem seems to declare in this final movement of meaning that there just might always be a lot more world to see, thus questioning the ultimate transcendence of 'metaphorical' reality promised by mystical language and institutions. The latter dig is audible in the "subsistence" (*baqā*) of the physical world, overturning a cherished mystical dogma.

I call this poetic structure which presents sexual desire as studied confusion of cause and effect, following John Brenkman's reading of a William Blake poem, metaleptic: "a contradiction between *what is narrated* and *the narrative itself*.[346] Of course my context and interest here is different from and wider in scope than Blenkman's symptomatic reading of metalepsis within the structure of one eighteenth-century English lyric as a mode of figuring utopian possibilities in lyric poetry that was fast coming up against the commodifying logic of the industrial revolution. But this difference I mark is neither cultural–economic nor linguistic. The category of the "lyric", as I have shown in the first section of the chapter, is itself one

[346] John Brenkman, "The Concrete Utopia of Poetry: Blake's 'A Poison Tree'," in Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker, eds. *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 190.
Mir (d. 1810) and Blake (d. 1827) are rough contemporaries in two geographically and linguistically different "long" eighteenth centuries, but both live through times in which prefigurations of colonialism directly offer material for their poetry. These prefigurations are visible in Blake's opposition to the Atlantic slave trade, which, as Irfan Habib reminds us, was financed by the import of 'East India' textiles into Britain and western Europe (by Dutch, English and French East India Companies) which then became "the single largest items with which slaves were paid for." The pressure for payment for these Indian artisanal imports, he notes, became a direct cause for wars of economic plunder and booty launched (as early as the 1740s in the Carnatic) by the British and French companies in India. By the time of Mir's death, this onslaught of mercantile capitalist interests had consolidated as a political force and directly affected the so-called traditional "successor" states of north India, such as Awadh, from which Mir's patronage came. Irfan Habib, "The Eighteenth Century in Indian Economic History," in P.J. Marshall, ed. *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, 110.

moment in the redressal of disrupted premodern forms of expression in the colonial archiving of poetry as literature or imaginative writing. Part I of this dissertation has spelled out some of the social consequences, both in terms of writing and reading, of this epistemic shift from ghazal poetry to ghazal as one kind of poetry. Thus, my use of metalepsis for the ghazal's poetic structure aims to keep away from its somewhat easy "lyric" associations in Brenkman's argument (easy because Brenkman's continuist history of the European transition from the early modern to modernity proper, without accounting for the intervening historical experience and category of colonialism in the spread and consolidation of the capitalist spirit, finds easy solace in the predisposed definitional characteristics of the lyric) and to keep the question of the ghazal's precolonial determinations open. It is a sign of the intervening category of colonialism, when we compare the development of the ghazal and the early modern English lyric that the latter enjoys a coherently conceptual status, separate from its designation as a genre of poetry, while, in my own argument, I keep using "ghazal" to denote both what can be prised apart from its mere formal and descriptive features (i.e. its lyric-like function, so to speak) as well as these features themselves, to bring to light a social history of its concept.

It is this metaleptic structure, observable in Mir's "*amradnāma*", that opens the space for social observation, crucially refracted through the themes and categories of the erotic. But as I explained in relation to the social vistas of the boy-theme, this observational space is not a reflective medium for capturing external social reality (the erotic is in no simple way a description of sexual or amorous relations in society) but presupposes the aesthetic or rather symbolic power of social determinants of 'religion', principles of hierarchization, and institutions of coercion (patriarchy and slavery in particular). The metaleptic structure allows the

inscription and justification of these socially powerful symbolisms within the apparently ludic construction of the ghazal's verses.

I thus understand Faruqi's designation of a separate "classical" poetics for understanding the premodern ghazal as the institutionalization of the ludic component of the ghazal through which the metaleptic structure versifies (*maẓmūn bāndḫnā*) contradictions between the observer and the observed, lover and beloved, man and boy etc. Brenkman's view of metalepsis as marking a social contradiction in the inner world of the lyric through which the poet may choose to expose the mystifying logics of an unequal society, may be rearticulated outside the subjective limits of his argument based as it is on the powerful bourgeois ideology of the self-introspective lyric. Metalepsis indeed marks a social contradiction in Mir's boy-poems but one which produces the mystifying effects of subjectively controlled poetic writing and thus naturalizes the social distance between this subject and the objects he sees and desires. In this format, poetic artifice appears as an afterwork on the basic erotic script (much of the ghazal utterance is in reported speech: "thus it happened") which then requires reading or interpretation to work backwards through the features of rhetorical afterwork in order to recognize the 'point' of the poem, i.e. the acuity and stresses in social observation.

