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Mapping Identity: Qurratulain Hyder's Return to Roots in *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* (Vols. I and II)

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Abstract. While *Aag ka Darya* (*River of Fire*) is often hailed as Qurratulain Hyder's magnum opus, *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* (affairs of the world are endless), rivals it in scope and depth, particularly in its epic treatment of familial and historical rupture. *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* (2003), is Hyder's sweeping, three-volume family saga that traces her ancestral roots and identity. The narrative begins in the turbulent eighth-century Arabia and unfolds across centuries, intricately linking personal history with larger historical events. Despite her towering literary achievements, Hyder's work has remained underrecognized on the global stage, primarily due to limited translations. Nobel Laureate J.M.G. Le Clézio acknowledged her literary genius in his 2008 Nobel acceptance speech, and critics like Aamer Hussein have likened her to Gabriel García Márquez. However, *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* remains untranslated, creating a gap for English readers.[1] This paper employs a close reading of Hyder's *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* (vols I and II) to explore its thematic preoccupations with identity, ancestry, and belonging. I have also translated some passages from the book, thereby, introducing the richness of Hyder's work to an English-speaking audience while exploring its profound engagement with themes of identity, belonging, and historical continuity.

Keywords. *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai,* Qurratulain Hyder, multiple identities, Partition of India, translation

Introduction

Family saga as a literary genre strides two domains – those of fact and

[1] The recently published anthology *At Home in India* comprises a cross-section of Hyder's works across genres. It includes a long section on *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* where some of its parts have been translated into English for the first time. Therefore, it is an invaluable source for Hyder scholars. A 4-volume Hindi version of *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* was published in 2020 by Vani Prakashan available at a price of Rs.6000 only.

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fiction. Being almost wholly fact, it allows a lot of scope for looking into an individual's story, his/her joys and sorrows, the moorings of his/her identity embedded in the larger narrative of family, stretching back to generations. It offers promising material for story-tellers who ground their narrative in facts, and resort to some fiction to fill in gaps. I have briefly looked at Hyder's family saga to have a clearer view of her ideas about the Partition, gender, history, identity, nationhood and allied issues. A biographical perspective may not always be reliable for the understanding and appreciation of an author's work as explained by the Cambridge New Critics. However, understanding the biographical details of an author adds layers of meaning and depth to his/her oeuvre. It allows readers to engage with the text not just as a creative artifact but also a reflection/expression of lived experiences, histories, and intellectual legacies. For authors like Qurratulain Hyder whose personal and family histories are inextricably linked to the socio-political upheavals of their time, this knowledge becomes even more valuable. C.M. Naim writes: "In the flowering of that particular family, however, there is also revealed to our riveted gaze the formation of that more general cultural identity, the Indian Muslim" (105).

Key scholarly works from history, philosophy and postmodernism provide a theoretical framework to interpret Hyder's nuanced exploration of identity, memory, and displacement. The methodology integrates textual analysis with interdisciplinary insights, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how Hyder reconstructs identity through her familial and historical narratives.

Reading of *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* reveals Hyder's boundless imagination, her capability to see time as a continuous, unbroken flow (analogous to the flow of a perennial river), her close identification with her ancestor, Zain-al Ward (Zain the Rose), martyred by the Umayyads in the eighth century and whose family migrated to Central Asia to avoid persecution, finally coming to India in the 12th century. In India, her early ancestors – warriors, poets, Sufis – spoke and wrote Persian, not Arabic. Over the centuries, they became part of the cultural landscape, using high Urdu and Persian in their scholarly writings, but also communicating with the people in the local dialect.

The title *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* is a phrase from a couplet of Iqbal that addresses God:

Bāgh-e bahisht se mujhe hukm-e safar diyā thā kyoṇ

Kār-e jahān darāz hai ab merā intizār kar[2] (Iqbal, 540)

Why did you give me marching orders from paradise?

The world's affairs are too long; now await my return. [3]

Iqbal's lines allude to Adam and Eve's banishment from Paradise and their lives on earth.

She mulls over the probable alternative: What would have happened if some of her "ancestors, instead of opposing the caliph, joined the establishment? In that case, they would have had to flee to Spain with the Umayyads after 750 A D to escape persecution by the Abbasids" (10). The Abbasids took over from the Umayyads after violently removing them from power in Islam's long civil war. Her take on the probable alternative turn of events: if her ancestors had, instead of opposing the Umayyads, joined them, they would have had to flee to Spain, and would have been Roman Catholic Spaniards (10).

