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## Editorial

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The English *Urdu Studies* Vol.3, Issue 1 2023, is a Special Issue featuring literary translations. It includes translations of various genres of Urdu literary writings, including short fiction, poetry, drama and critical non-fiction, written or composed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Translation is as old as language itself, or rather, it is as old as the desire to communicate. Translation expands readership and involves interpretation, or reinterpretation on the part of the translator and the reader. Semantically, it involves decoding of meaning before it is recoded and restructuring of source language syntactical and grammatical structures in accordance with the norms of the target language. Translation enriches and expands the scope of literary and cultural texts, builds bridges across cultures thereby bringing them closer, and facilitating better understanding. It is owing to translation that literary, critical or political texts transcend geographies or regions of belonging and are revitalized and renewed so as to exist in distant lands and in diverse linguistic cultures. Translation is in fact, the mainstay behind a large body of world literature, constituted by the existence of classical Grecian and Roman literature, Persian and Arabic literature, Continental literature in Germanic or Slavic languages, African and Caribbean and Indian or subcontinental literature in translation, in multiple languages across the globe. We can read and interpret a plethora of these translated

<sup>1</sup> All the translations in this volume have been published with the permission of copyright holders.

literary texts for ourselves. In fact, a large number of texts that we read in English, or have internalized as integral to all that constitutes our literary consciousness, such as Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* have, in fact, reached us through translation. Translation then, enables a text to travel across cultures, and opens up more and more possibilities of reading, reviewing, researching and renewing not only the translated texts but also the cultures of their location. It also enables texts and their writers have robust afterlives, not only in the language and culture of their belonging but also in intra and/or inter-cultural spaces. Through translation, we may overcome or rupture areas of silence, so that writers and critics, texts, political ideologies, poetics, and literary aesthetics that have hitherto remained in obscurity, become vibrant as novel or fresh spaces of reading, learning, understanding and interpretation. Translation also enables appropriate representation of literatures and helps dispel or overcome misinterpretation and/or misunderstandings, if any.

Translation can be taken up as an individual enterprise, or it can be undertaken by institutions on larger, concerted scales. Over the centuries, both, innumerable individual and institutional translational exercises have been undertaken in various societies across the globe. Large numbers of Classical and Arabic texts were translated into European languages during the Renaissance and these translations opened up huge possibilities of both, reading and learning. When in 1816, Keats extols Chapman's Homer as a great discovery, in his sonnet, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," he is, in fact, paying homage to the act of Elizabethan playwright George Chapman's translating the ancient Greek poet Homer into English and all the possibilities that his translation opened up. The Petrarchan sonnet (of Francesco Petrarca) was imported to England from continental Italy by Wyatt and Surrey and then improvised in England in metre, rhyme and rhythm, internal form and subject to create Sydney's, Spenserian, and Shakespearean, Elizabethan sonnets. Translation played a significant role in this. Over the years translation has been a significant means to transmit literature across cultures. Recent, classic examples of cross-cultural individual translational exercises are Victor Kiernan's translations of Muhammad Iqbal's and Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry, or Ralph Russell's translations of Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib's, which have been instrumental in taking these classical Perso-Urdu poets to the Anglophone readership. Institutions engaged in translation employed

professional translators whose exercises ensured a great deal of inter-cultural transaction as translations undertaken by them were mostly, cross-cultural. Among some of the earliest centres of translation are the Bayt al Hikmah (House of wisdom) in Baghdad during the Abbasid era and the Toledo School of Translators in Andalusia during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Several institutions with dynamic translation centres opened in colonial India under the aegis of the British, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as part of colonial practice. The Asiatic Society was founded in Calcutta in 1874 to gather knowledge about the “orient.” Apart from housing rare and valuable manuscripts and texts in Indian languages, the society promoted translations, in this endeavour. Fort William College was set up in Calcutta in 1800, with the primary purpose of educating and disseminating oriental studies. It undertook large-scale translations and adaptations of Perso-Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, Sanskrit and English texts which aimed at generating a linguistic structure that was simple and lucid and easy to acquire. Fort William publications had long-lasting effects on the Urdu literature that was produced over the next few years. The Vernacular Translation Society established in the 1840s, at Delhi College, which came into being in 1825, undertook a two-way translation exercise addressing the oriental reader as well as the Anglo-vernacular reader. Books on medicine, law, science, economics, and history were translated. The Naval Kishore Press established in 1858 in Lucknow by Munshi Naval Kishore, was a commercial cum literary enterprise, printing and publishing religious, literary and scientific texts in Persian, Sanskrit, Urdu and Hindi. Its *Shu'ba-e taṣnīf va Tarjumah* (Department of Composition and Translation) took up a number of translational projects, translating from English into classical, oriental languages in order to disseminate scientific and religious knowledge. The chief objective of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Aligarh Scientific society established in 1864 was to translate English texts into Indian languages commonly employed by the people, and to publish rare and valuable texts. A more recent instance of cross-cultural translation can be seen in the translation exercises undertaken by the Soviet Information Centre with a view to popularize Soviet culture. The Centre had its branches in various Indian cities. In addition to these institutionalized translation exercises undertaken by the colonial and Indian institutions, Urdu periodicals also published a number of translations of European and English literature. The translations published in these periodicals and magazines were often indigenized by means of adaptation to cater to the interests of the readers. These translation exercises indicate that translating literary texts involves on the part of the translator, both, a double creative involvement with the

source language and as well as with the target language, and that it can also be a political and/or purposeful exercise, undertaken towards a serviceable end. These nineteenth and twentieth century translational exercises were both, cross-cultural or inter-cultural and intra-cultural.