The erotic is not an empty medium, but comes peopled with its exemplary objects like the boy, filling the metaleptic format with narrative detail of the boy-love vignette. This iconic presentation of the boy hides the efforts in poetic composition to orchestrate an iconic image from the dispersed logics of extratextual valuation (e.g. the various *shi'r*s about the Delhi boy and his specific attractions), semantic and repertoire associations (poetic fictions about the boy's down, his dress, his movements and postures). This makes it appealing for modern readers looking for textual signifiers of identity and its durable politics, but the deliberate iconization of

the iconic image, embedded with borrowings from pictorial tradition and other contiguous verbal-image and devotional repertoires from non-Muslim poetic styles, reveals rather the desublimated, unfinished nature of the ideal boy-beloved. This deliberation is not particular to any single ghazal poet, such as Mir, but suggests the mixing of image repertoires (and not just stray words and decontextualized idioms) as part of that great late medieval cultural churning that produced the mixed speech of north India, i.e. *rēḳhta*. The boy-image itself, while obviously 'borrowed' from Persian ghazals, is set in motion using elements of the Indic devotional tradition, invoking, for example, the ludic and gestural aspects of the *līlā* of popular gods Rama and Krishna in the northern plains and Bengal.[347] Anuradha Kapur explains the reasoning behind this divine play of the gods as part of a performance tradition (the Ramlila of Banaras) still alive in India:

> Presumably the need to describe god's acts as *līlā* is the need to explain why gods act at all, since they are meant to be entirely perfect, self-complete, needing nothing and desiring nothing. Therefore, while humans need to act in order to fulfil their appetites, gods do note *need* to act, but as they still do, their acts cannot be understood within our terms, our structures of cause and effect, our needs and desires.[348]

This description near perfectly describes the conventions of the boy-image in which the boy is presented as divinely perfect, needing nothing from the world. However the crucial difference is that unlike the gods, these boys are the singular cause of desire, and thus part of an already

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[347] By Mir's time these linkages with antinomian ('Hindu') traditions were somewhat submerged in the smoothened exterior of the ghazal aesthetic, but these cultural crossings are starkly marked in the raw, unfinished texture of early eighteenth-century ghazal specimens from Delhi, made possible in part due to the much earlier (throughout the seventeenth century) linguistic intercrossing between Persian and 'Hindi' in the amalgamated language and poetry of Dakani. An example of this from Abru (d. 1733) which combines the boy-love image with the Krishna *lila* topos:

sitam sēñ sāñvlē nēñ naqd-e jāñ aur dil mirā čẖīnā
mutā' aur māl jō kučẖ ṯẖā sō lē baiṯẖā hai yi kālā
[The dark one cruelly snatched my precious life and heart.
Whatever kind and cash there was, the black one has taken away.]

Najmuddīn Shāh Mubārak "Ābrū," *Divān-e Ābrū*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan (Naʾī Dihlī: Taraqqī urdū biyūrō, 2000; new ed.), ghazal 54: 98.

[348] Anuradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and Gods: The Ramlila at Ramnagar* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1990), 12–13.

worlded arena of operation. The demi-divine boy, while orientated completely *for* the lover, maintains an inscrutably playful distance from all compelling bonds of social life: family, loyalty, humanity, friendship. The boy is thus not so much a socialized personage as a problematic brought into historical sight by the interaction of kinds of divinity, patterns of devotion, and poetic image repertoires, providing a heterogeneous ground for the apparent resolution of key social contradictions relating to sovereignty and masculinity.

Before answering what is gained through this carefully nurtured illusion of erotic effects as causes, it is necessary to uncover its immediate relevance to the arrangement of thought in poetic composition. Couched in the structure of a proposition ("what is the poem about?"), in the poetic utterance thought pursues the primary causality of desire to the object. If the proposition's structure predisposes this pursuit towards a 'reasonably' ordered exercise, a temporal arrangement of poetic artwork on the basic social template of erotic relationship makes the recognition of primary causality inevitable in the pre-given, already socialized erotic object. Thus, in

ṣuḥbat mēñ us kī kyūñ kē rahē mard ādmī
voh shōḳh o shañg o bē-tah o aubāsh va badmaʿāsh [349]
[In his company how does a person remain a man?
That imp, pert, shallow, rogue, that low-life!]

the proposition is an arresting one: the beloved's company compromises the social identity of *mīrzāʾī* masculinity. The thought then moves on to the second hemistich which should give a reasoning for the proposition. It however turns out that the reasoning is merely the immanent attributes of the boy-beloved, which stand in for the causative features of the boy's socially and morally disturbing powers. The propositional structure, which gives a reasoned persuasiveness to the utterance, is however undercut by the metaleptic structure in which the metonymic features

[349] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, V.1638.11850: 769; *c*. 1798.