Dynamic Identities

It is interesting to note that Hyder's approach to identities, contrary to common belief, is not static, or fixed, but constantly changing and reconfiguring. Identity thus turns out to be accidental. That is a reflection on the identities of literary characters like Othello, Heathcliff and Moraes Zogoiby, all descendants of the Muslim Moors of Spain. How identity shifts are natural and plausible is further evident in the following from *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai*:

> *Aur ḥizb-e-mukhālif men mustaqil jame rahne ka anjām bhi zāhir hai. San 1216 men Isfandyār ne "Tārīkh-e Tabristān" (motarajjim Prof. Edward G. Browne) me likhā thā ke "Khalīfa al-Mutawakkil Billah Abbasi (847–861) ke be-panāh mazālim se bachne ke liye aulād-e 'Ali (Alaihissalām) vīrānon aur khandaron men sar chhupātī phirtī thi." Us vaqt unhon ne dūr-darāz Kohistān-e Alburz ka rukh kiya. 'Aqāb-e Hazrat Umar Ashraf (Razi Allahu anhu) Bin Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn (Alaihissalām) ne Buhaira Caspian ke sāhilī mamālik Tabaristān va Gilān per apini hukūmat qa'm ki. Äle Zaid Shahīd (Razi Allahu anhu) bin Imām Zayn-al Ābidīn ke muta-addid afrād ne jin mein Syed Hussein Abu Abdullah Mohaddis shamil the, Tirmiz ko apnā vatan banāyā. Ab in buzurg ki aulād mein Syed Kamāluddīn bin Syed Usmān*

[2] Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*..Delhi: Farid Book Depot, 2006, p.540.These lines are taken from *Bāl-e-Jibrīl* (*Gabriel's Wing*) For a literal English translation with detailed notes see https://franpritchett.com/00urdu/iqbal/gesuetab.html

[3] All translations in this paper are mine including paragraphs from *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai*.

> *Tirmizī ne agar 1180 me Turkomania se Hind ka rukh na kiya hota to āj hum-log Soviet Rūs ke communist bāshinde hote. Ye nukta bhi qābil-e ghaur ha* (10).
>
> The consequences of being permanently in the opposition are quite obvious. In 1216 Ibn Asfandyar wrote in *Tārīkh-e Tabristān* (History of Tabristan) [translated by Prof. Edward G. Brown] that to escape the monumental tyranny of Al-Mutawakkil Abbasi (847-861 AD) the descendants of Ali were hiding themselves in ruins and wildernesses. At that point in time, they headed for the distant, mountainous al-Burz. Followers of Hazrat Umar Ashraf bin Imam Zain-al Abedeen, including Syed Hussain Abu Abdullah Muhaddis, made Tirmiz their homeland. If, among his children Syed Kamaluddin bin Syed Usman Tirmizi had not moved from Turkmenistan to India in 1180 AD, today we could have been citizens of the Communist Soviet Union. This point, too, is worth considering.

Elements of her identity, like religion and nationality, turn out to be largely incidental. However, there are other elements within her identity consciousness that have been constant. She was a link in a long chain of illustrious Syeds, who traced their origin to the Prophet Muhammad (PUBH) through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. The people referred to as "descendants of Ali hiding themselves in ruins and wildernesses" in 9th century Arabia were her forefathers. Zain-al Ward and Umar Ashraf mentioned above were sons of Zain-al Abedeen, who was the son of Hussain, son of Fatima and Ali.

"Being permanently in opposition" (10), as she describes the situation of her ancestors, brought them persecution, martyrdom and migration, generation after generation. The propensity for remaining in opposition somehow was evident in her as well, for she stood her ground "in the opposition" when the Progressive Writers' Movement held sway over Urdu literature.

This family saga is a long procession of her illustrious ancestors down to four children of her brother (three daughters and a son), all of whom are important officials in Pakistan Civil Service. It shows all her people were not necessarily, on the wrong side of power. Then there were ancestors over the last fourteen centuries who were warriors, writers, scholars and Sufis, many of them in the favour of the royal court of their time and prosperous, influential persons of their age. Scholarship, political activism (sometimes leading to martyrdom and exile, but more often a valuable

position in the court, the army or in administrative service), religious and spiritual activity (as *ulema* and sufis) and writing had been the hallmark of the family.

Her forefathers (and foremothers) can be traced because they figure in accounts provided by historians, religious scholars and other eminent persons. As mentioned in the paragraph from *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* quoted above, Syed Kamaluddin, son of Syed Usman of Tirmiz (in today's Uzbekistan, across the border from Afghanistan) moved to India in 1180 AD. An illustrious ancestor Mir Qasim Ali became important in the following way:

> *Maslan ye ke E.A. Princip jin ke banā'e hu'e qavānīn-e arāzi ki Mīr Qāsim Ali ne san 1857 ke ba'ad Punjab me islāh-o-tarmīm ki, honourable East India Company ki civil service ke voh mustashriq buzurg the jin ki mash-hūr English-Sanskrit Vocabulary Haileybury College ke nāshirīn ne Hertford me ghadar se bahut pahle sha'e ki thi.* (11)
>
> For instance, E.A. Princip, whose land laws were amended and reformed by Mir Qasim Ali in Punjab after the year 1857. He was that senior orientalist of the Honourable East India Company's civil service, whose famous *English-Sanskrit Vocabulary* was published by Hailebury College Publishers in Hertford much before the Mutiny of 1857.