Translations can be of various types and can be undertaken for various purposes – they may be undertaken as professional activities with technical requirements. For instance, user manuals, do-it-yourself guides, text books, may all require translation as intermediary. Sociological, political, psychological, feminist, anthropological, cultural and economic studies all rely on the possibilities generated by translation in their dissemination. Marxist, feminist, linguistic, structuralist, and formalistic philosophers and theorists Karl Marx, Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Bakhtin, Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, and Walter Benjamin could not have reached an Anglophone readership without the mediation of translators. In fact, many aesthetic and philosophical theories and ideologies have reached English readership through translation. All cultures and all languages and all forms of learning have benefited from translation and continue to do so.

This volume publishes Marcia Hermansen’s research paper “*Ta’rīkh-e Masīh: Khwāja Hasan Nizāmī’s “Life of Jesus.”*” She explores the major elements and perspectives represented in Nizāmī’s work on Jesus in order to situate it within broader themes and issues surrounding Muslim-Christian dialogue in South Asia.

The volume includes twelve translations in all. They have been arranged in chronological order of the birth-year of the source language writer or poet. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan’s “Guzrā huā Zamānā” translated by Junaid Shah Shabir as “Time Bygone: A Nightmare” is a short but poignant biographical essay unfolding in the form of a dream. The narrator, very likely Syed Ahmed Khan is concerned about making good use of time. Imbued with spiritual sensibility, the essay endorses the idea of *carpe diem* or ‘seize the day’ from a serviceable point of view. Ayesha Irfan translates Nawab Vajid Ali Shah’s *Radha-Kanhayya ka Qissa*, usually designated as a stylized dance drama, staged in the Rahas Manzil as *The Tale of Radha-Kanhayya*. The play epitomises the *ganga-jamuni tehzīb* or the syncretic Indo-Muslim cultural tradition of Avadh. It stages Lord Krishna, Radha, the gopīs, a Vidushka-like character Ranchera, and a number of characters who recite poetry, sing and dance. Mohammad

Aqib's "The Couplet," a translation of "Shi'r" by Abdur Rahman, a Professor at University of Delhi, is a detailed critical analysis of the evolution of the couplet from an emotive to a thoughtful text from pre-Islamic Arab to twentieth-century India. He describes it as an imaginative, linguistic, and creative concept that has developed in various languages and regions across the Perso-Arabic world in different ways.

Several translations in this volume entered the 2022 edition of the Ali Jawad Zaidi Memorial Prize for Urdu-English translation. The prize has been instituted by Ms. Annie Zaidi in memory of her grandfather, to encourage more and more scholars to take up Urdu-English translations. Last year's edition of the prize featured translated Urdu fiction. I requested Annie to share some of the entries with us for this Special Issue of *Urdu Studies*. We bring here six entries. Three of them are by avowed Progressive writers. "Chor" by the staunchly Marxist Rashid Jahan, translated as "The Thief" by Anukriti Pandey is a short, sensitively written story about a young lady-doctor who lets a thief who has robbed her house, go free for reasons that are meant to make the reader sit up and ruminate upon the efficacy of civic systems that govern our society and question our own ethical ideals. Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi's "Joota" translated as "The Shoe" by Hamza Naseer centres Karmo *mirasi*, a man with foresight, who educates his sons in his bid to enable them transcend stringent class and professional barriers. The story brings into sharp contrast the resilience of Karmo with the ever increasing frustration of Chaudhry, the village headman. Raziya Sajjad Zaheer's "Andhera" translated as "Darkness" by Saba Mahmood Bashir is one of the very few stories by a woman writer about a train journey. Narrated in the first person, the emotions the protagonist experiences are very likely the writer's own, and foreground the anxieties and fears she experiences as a lone, Muslim traveller to Amritsar, the place which saw one of the worst carnages during the Partition. Zaheer's story emphasises that fears of sexual violation are so deeply ingrained in women's psyches that they continue to experience them years after their happening. "The Thief" is clearly Marxist in sensibility, while "Darkness" and "The Shoe" centre two pertinent issues that were called to question by the Progressives – the communal anarchy that reigned during the Partition and social segregation based on one's profession. "Qanūn kī Bastī" by the popular fiction writer Sheen Muzaffarpuri translated by Syed Kashif as "Land of the Law" brings to question some of the corrupt practices prevalent in our society by contrasting them with the lawless lives of dacoits dwelling in the wilderness, who take the law in their own hands. "Begum" by Ibn-e Sa'id

translated by Shama Askari, narrates how, owing to the pressing desire to save themselves, “respectable” people take refuge in a courtesan’s quarters in riot-torn Delhi during the Partition. It also dispels some of the stereotypes that hang like an albatross around the neck of Begum, the courtesan. “Masrūf Aurat” by Khalida Hussain translated as “The Busy Woman” by Sabyan Javeri is a narrative rooted in psychological self-analysis conducted by a contemporary woman-writer who multitasks through her private-personal and her public or professional lives and muses upon gender stereotypical roles assigned to, or expected of women.

This volume includes translations of Urdu poetry also. Our Urdu section is dedicated to Shafiq Fatima She’ra and it is thus only appropriate that we include English translations of her poetry. Dr. Latif’s translations of She’ra’s nazms indicate the finesse and the sensitivity of her thought and expression, albeit in English. Alamgir Hashmi’s translations of Parveen Shakir’s apparently romantic but cleverly layered nazms give an indication of the variety of her themes and her deep-seated emotional sensitivity. Usama Zakir’s translations of select poems by Zeeshan Sahil from his anthology *Sārī Nazmeñ* emphasize the poet’s concern with preservation of the environment, with ecological values, and their sustainability. The poems are poignant reminders that man is at the root of environmental depredation and he alone can ensure its preservation in the future.

I hope you will find the research paper and the translated stories published here both, engaging and effective.

**Fatima Rizvi**

Lucknow

16<sup>th</sup> October, 2023