of the object stand in not just for the object itself, but the relationship in which it becomes an object for someone. This poetic movement reveals a great social interest in the apparent causality behind social relationships, e.g. erotic desire, but only apparent because the pursuit of causality, in the ghazal, is the expression of the already constituted template of social relations. If we describe the boy-image now as a value form, then it is an object which consists of a pregiven, indestructible value which no amount of objective breaking down diminishes. Indeed, this breaking down produces value in the act of contemplating it, just as political sovereignty, in dominant eighteenth-century conception, is always a shareable value and accrues power by dividing it further within itself.[350] This aspect of precapitalist value of poetic objects could explain the poorly defended boundaries of the ghazal universe, which move quite effortlessly, even today, across national-linguistic boundaries (ghazals have been written in English, Pashto, Sindhi, Gujarati), thematic registers, and political orientations.

The true representative of the preconstituted world of the ghazal is however not the object of desire but the speaker, the subject of the utterance. The gains of metaleptic social observation are secured for this subject. They enable him to maintain a feigned ignorance in relation to the objects of his gaze as well as turn those objects into a spectacle directed solely for his enjoyment. In a famous *shiʿr* about boy-love, Mir presents a rather unique spectacle of two boys having sex:

bāham hūā karēñ haiñ din rāt nīčē ūpar
yi narm shānē launḍē haiñ maḳhmal-e dō-khvābā [351]
[They always come together, day [and] night, under [and] above.
These soft-shouldered boys are double-napping velvet.]

[350] Eighteenth-century and even earlier South Asian models of political sovereignty are treated in Ajay Skaria, "Being *Jangli*: The Politics of Wildness," in P.J. Marshall, ed. *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, 293–318; and Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[351] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, I.60.472: 205; *c*. 1752.

The boys have an irrepressible sexuality, turned towards each other in this instance, and in the first line presented as self-sufficient. The scene is condensed into the sexual fusion between the soft-shouldered (signifying vulnerability as well as texture) boys with the physicality of their union (in the image of double-napped velvet, retaining the pun on "napping" as part of lovemaking). The poetic proposition is then undercut by the speaker's leering and slightly mocking desire to touch the distant sign of erotic union and experience it through less voyeuristic, and therefore more participatory, senses. Due to its staged eroticism between erotic objects, in this *shiʿr* the gestuary of boy-love presumes erotic ripples travelling from their bodies to the speaker, implicating the latter in the scene. The obviously mature, adult speaker, as noted in Faruqi's commentary, brings a light tone of mockery (*ṭanz*) to the description,[352] showing up the innocence of the boy ("child") in a mouth-watering observation of the velvety, downy, but animalistic, boys. The image is poignant because of the implicit characterization of young boys ("soft-shouldered") as inherently deceptive: young and innocent but they are up to no good when they "come together." Rather than cross ourselves for fear of paedophilia, we should note the instrumentalization of the "child" as a deceitful, paradoxical entity. While firmly ensconced in the moral universe, it simultaneously signifies its unregulated aspects. The ghazal universe specializes in pinpointing those objects and scenarios in which the speaker fails to attain his erotic and subjective fulfilment. But such is the force of the metaleptic poetic movement that even these recalcitrant objectivities are viewed as inherently bifurcated and therefore the *cause* of the subject's pangs of desire and incompleteness.

The duplicity of the object, notably in the figure of the male child who will be the future ideal subject of the moral city, is not a problem to be resolved through poetic form or narrative readjustment. In stark comparison with the mystical problematic of recognizing the meaning

[352] Faruqi, *Shiʿr-e shōr angēz: jild avval*, 307.

(*maʿnī*) of phenomena in their union with an extra-physical, unqualified entity, the problem of the bifurcated object is distinctly a problem of homoeroticism. The latter persists as a category in the ghazal's erotic repertoire because it connotes the problematic of meaning (*maʿnī*), as neither a linguistic problem (viewed in colonial times as a problem of gendered pronouns and nouns) nor resolvable through theoretical breakdown and analysis. The doctrine of reaching the real (*ḥaqīqat*) through the metaphorical/physical (*majāzī*), in the context of boy-love, is a false promise in itself. Since the male seeker of esoteric understanding must inhabit the social institutions that produce the possibility of otherworldly pursuits, there is nothing inherent in those institutions that can move the subject from a lower to a higher state of consciousness. The talk about boys and physical objects as mere vessels (*vaṣīla*) for esoteric understanding implicitly acknowledges the possibility of the incompleteness of transcendental systems. From the subject's point of view, this incompleteness exists in him, rather than in the internally divided object. It is this tension and its acknowledgement that explains the turning of the deceitful, internally riven boy-figure into a conventional conceit, or, as I suggested, into an instance of the value form for this historical period. The desublimating aspect of this conceit then attains a solidity hard enough to be used and reused to produce postures against the unbending morality and systematicity of mystical and devotional systems. Thus, we get innumerable references, often edging on the vulgar and abusive, to the *shaiḳh*'s (Sufi preceptor) hypocritical pursuit of earthly pleasures. A random dipping into Mir's *Kulliyāt* brings up the following:

tẖē burē muġh-baččōñ kē tēvar lēk
shaiḳh mai-ḳẖānē sē bẖalā kẖiskā [353]
[The Magian boys were in an evil mood.
The shaikh decamped from the tavern mercifully!]