Their Indianization began soon after they arrived in India. Their arrival was part of the Age of Faith scenario:

> *Bayad danist ke ain usī zamāne mein Europe ki khānqāhon ke rāhib, pādri, dehāt ke kisān, shahron ke kārīgar aur be-rozgār ghurabā, bachche, būdhe, manchale amīr-zāde sab apne apne bādshāhon ki afvāj me bhartī hokar Salībī pharere aur ghoṛe uda'e arz-e-Shām pahunch rahe the aur vahān shahīd ho kar āsmāni bādshāhat hāsil karne mein masrūf the. Age of Faith ki in laṛa'yon men kām āne wāle saint, knight, ghāzī, salātīn-o-rājgān qurūn-e-vusta ke maghrib-o-mashriq ke liye razm-nāmā, ballad, aur silsile-vār qisas kā ek rūmān-parvar zakhīra muhaiyya kar gaye* (11).
>
> It must be kept in mind that right in that age monks from European monasteries, priests, peasants, artisans from towns, jobless poor folk, children, old folk and adventurous scions of aristocracy were getting themselves recruited to their kings' armies and reaching Syria riding horses, flying flags with the cross emblazoned across them. They were busy trying to enter

> the Heaven's Kingdom as martyrs. In the battles of this Age of Faith – saints, knights, ghazis, sultans and rajahs of the Middle Ages left enough material for a rich repertoire of romances, epics, ballads and serial tales (for readers and listeners) from the West and East.

She continues:

> *Maujūda dāstān Maghribī Asia se Hindustān pahuch kar isī ahd-e dilāvarī me shuru hotī hai. Lekin umrānī lehāz se ye zamāna is li'ye zeyāda aham hai ke isī vaqt se hamārī makhlūt tahzīb aur zabān-o-adab ki dāgh-bel paṛnā shuru hu'* (11).
>
> The present saga begins in that "Age of Chivalry" (as her ancestors come to India from West Asia via Central Asia). But sociologically, this age is significant as from that time our (Indian) composite culture, language and literature started taking shape.

Over the centuries, massive cultural cross-fertilization produced the uniquely Indian personality of the north Indian Muslim elite, to which her ancestors belonged. That class was largely cosmopolitan where religious and sectarian divisions were considerably muted. Her mother's parents were Shi'a and father's, Sunni. However, by the early forties, told solidarities began to develop cracks under political and historical pressures that seemed to overwhelm everything.[4]

Afzal Khalu (Nazar Sajjad's paternal cousin) hints at this divide when people show their disapproval of his sending money to Qadian to disseminate Islamic teachings in the West. He retorts that if any Shia or Sunni organisation had taken up the responsibility of educating people on Islam, he would have supported them. Instead, all they did was fight

[4] Mushirul Hasan in "Traditional Rites" writes: "Lucknow was the scene of violent Shia-Sunni riots in 1938-39. These were a sequel to a protest movement, launched in May 1935, against an official suggestion to forbid 'madhe sahaba' on certain days" (546). He elucidates that there was more strife in the next two years. Some of the reasons for the chasm were that Sunni and Shia groups began to claim and manipulate the symbols of Muharram, emphasizing their own interpretations and grievances, thereby turning them into platforms for asserting community identity and political interests. The colonial administration's 'divide and rule' strategy which aimed to manage communal tensions by making concessions to certain groups at different times, inadvertently deepened the divisions. This approach often failed to address the underlying political grievances, allowing sectarian discord to intensify (547).

amongst themselves (342).

Being the descendant of Fatima, Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Hyder sees the Jewish prophets as blood relatives. Prophet Muhammad was among the descendants of Ishmael, while the Jewish prophets were the children of Ishmael's half-brother Isaac. Prophet Abraham was the father of both. Jews, Christians and Muslims claim the same Abrahamic heritage.

Allusions to the Jewish prophets and their people is some kind of going back to the roots even farther than the advent of Islam. At one point, one of her characters observes that Philosophers have written that all their ancestors are alive in them physically, metaphysically (53). She could as well have added "genetically, too," for the ancestors do live in our genes, always scheming to make us do things they want us to do, prefer certain things, reject others.

