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Description

The Novelist as Critic: The Disparaging Versions of Urdu Poets in Early Urdu Novels

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Abstract: This paper aims to show that the negative portrayals of the Urdu poets that figured in early Urdu novels was a manifestation of the rivalry that developed between the genres of poetry and novel in the second half of the nineteenth-century. By analysing Na??r A?mad's novels *Taubat-al Na??h* (The Repentance of Na??h, 1874), *Fas?na-e Mubtal?* (The tale of Mubtala, 1885), and Mirz? H?di Rusv?'s *Shar?f Z?da* (The gentleman, 1900), the paper seeks to demonstrate that the depictions of poets as profligate, degenerate, foppish, narcissistic, effeminate, sycophant, and idle are revelatory of the strategy adopted by the novelists to undermine the cultural appeal of poetry. This paper shows how the novelists deployed various fictional devices as powerful tools of literary evaluations. The novelists' assumption of the authority of literary critic accorded a weight to their opinion, helping them exercise censorship on classical Urdu poetry. The didactic design of the reformist novel readily accommodated the prolonged discussions of literary matters. The fluidity of literary genres in the late nineteenth-century caused by the proliferation of lithographic press in South Asia allowed novels to incorporate the elements of literary criticism. This paper also highlights the significance and inseparability of the early Urdu novel in the history of Urdu literary criticism in late nineteenth-century India. This research paper seeks to demonstrate that the marginalisation of poetry was not only linked with the emergence of novel as a new genre but also inextricably related to the cultural imperialism of the British administration in India.

Keywords: Early Urdu Novel, Urdu Poets, Urdu Literary Criticism, Na??r A?mad, Mirz? H?di Rusv?, Nineteenth-century literature.

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