[353] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, I.12.92: 187; *c*. 1752.

The repertoire of boy-love is indiscriminately used here to devalue the *shaiḳh*'s piety in terms of the twin charges of intoxication and flirting with boys. The association between hypocritical piety and the boys' sexual attractiveness is no more than a weak contiguity but turned in this poetic image into a persuasive propositional structure.

Representatives of the non-mystical 'orthodoxy' are not spared either. The structure of orthodox piety is parodied and recast in terms of boy-love as a cultish ritual that needs no faith in transcendence to set up its own church:

sārē rind aubāsh jahāñ kē tujẖ sē sujūd mēñ rahtē haiñ
bāñkē tēṛẖē tirčẖē tīkẖē sab kā tujẖ kō imām kiyā [354]
[All the knaves, rogues of the world make prostrations to you:
Of all the hot, crooked, bent rakes, you are hereby the "leader".]

While the literal superimposition of a profane theme on piety suggests some criticism of the self-grounding foundations of organized faith, the poem only makes a gesture towards this possibility, upholding the distinction between the erotic and the profane. The speaker is unwilling to join the band of sexily profane brigands, and in this sense unwilling to stake himself, and by extension the poetic utterance, in the contradiction brought forward in the poem. The desublimating effects of the boy-image therefore do not automatically translate into a position of critique whether within the poem's fiction or in relation to an external social institution. The unidealizable properties of the boy-image maintain a subjective hold over the oscillation between the domains of the secular and the devotional, which, as I suggested earlier, is the internal movement of the ghazal.

Let there be no doubt that the objective conditions of the boy-image are also the conditions of pleasure for the lover. The conventional duplicity of the boy in his image allows social observation to find great pleasure in breaking the valued objectivity of the beloved:

[354] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, I.7.47: 185; *c*. 1752.

vē nahīñ tō unḫōñ kā bḫaʾī aur
ʿishq karnē kī kyā manāʾī hai [355]
[If not him, then some brother of his.
To love is not a crime, is it!]

The poem wits on the clichéd defence of lovers ("is love a crime?") by restating it as a defence of the exchangeability of objects of love. It ironically differentiates the acts of love (*ʿishq karnā*) from the loved object, and restates the defence of love as a defence of the former rather than the irreplaceable, ideality of the latter. Thus love becomes pleasurable not in the attainment of its object but in the pursuit. Moreover the pursuit is not socially indiscriminate but stays within the family ("then some brother of his"), signifying its fulfilment in precise contexts of class and caste-based lineage. Pleasure is always specific, not an abstract jouissance, and it arises from tarrying with the attributes of the beloved to an extent that those attributes become more important than any single bearer of them. In this extreme instance of the erotic scenario desire, again, caused by the beloved, is an effect of the disaggregation of the beloved's conventionally unapproachable, unresponsive otherness. The rhetorical flatness of this *shiʿr* suggests an exceptional situation in which the beloved has been exchanged for another, just like him.
In the following, famous example the disaggregation works through the layers of the poetic utterance and arrested for observation in a single image:

kḫulā nashē mēñ jō pagṛī kā pēč us kī Mīr
samand-e nāz pa ēk aur tāziyāna hūā [356]
[When drunkenly his turban's fold fell open,
Another whip cracked on the posturing steed.]

The erotic object is presented here in the distance of a spectacle (like in the *shiʿr* about the two lovemaking boys) and spells out the temporal property of the metaleptic function. The immediate meaning valorizes the animating effects of the slight gesture of the beloved's turban coming

[355] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, V.1780.12773: 814; *c*. 1798.

[356] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, I.114.913: 226; *c*. 1752.

loose, but its effects are registered in terms of the beloved's metonymic extensions, rather than on the spectating lover. The turban falls loose and *then* the steed of coquetry, which was already galloping at full speed (i.e. the beloved's beauty was maximally postured), feels another lash of encouragement. In the position of the missing jockey (presumably whipping the steed) we are given the selfsameness of the beloved's sexuality: it internally comes loose, without any manoeuvring, like the folds of a turban. This fictional explanation hides the subject's ability to arrest and withhold sexual release, in the form of the arresting moment–image of the falling turban fold sounding like the whip lash of a horserider. The metaphorics of horsemanship and the beloved's erotic artfulness spell out a relationship of power between the lover and beloved which manifests itself in the arresting power (acoustic, semantic and metaphoric) of this image. This power, disavowed by the debilitated lover, projected on the overweening beloved, implies a social knowledge that objects choose their mode of being observed. This is the basic assumption in the gestuary of the boy: not only are gestures orientated towards someone specific, their reading involves following strict protocols inherent to them. Pleasure thus comes already bearing the marks of social exchange, and the social distance it travels, from object to subject, is the observational space within which lovers recognize themselves and their beloveds, in predetermined, hierarchized relationships.