One of her ancestors, a fugitive from law, is said to be hiding in a jungle. It is the time of British rule in India, and government spies are snooping around. At dawn, delirious with cold and hunger, he thinks he has experienced an epiphany of his illustrious ancestor Syed Ziauddin and makes the above-quoted remark. He goes on:

> *Hum khūd is vaqt Mīr Ziauddin ki ānkhon se is sard vīrāne ko tak rahe hain. Ziauddin ki ānkhen aur hamārī ānkhen eik hain. Hamāre hāth kisī aur nagaṛ dādā ke hāth hain. Dimāgh, aql-o-fahm ya na-fahmi kisi aur purkhe ki aql ya na-fahmi hai.*
>
> *Khūn hazārhā baras se in shiryānon me gardish kar raha hai. Tajdīd-ul khalq. Soch kar phurairi si ājātī hai. Maulānā Rūm ne kyā farmāyā thā? Kuchh zarūr farmāyā thā. Yād nahī ārahā. Hāfiza kamzor ho chalā (53).*
>
> I am staring at this cold wilderness with the eyes of Syed Ziauddin. Ziauddin's and my eyes are the same. My hands are those of some other great-grandfather. My mind, reason, intelligence or the lack of it are the mind, reason, intelligence or the lack of it of some other ancestor.
>
> Blood has been coursing through these veins for a thousand years. Renewal of creation. My spine tingles to think of all this. What did Rumi say about it all? Must have said something. Can't recall. Memory is fading.

The formation of identity is deeply shaped by interconnected factors, including individual and collective memory, racial and ancestral remembrance, folkloric traditions, and historical discourse**.** The delirious ancestor traverses through centuries in split seconds, like his descendant Qurratulain Hyder. This fugitive, constantly on the run, shivering, stricken

with hunger and exhaustion, alert to the rustle of breeze through the trees and crackle of his own boots crushing dry, fallen leaves, seems to find his bearings out of semi-consciousness, sees a procession of his ancestors before his wide-open eyes:

> *Bībī Mehrun-nisā bint Qāẓī Chaman Tāfta ki surkh qabā pahne, Syed Hasan ki dulhan. Pālkī unke phatak ke andar ga'e. Zamīn ke andar utar ga'e.*
>
> *Bībī Jāved Daulat — Hāl-e shumā che taurī Khānum?*
>
> *Khamoshī atal hai….*
>
> *Bībī Jāved Daulat*
>
> *Bībī Gul-rukh, gul chehra khatūn Māh Nūr Begum*
>
> *Mitti. Mitti* (55).
>
> Bibi Mehrun Nisa, daughter of Qazi Chaman Taftah, resplendent in red gown, Syed Hasan's bride. Her palanquin enters the gate. Then it enters the earth
>
> Bibi Jawed Daulat—How have you been lady?
>
> Silence. Impeccable silence….
>
> Bibi Jawed Daulat, Bibi Gulrukh, the flower like Maah Noor Begum
>
> Dust. All dust.

The names of Indian Muslim women of the elite were commonly Sayeed-un-Nisa (nobility of women), Shaukat-un-Nisa (grandeur of women), Fazilat-un-Nisa (great learning of women), Daulat Jawed (eternal ruler), Gulrukh (flower-faced), Maah-e Noor (light of the moon). Hyder was keenly conscious of the ephemeral nature of life. The cycle of life and death is repeated generation after generation, century after century, millennia after millennia.

And here is something from an even more distant past. The hungry, cold, befuddled ancestor dipping into a fuzzy, semi-conscious state one moment awakens to the next to find some clarity and philosophizes, only to get into a dreary state again in the cold wilderness:

> *Quṣaī bin Kulāb bin Murrah bin Ka'b bin Lu'ayy se le-kar Adnān Sānī tak aur un-se ka'ī pīṛhī qabl Adnān Avval tak ke jab Bakht Nasar ke hāthon khatūn-e aqvām Yaroshlam beva hui. Khudā ne mukhālifon ka sīng buland kiya. Shahr-panāh ke darvāze zamīn me gharq hue. Fāteh ne hukm diya — Maftūh shurafā ko Qāsī 'ulūm ki ta'līm dī jae taki voh qasr-e shāhī ke darbār mein khaṛe ho saken aur in qaidīyon me Dāniyāl tha jis-ne Dajlā ke kināre baiṭh kar apne royā*

dekhe (56).

> From Qusai son of Kulab, son of Murrah, son of Kaab, son of Lu'ayy down to Adnan the Second, and again so many generations earlier up to Adnan the First, when the Lady of Nations Jerusalem was widowed at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II. God raised the horns of enemies. The gates of the fort were buried under the earth. The victor ordered the vanquished elite to be tutored in *qaasi uloom* (knowledge of distant lands) so that they could stand in the (new) ruler's court. Among those prisoners of war was Daniel, who witnessed an epiphany while he sat on the banks of Tigris.