While gender and class hierarchies may only be surmised from the signifying chains of poetic imagery, caste distinctions and identities are prominently displayed and narrated in lines from the premodern ghazal corpus. Mir's corpus, not just his *amradnāma*, is littered with caste-accented poetic themes. But it in his boy-poem that the caste-bearers are presented through the acuteness of erotic observation. One kind of poem under this theme is the ghazalification of the Persian *shahrāshūb* mode of poetry: long poems describing the city-disturbing attractions of the

boys of the various caste-professions. Shadani has collected several of these *shiʿr*s that wit on the perceived nature of the boys of a particular caste-profession or 'nationality' (washerman, oil-presser, barber, soldier, perfumist, Brahmin priest, Turk, Mughal, Hindu etc.). The metaleptic process of investigating conditions of erotic attraction is at play here in its most literal possibilities. The boy's effects are consolidated causes, through metonymic elaboration and metaphoric substitution, of his caste and professional affiliations. Indeed, this structure presupposes and normalizes the relation between caste group and its 'traditional' profession.[357] Notably the boys come from middle to high-level castes in the hierarchy, pointedly avoiding boys of the 'untouchable' professions such as sweepers, leatherworkers, "manual scavengers" etc. In these caste-coloured boy-poems the erotic object's disaggregation has the added readerly pleasure of recognizing social fragments in the boy's disaggregated objectivity. The elevation of the speaker is also assumed above the caste designations that signify everyday, humdrum professions. The effect is distinctly a herding of boys in a royal menagerie, classified according to their family professions. This illustrates the sense of the premodern ghazal universe as a world unto itself, in which real-life objects are placed in fictional scenarios and treated to linguistic distortions, to mark the limits of poetic representation. While each boy-poem based on a caste theme is a finished artefact, drawing on an ideal picture of caste differentiated professions, the metaleptic structure presumes the substance of caste as the common principle of metonymizing boys from their hereditary professions.

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[357] Imtiaz Ahmad's modern-day fieldwork among Muslim caste groups (he calls them "caste analogues" patterned on Hindu caste definitions and differentiation) in northern India shows that a correspondence between caste-names and "pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation" does not always operate. Ahmad, "The Ashraf and Ajlaf Categories in Indo-Muslim Society," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 12, No. 19 (1967), 890. A detailed analysis of the colonial identification of lower-caste groups with 'traditional' occupations is provided by Ramnarayan Rawat in his *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

This aspect is visible most strongly in poems about the 'high-caste' boy (son of the nobility or the Sayyids):

kyūñ na ai sayyid pisar dil kẖīñčē yi mū-e darāz
aṣl zulfōñ kī tirī gēsū-e paiġhambar sē hai [358]
[Why wouldn't this long tress attract the heart, Sayyid boy?
The root of your tress lies in the Messenger's hair!]

Shadani expresses great shock at this conceit (he footnotes this *shiʿr* with a prayer of forgiveness: "*astaġhfir ul-lāh*"![359]) possibly because it turns the holy line of descent (sayyidhood, a sign of devotional and political precedence) into a justification for homoerotic desire. However, as I have pointed out, the social space of the ghazal is shared with "religion" in so far as both implicate themselves in the delineation of secular life from devotional practices and therefore there is nothing particularly blasphemous about this conceit, whose structure is repeated in several, less obviously enunciated *shiʿr*s. In fact, it appears that the novelty of this conceit belongs less to the travestying/desublimating mode of the ghazal than to the casteist boy-love poem. Within the South Asian context, the notion of sayyidhood has a long history of governing and disavowing the stratifying logics of caste in ritual practice, kinship and marriage relations.[360] But what is truly South Asian in this conceit is its inflecting the notion of holy descent with the unmistakable marks of caste symbolism. In that one image of the single hair of the sayyid boy, invoking the several specimens of the holy relic in shrines across South Asia, the

[358] *Kulliyāt-e Mīr*, II.1051.8024: 570; *c*. 1775–76.

[359] Shadani, "Mīr ṣāḥib kā ēk ḳhaṣ rañg," 170.