Comfort of the Eyes

Hyder's parents named her after a famous woman writer of 19th century Iran[5]. "Qurratulain," an Arabic word, means "the comfort of the eyes." The eyes whose comfort the doting parents could possibly have meant were possibly their own.

The marriage between her parents was one between equals. In turn, they brought her up as an equal of her brother as well as that of her male cousins and other relatives. The family had the advantage of having received training in the best of both, European and Islamic systems of education. By the time young Hyder began her schooling, another tradition, that of studying Indian classical music, had taken root in the Hyder family. Her mother had learnt it before she went on to acquire a proper training in it. It is interesting to note that women from north Indian Muslim upper middle class and middle class were not supposed to learn music. Sajjad Hyder's wide circle of friends included Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the poet Allama Iqbal, and Mohammad Ali Jauhar-- who headed a nationwide campaign for the restoration of the Turkish caliphate, one of the major influences on the Subcontinent's Muslim identity (Gandhi 15-16).[6] While Nehru stood for a composite Indian nationhood, poet Iqbal and the Raja of Mahmudabad

[5] Qurrat ul- 'Ayn Tahirih (c.1815–1852) was a Persian poet, theologian, and early advocate of women's emancipation. A key figure in the Bábí movement, she famously removed her veil in public at a religious conference in 1848—a radical act that symbolized her rejection of patriarchal constraints and religious orthodoxy. Though executed for her beliefs, she left a lasting legacy through her poetry and defiant stance. Her story resonated deeply in South Asia, where poets and scholars, including Allama Iqbal, admired her passion and literary brilliance regardless of theological differences.

[6] The other seven leaders identified by Rajmohan Gandhi in this book are Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Fazlul Haq, Abul Kalam Azad, Liaqat Ali Khan and Zakir Husain.

(UP), Sajjad Hyder's employer for some time, thought in terms of a distinct Muslim identity. The young Hyder believed in the composite Indian identity of Muslims that included strands of "Islamic culture" in it.

The 1200-year-old tradition of sitting in the opposition could overwhelm even the most worldly-wise of her ancestors. Her great-grandfather's elder brother (the retired tehsildar and zamindar with 15,500 acres of land) had saved the lives of a family of British officers during the Uprising at great peril to his own family. For that the Commissioner honoured him at a public *darbār* with a gift of an estate of the size of a desi raja's domain. He requested the Commissioner to declare amnesty for his rebel brother sentenced to death. When the Commissioner turned his face away in disgust at the seemingly outlandish request, the intended recipient placed the platter back on the table after receiving it, and walked away. This public snub to the Empire led the government to take away his own 15,500 acres of land. That started another round of hardships for the family. However, soon Queen Victoria announced a general amnesty for the rebels. The list included the name of Mir Ahmad Ali, whose amnesty his elder brother Mir Bande Ali had chosen to undergo hardship and lost everything. In a strange turn of events Mir Ahmad Ali got his amnesty without much ado, along with all remaining rebels (Hyder 66-67).

Time, Hyder's favorite subject of speculation appears at every stage through her entire body of work. I *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai*, her great grandfather Mir Ahmad Ali (the rebel) broods:

> *1880 bhi qarībul-khatm hai. Hamārī rūposhī aur jān-bakhshī ka vāqiya äj afsāna ma'lūm hota hai. Dillī ki galīyon me äle Tīmūr bīs sāl se bhīk mang rahī hain. Sheron ke qālīn ban ga'ye.* (67)
>
> 1880 is also drawing to a close. The days when I was on the run and when I was granted amnesty seem like a story. The descendants of Tamarlane have been begging on the streets of Delhi for the last 20 years. The roaring tigers of yesterday have been turned into carpets.

Time, that has neither beginning nor end, continues its flow as enterprising tribals from Central Asia rise and spread to India, become the Great Mughals, roar like tigers, only to be forced by Time to beg on the streets of the Delhi that was once their forefathers' majestic capital. Thanks to Time, the most magnificent tigers end up being skinned and turned into carpets.

1857 was a watershed in the history of the Muslim elite of the subcontinent. From a self-image of a confident, triumphant class, they gradually began to acquire another, contrary self-image: that of a class at the

wrong end of history, a victim of time, hurt and humiliation[7].

Mir Ahmad Ali, a staunch believer and student of Islamic spiritualism and a warrior in the 1857 uprising, ultimately decided to send his children to Aligarh's Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College (which later became Aligarh Muslim University), instead of Dar-ul Uloom, Deoband madrasah. Ahmad Ali, sitting in the sprawling bungalow of the Deputy Superintendent of Police in Jhansi muses in his twilight years:

> *Ulamā-e Dīn fatve de chuke Angrezi ta'līm harām hai. Lekin hum khūd jo pāband-e Shar' Musalmān aur sazā-yāfta bāghī hain apne bachchon ko Deoband ravāna karne ke baja'e Angrezi ta'līm dilvā rahe hain. Kiyon-ke ab hum jānte hain ke Musalmān agar jāhil aur pasmānda na hote to is ibrat-nāk taur se shikast na khāte.*
>
> *Magar sad afsos ke inhetāt ka vahī ālam hai, balke pahle se zeyāda ta'vīz, gaṇḍe, jhāṛ phūnk ki garm-bāzārī hai. Mashaikh-e Uzzam ki dargāhen aur fuqarā ki khānqāhen ayyāshī aur nashsha-bāzī ke aḍḍe ban chukī hain* (68).
>
> The ulema have issued fatwas that English education is forbidden in Islam. But I, a strict follower of Islamic Shariah and convicted rebel, am getting my children English education instead of sending them to Deoband as I know that Muslims would not have met with such ignominious defeat if they had not been so ignorant.
>
> Regrettably, Muslims are still steeped in the same ignorance and stagnation. In fact, the stasis has deepened. Still, they are indulging in the same old *jhaad phoonk*, wearing of amulets. The *dargahs* of *pirs* and monasteries of sufis have become dens of drug abuse and frolic.

A visible shift in north Indian upper class Muslim identity and its markers came after the 1857 Uprising and crushing defeat. However, some

[7] See the following for a fuller discussion on this topic:
1. Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton UP, 1982);
2.Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (Columbia UP, 1982);
3.Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (Oxford UP, 2001);
4.Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (Routledge, 2000);
5.William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (Bloomsbury, 2006).

of them managed to stay on the side of the new rulers. Mir Ahmed Ali remembers his brother's close relations with commissioners and collectors of United Provinces and how everything had changed over the years:

> *Ruhelkhand aur Bundelkhand ke Commissionerān bha'ī jān ko hukūmat ṣubajāt-e shumāl-o maghribī ka ek aham sutūn kahte the. Eik bār eik collector ne un-se pūchha: "Well Mīr Sahib! Hamārā samajh me nahi ātā āp jaisā loyal Mohammedan gentleman kā sagā bha'ī itna badā mufsid aur baghī kaise banā."*
>
> *Hum ab kyā baghāvat karenge. Kab ke hār mān chuke. Thak ga'ye…. Bāt dar-asl ye hai ke Musalmān ab sirf karāmāt ki ummīd par zinda hai* ((67-68).
>
> The commissioners of Rohelkhand and Bundelkhand called Bhaijan the pillar of northern and western provinces. One of the collectors once asked him, "Well, Mir Sahab, I cannot understand how could the brother of a loyal Muslim gentleman like you become so seditious and such a dangerous rebel.
>
> Rebellion? What rebellion? I have conceded defeat long ago. I am sick and tired. …The point is that today every Muslim is looking towards some miracle to happen.

The perennial triumphal mood that characterised the north Indian upper-class Muslims had turned to a downbeat perspective on life. However, everybody was not waiting for a miracle to happen. Quite a few, like Ahmad Ali, were really up and on the go. The Deputy Superintendent of Police in whose bungalow Mir Ahmad Ali was brooding, was his son. He was intelligent enough to get two of his sons to a traditional Indian medicine college and another one to Lahore medical college. The last one cleared his exams to become a Deputy Superintendent, who in those early days used to lord over a larger area than a Superintendent of today. None of his sons went to a madrasah like him, his brother or their forefathers. That, in a way, was a welcome change, a more constructive response to challenge than waiting for a miracle to bring back the old glory.

This passage in Hyder's narrative offers a productive site for postcolonial and postmodern critique, revealing both the strategic adaptations to colonial modernity and the subversion of monolithic historical narratives.

It reflects the shifting dynamics among North Indian upper-class Muslims after the 1857 revolt, marking a transition from a "perennial triumphal mood" to a more pragmatic engagement with colonial modernity. Ahmad Ali and his sons embody what Homi K. Bhabha terms *mimicry*—a partial adoption of colonial structures to negotiate power within the new

regime (122). By sending his sons to medical colleges and securing bureaucratic positions, Ahmad Ali strategically assimilates into the colonial system rather than resisting it outright. This mirrors Partha Chatterjee's argument that colonial subjects often navigated modernity by selectively adopting Western education and professions while retaining cultural identity (*The Nation* 35). The rejection of madrasah education signifies a departure from traditional Islamic pedagogy, reflecting what Sanjay Joshi calls moral and intellectual superiority of the University graduates (29). Their education fostered a shared modern identity, but rather than becoming copies of the British, they blended Victorian values with older social privileges and Islamic reformist ideas. This shows adaptation without total mimicry. The passage thus captures the tension between nostalgia for pre-colonial "old glory" and the necessity of adapting to colonial modernity—a key concern in postcolonial literature.