[360] Ahmad, "The Ashraf and Ajlaf Categories," 889. These caste-stratifying logics are quite visible in the high-tradition of the Urdu ghazal, right from controversies about poets' social origins that appear in premodern *taẕkiras* to literary battles fought with *ad hominem* attacks about the social origins of antagonists. E.g. Mir's claims to sayyidhood have been most famously contested by the modern critic Qāẓī ʿAbdul Vudūd, however through a literalist critique of the inaccuracy of Mir's 'autobiographical' claims in *Zikr*. Abdul Vudud, "Mīr kē ḥālāt-e zindagī," in Taḥsīn Firāqī and ʿAzīz Ibn ul-Ḥasan, eds. *Mīr Taqī Mīr (1810 tā 2010): Mīr shināsī: muntaḳhab maẓāmīn* (Islāmābād: Muqtadira-e qaumī zubān, 2010), 22, 23, 40.

As pointed by Naim, on Jalibi's authority, one of Mir's *maśnavī*'s is a vitriolic attack against a man called Kallū "Ḥajjām" (i.e. a barber by profession; a 'low caste' as well), who was also a disciple of his arch-rival Saudā. I have already shown the anxieties about caste-breakdown in Ḥātim's *shahr-āshōb* in the previous chapter.

substance of sayyidhood is condensed, making irrelevant the need to actually trace descent authoritatively. The fact of being sayyid is presented here as a self-evident, social trait, metonymically extendable to the very body of the Islamic prophet. In this caste-inflection of historical time and social descent, the poem connotes the limits of erotic mobility, bracketing them into discrete caste vignettes. The value of the question, why does the boy incite desire, is answered definitively in the structure of the caste-based boy-love poem in which the erotic link is established as a definite correspondence between the ghazal and its idealized social lifeworld.

What, then, about love in this poetry obsessed with the circumstances of desire? To speak of a primary, plain discourse of love would be to mistake the very nature and value of the beloved through which the dual layer of poetic utterance operates. If love is a relation, temporally caused by desire's ripples reaching the unmotivated lover, it will always require a poetic correlate to stand in for a 'real' love-object. This view would tend to support a naturalized domestic ideology in which both women and boys, as possible placeholders in the matrix of desire, are not allowed to individuate themselves as speakers, authors or lovers. The notional availability of women's speaking voices in contiguous traditions such as Braj and Dakani poetry, and even within the ghazal in the form of *rēḳhtī*, should be seen as variations on the predetermined grid of the erotic–devotional genres, in which femaleness and maleness are already inscribed with aesthetic and moral values. Thus, the carefully staged relationality of love (*ʿishq*) in Mir's ghazals is an attempt to break the impasse of a self-imprisoning love in which the male subject finds himself under given social conditions. This impasse is not merely literary or generally social as it appears in other representational fields as well such as mystical writing and moral thought. In the ghazal, linguistic play is offered as a substitute for interrogating the limits of the self, through its relationship with objects. Language becomes an agency for

externalizing subjective effects (presented as primal causes) which are then recovered through the multiplicity and layers of meaning, carefully unified in the poetic utterance (*shiʿr*). It is this conventional circuit of the self that we can now identify as the inner meaning of the erotic. The erotic provides the illusion in which this circuit can be traced, retraced and contemplated avoiding the conclusion that "love" is nothing but self-imprisonment.

Social unconcern in the ludic mode

Such subjective control, reflected in the rhetorical conduct of the ghazal, is important not just in a socially immediate sense for a privileged male poetic speaker and a politically and economically powerful clique of ghazal poets, but more impersonally for the institutionalization of *social unconcern*. This aspect of the eighteenth-century ghazal aesthetic is misrecognized if we read literally stray references to a fallen city, the breakdown of social intercourse (figured as the delinking of caste identities from their 'traditional' occupations in *shahrāshōb* poems), and other 'topical' imagery as signifying the general trend of 'decline' of the Mughal polity. The ripples of the erotic destabilize the ghazal speaker/lover only to the extent that it gives him the opportunity and contemplative distance to re-form himself and regroup and reassert his privilege in order to poetically describe, condense, disperse and iconize social disabilities corresponding with gender and caste ideologies.