From a postmodernist perspective, Hyder's narrative destabilises grand historical narratives by focusing on individual agency and fragmented identities. The passage resists a monolithic portrayal of post-1857 Muslim decline, instead presenting a family saga where individuals like Ahmad Ali's sons carve different paths like medicine and bureaucracy, eschewing the deterministic fate of their forefathers. This resonates with Jean-François Lyotard's critique of metanarratives in *The Postmodern Condition*, as Hyder rejects a singular "Muslim decline" narrative in favour of plural, localized stories (xxiv). Furthermore, the irony in the Deputy Superintendent "lording over a larger area than a Superintendent of today" subverts linear progress myths, echoing Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction, where history is rendered ambiguous and contested (118). The text's nonlinear temporality (juxtaposing past glory with present adaptation) also reflects Fredric Jameson's notion of postmodern *pastiche*, where history is recycled in fragmented, ironic ways (17). Hyder's narrative thus deconstructs both colonial and traditionalist teleology, offering a postmodern play of possibilities.

1857 was as traumatic as 1947, two events in history that had the potential to enable Muslims and to reconfigure their worldview, self-image, identity and their station in life[8].

In 1857 no new nation state was created; there was a violent transfer of power from the Mughals to the Crown. On a lower level of authority in the provinces, districts and talukas power had slipped away (in most cases) from the Muslim elite. Only those of them had been able to retain their land and authority who had switched their loyalty from the old dispensation and

[8] See Metcalf, Thomas R. *The Aftermath of Revolt: India 1857–1870*. Princeton UP, 1965.

sided with the British. Quite a few new zamindars, taluqadars and rajas had emerged in place of the older, disempowered lot, whose fiefs were taken away from them by the victors and given to new, enterprising warriors who had sided with the British, or to those who were already serving with the British and had rendered some exemplary service to them during the uprising.

A non-conformist

Hyder began writing at a time when the highly influential Progressive Writers' Movement had become deeply rooted in Urdu literature. Virtually every prominent novelist, short story writer and poet was a "Progressive." Highly optimistic about a socialist future where the earth's resources would be equitably shared by all humans according to the principle, "to each according to his/her needs; from each according to his/her capabilities," these writers and poets were driven by the credo, "art for life's sake." In this socialist utopia there would be no British or other imperialism, no oppression, no slavery, no dehumanisation of women or neglect of children, no disempowerment of the toiling masses.

A key influencer of the Movement, Ismat Chughtai, derisively called Hyder "Pom Pom Darling[9]," ridiculing her and her Western airs. A section of the Urdu literary establishment complained about Hyder's elitist proclivities, the parade of her long line of illustrious ancestors and her approving description of them (mostly quoting old documents and historical records).

Hyder's response to the above accusation was unapologetic: she was true to herself and wrote about the world she knew, lived in and interacted with. And that world was aristocratic, its collective memories elitist. She never pretended to be what she was not: a plebian. Nor did she try to look at life as a member of the proletariat. She was quite upfront and unassuming about who she was. She saw herself as a writer, a woman, and as a Muslim woman of the educated North Indian Muslim class and its elite that had either moved to Pakistan or crumbled slowly, giving ground to the Muslim underclass to surge ahead in India.

In the introduction of *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* it becomes clear that she bears no ill will towards the rising Muslim underclasses, the weavers and artisans. On a visit to her ancestral home in Nahtore in Bijnore district of Uttar Pradesh, preparing to write the family saga, collecting documents and

[9] Chughtai's epithet is better understood when readers are reminded that it comes from the word pomposity. It also shows how great authors may have difference of opinion and style. Some of them are able to take criticism in their stride while others write rejoinders. The same author may react differently at separate points of time.

books, and talking to relatives, she writes:

> *San 1962 ki barsāt me mahalla Sādāt Seh-darī Nahṭore Zila Bijnore (U.P.) ke vīrān ḍhanḍār ābā'e makānāt bārish ki jhaṛī me dhaṛa-dhaṛ girte ja rahe the…. Bil-ākhir nidā ā'ī, bar-khez! Nahṭore, Lanakdi, Mahmoodpur. Urdu-e-Shahjehani ke in tīn gumnām, virān khemon ki rudād likh. Benegar! Feudal samāj apne afrād ko delusions of grandeur me mubtala rakh ke, umr-e ṭaba'ī ko pahunch kar kis ṭaur se khatm hua. Khol ānkh aur isī mahalla Sādāt Seh-darī me ṣadīon ke darmānda bunkaron aur karīgaron ki na'ī khud-dārī aur khush-hālī ko zarā dekh. Ke ye na'e samājī inqalāb ki ek khush-ā'nd alāmat hai* (9).
>
> In the monsoon of 1962, our desolate and dilapidated ancestral houses in Mohalla Sadaat Se Dari at Nahtore of Bijnore district (UP) were collapsing one by one in the incessant downpour. …And the voice inside me called, "Get up! Write the narrative of Nahtore, Lanakdi, Mahmoodpur. Write the story of those three forgotten and desolate camps of the forces of Shahjehan. Write about how the feudal society kept its members in delusions of grandeur and died its natural death after reaching old age. Open your eyes and see in this Mohalla Sadaat Se Dari the new self-respect and prosperity of weavers and other artisans who had been left behind for centuries. This is a happy sign of the coming social revolution. Call for the balladeers (to sing in celebration).