The social terrain mapped through this highly conventionalized language cannot be seen if we continue falling into the idealist traps of the ghazal's rhetoric and imagery. Indeed, the dismissal of this huge corpus of poetic material in historical analysis as mere hyperbole and elite posturing, ignores the often vulgarizing, secularizing tendencies of poetic practice. The premodern ghazal may not reflect the lyrical, utopic possibilities of transcending its social

lineaments, but in its metaleptic moments it does capture a precipitated history of violence against social groups whose social exclusion is presupposed in the drive towards extending the ghazal's image repertoire. In this regard Mir's oeuvre uses particularly novel images of the burning Hindu widow (*satī*) and the "lower-caste" groups such as the *čamārs* treated with characteristic unconcern for subjective dimensions of social suffering.[361] However these extreme cases point to the neighbourliness of abuse, travesty and erotic iconization in the ghazal universe which needs to be acknowledged in both literary criticism and historiography to understand the nature of idealization, which the ghazal form is immediately aligned with as the bearer of the 'high' Indo-Islamic culture. While social historians dwell on the rise of new, "intermediate" classes, threatening the dominance of the old aristocratic elite and its "literary clientage,"[362] such neatly segmented group formations need to be reimagined from the relative stability of forms like the ghazal, patronized and read not just by the royalty and nobility, but also smaller chieftains (Mir found refuge for years in the Jat kingdom), zamindars, local *navābs*, and possibly those very new groups which would have needed the stability of older forms in which to inscribe their "moneyed" interests. The question of literary form and value is central to the representativeness of *sources* for particular cultural formations in history.

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[361] Some representative Mir-ian examples:

jalnē kō jō ātī haiñ satiyāñ Mīr sanbẖal kar jaltī haiñ
kyā bēṣarfa rāt jalī bēbahra apnē shu'ūr sē shama'
[The women who come to burn, Mir, they burn composedly.
Last night, so uselessly, unaware the candle burned itself!]
(V.1646.11887: 771; *c*. 1798)

ai ġhair, Mir tujẖ kō gar jūtiyāñ na mārē
sayyid na hōvē pẖir tō koʿī čamār hōvē
[Mr. Rival, if Mir doesn't beat you with slippers,
Then may he be a Chamar, not a Sayyid!]
(I.579.4231: 390; *c*. 1752)

[362] Barnett, "Introduction," in idem, ed. *Rethinking Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 17.

Through the example of Mir's boy-poems representing the high-point of a premodern ghazal aesthetic, I have described in this chapter its erotic content as a social value form in whose *negative* relation with social conditions, a historical expanse is imagined within which social relationships are posed as ritualized, self-sufficient moments, with a harmonized internal logic. Both these functions are achieved by a basic detailing of the value form with distinct "homosexual" morphologies: the sexual dominance of boys, idealization of the feminine withdrawal from society, and the self-ennobling, spectacular suffering of the male lover. The relation between poetry and society is negative because the late medieval man lives the contradiction between transcendental systems and symbolism of authority.[363] This contradiction is repeated in poetry because it is the most powerful form of appearance of social life. The negation is not of social life but an attempt to express, in a sexualized code, the self's constant making and unmaking in this negation. The impetus of this enterprise, glimpsed on the iridescent edges of its iconizing, idealizing tendencies, such as the meditations on the boy as the unregulated part of the universe, is thoroughly secular.

[363] This is most definitely a class, caste and gender-qualified viewpoint. Other groups, e.g. women, who were allowed to learn and write, e.g. women entertainers and courtesans, could perspectivize differently their subject positions in the ghazal's erotic scenarios. To give an obvious example, Māh Laqā Bāʾī "Čandā" (1767–1824), the first woman author of an extant ghazal *dīvān*, and a younger contemporary of Mir, turns the "religious," through a carefully chosen practice of signing each of her five-*shiʿr*-long ghazals with her name while ritually invoking ʿAlī's name, into routinized piety to figure the contradiction between the gendered self caught in the body's social-sexual valuation (she was a practising courtesan who left behind a huge fortune at her death) and its negative valuations in transcendental systems as the vessel for attaining the extra-physical. Several of her *shiʿrs* deploy the *amradparastī* imagery successfully, some in a gesture of devotion for the demi-divine Ali. See Mah Laqa Bai "Chanda," *Dīvān-e Māh Laqā Bāʾī*, ed. Shafqat Riẓvī (Lāhaur: Majlis-e taraqqī-e adab, 1990), particularly ghazal 5, 100, gh. 3, 110 and gh. 2, 126.

Conclusion

Apart from its canonized duration of at least three centuries (from Valī to Faiẓ), the classical Urdu ghazal's format of presentation – *shiʿr*, *ġhazal*, and *dīvān* – maps a historical trajectory of its own. This overwhelmingly male tradition gathers its aesthetic coherence around this internal trajectory, comprising of the "collection" (*dīvān*), the ghazal as the basic template of the "poem" and the individual instances of linguistic artistry in the "poetic utterance" (*shiʿr*). The unity of this triad has been the basis of assessing individual contributions to and the criterion for inclusion in the golden tradition of male poetry. While showing the discontinuities, reversals, ruptures, mutations and transformations in the seemingly continuous tradition of the Urdu ghazal, my argument has said nothing of this other trajectory that continues to influence our ability to speak of an Urdu poetic history without exceptions.

The *shiʿr–ġhazal–dīvān* format is essentially a gendered format even if it innocuously looks like a conventional breakdown of the concentric frames for grouping and classifying poetic matter. The division between evanescent orality (valorized in the form of women's speech, idiom and songs by linguistic historians as the repository of lived speech and the standard dialect) and the authorially inscribed (premodern poets often calligraphed their own manuscripts) and embodied monument of the poetic collection assumes and naturalizes the deafening silence of women's voices in the Urdu canon. The triad assumes the inability of women poets to scale all three rungs of the poetic craft, either from lack of historical evidence to the contrary or because of the 'real' historical conditions of forced female illiteracy. For feminist criticism and historians of women's writing this is the first aesthetic piety that must be dismantled.

While the work of retrieval of women's writing from the past, especially its classical specimens, has fitfully begun in the twentieth century, the systematic neglect of this literature has

a history all of its own. Urdu's first woman poet with an extant *dīvān* has been identified as the South-Indian courtesan–poet Mah Laqā Baʾī "Čandā" (1767–1824) of Hyderabad who compiled it in 1798 and personally gifted a copy to Sir John Malcolm, soon to be the Governor of Bombay, a year later.[364] This copy found its way to the India Office Library in London. However, despite reaching the circulatory heart of the empire and surviving in manuscript copies in royal libraries in Hyderabad, the first self-proclaimed writer of a women's *taẕkira* (*Bahāristān-e nāz*; 1864), Faṣīḥuddīn "Ranj" notes in his entry for Chanda that her *dīvān* had not survived.[365] Finally, it was published in 1906 more than a hundred years after its compilation. Behind the façade of critical and aesthetic standards and the monumentalization of the "Indo-Muslim" ghazal tradition, the work of women poets (an overwhelming number among them were courtesans writing from every possible provincial centre of Urdu), non-Muslim poets and poets from the 'lower' castes have dropped from manuscript circulation and preservation networks in which poetic worth is minted.

But even if we are able to retrieve a part of this forgotten past (erased by the triple weight of patriarchy, colonialism and nationalist reform) how would we read its figural connotations? As I have shown in this dissertation, the ghazal's erotic medium is not a thematic scenario in which all possible ghazal utterances may be subsumed. It is rather a grammar for orchestrating verbal patterns and propositions to imply an aesthetic detachment, which I have called a position of social unconcern, from the world 'outside' in such a way that the detachment becomes the expression of a social relation. The idealized objectivity of the boy, with his immanently erotic specification, provides the strongest reassurance to the male lover/speaker of his ability to

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[364] Shafqat Riẓvī, "Muqaddama," in idem., ed. *Dīvān-e Mah Laqā Baʾī* (Lāhaur: Majlis-e taraqqī-e adab, 1990), 44.

[365] Ḥakīm Faṣīḥuddīn Ranj, *Bahāristān-e nāz: taẕkira-e shāʿirāt*, ed. Ḳhalīlurraḥmān Dāʾudī (Lāhaur: Majlis-e taraqqī-e adab, 1965), 127.

contract the world into the single question of how he came to be himself and what this says about the world around him. Can a female lover/speaker pose this question in the same way? Indeed, what does the world look like when the first reflection afforded by poetry is of one's own objectified presence and subjective invisibility in its erotic idiom?

The answer to these questions need not wait for the recovery of past voices, although it cannot be stressed enough that this archaeological task is long overdue. It is in the vaunted continuity of the erotic idiomaticity of the ghazal in contemporary ghazal writing, a trajectory I have not been able to include in my argument, that an answer has been wrought in the same coin as the literary-historical question. The emergence of the woman ghazal writer, in direct defiance of the ventriloquized dummies of reformist didactic poetry in which female consciousness was drowned in the ideals of nationalist femininity, shows the relay of linguistic energy and erotic congelations between the classical ghazal and its reorientation and investigation in the grammar of feminist poetry. The feminist ghazal is not just a distinct possibility, but already an implosion within the ghazal canon represented most powerfully in the work of Fahmīda Riyāẓ, Parvīn Shākir and Kishvar Nāḥīd, Pakistani poets whose political consciousness was moulded by the struggle against postcolonial state oppression and its alliance with 'traditional' patriarchies. It has become a stylistic gesture of the feminist ghazal to force the erotic membrane of the ghazal to historicize itself through a literary-historical reflexivity in their writing. This reflexivity has lifted the accretions of gendered and sexualized knowledges ("the erotic"), refusing to turn them into static bodily attributes and moving them, through metaphors, from the world of objects to the realm of consciousness enabling the reader to visualize the development of a *gendered* consciousness. It is this critical gesture, whose movements, moments, and figurations we still

need to learn from, that I mark as the unfinished trajectory of my argument about the Urdu ghazal.

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