That Hyder was not hostile to the underclass is evident from the above. In fact, she even celebrated the rise of the underclass and criticized her own class which had "delusions of grandeur" (9). It is interesting to assume that she must have known that delusion of grandeur is one of the major symptoms of the destructive mental disease called schizophrenia. In that case, she attributed some kind of "madness" to the erstwhile Indian Muslim elite. Conscious of the innate unfairness of the old feudal system, she asks:

> *Mir Sahib, Khan Sahib aur Nawab Sahib, rif'at-panah kiyon the aur na-haq chot julāhā kiyon khātā thā.* (9)
>
> "Why was it that only the Mir Sahab, Khan Sahab and Nawab Sahab were the 'Exalted Highness' and why only the Julaha was beaten up unjustly?

There is a saying in northern Indian languages and dialects, "The donkey grazes the fields, but the Julaha (the weaver) is thrashed for that." Qurratulain alludes to that unhappy reality of the late lamented feudal system. Hyder bore no corresponding ill will for the Other, or Others.

Where does all this place her in terms of her social identity? Henri Tajfel describes social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to this" (63). It is interesting to note that despite her aristocratic social background, people in her family and friends chose to be Marxists, persons of wider sympathies with allegiance to the cause of the toiling masses. In a mock-serious reference to two of her close kin, she describes them in Sufi terminology:

> *Khān Bahādur Syed Karrār Haider marhūm ke eik har-dil-azīz pote ka fi-zamāna ta'lluq silsila-e Marxia se hai. Chirāgh-e Hidāyat Hazrat Lenin se bae't hain. Khān Bahādur Syed Jalāluddin Haider marhūm ki eik par-navāsī ke London School of Economics me zer-e ta'līm hain. Isī silsile ke bid'atī firqe Mao'ea Malāmatiya se aqīdat rakhtī hain* (80).
>
> A popular grandson of Khan Bahadur Syed Karrar Hyder is currently affiliated to *Silsila Marxia* (the tradition of Sufi Marx) and is *bayat* on the hand of the *Chiragh-e Hidayat* Lenin (has sworn allegiance to the Guiding Light Sufi Lenin). A great-granddaughter of Khan Bahadur Syed Jalaluddin Hyder, who is a student of London School of Economics, is follower of a *Bidaati firqa* (heretical sect) of the same faith, the *Maoiya malamatiya* (the cursed Moist sect).

Father Time's doings[10]

Behind the humour there is the clear recognition of the massive change that Time has brought to her clan's situation, its values, its beliefs and practices. From its beginning as religious leaders, Sufis and ulema, warriors, high government officials and zamindars, most of its members had become hard pressed refugees in Pakistan, only to rise again. Also, some men and women of the highly religious clan were professing the atheistic doctrine of Marxism.

Time (preferably with a capital T) and its inscrutable ways are always at the back of her mind: an endless stretch, a continuum that contextualises everything, reconfigures everything from power, pelf and pageantry to pennilessness, powerlessness and privation. Its favourites always change and according to the *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas,* "ceaseless reconfiguring alters personal and social identities as they are constituted and

[10] Father Time is a personification of time as an aged, relentless figure, often depicted with a scythe or hourglass, symbolising decay, change, and the erasure of memory. The phrase also hints at the writer's own engagement with themes of temporality, mortality and historical changes.

constructed by context". (1086)

That her social identity does not seem to hinge on communal solidarities is evident, not only in the works on which this study particularly focuses, but across virtually the entire body of her work. However, she seems more comfortable with her class of Subcontinental – anglicized, "cosmopolitan," people from different faith communities and racial stocks.

Life on the move

Movement, exile, migration, travel, change of place – under whatever guise it came, forced or voluntary – seemed to characterise her life, as if she had "inherited" it from her parents and the parents, from their ancestors. Her parents seemed to belong to the place where they found themselves at a particular moment. Nothing in particular "against" any place, nothing much in favour of another to make it *the* place for every season, or forever.

The 1857 fugitive from law, Qurratulain's great grandfather, left behind progeny who were quite as adventurous as himself, with the difference that they were no longer fighting the British Raj. His son, Syed Jalaluddin Hyder (Qurratulain's grandfather), the Deputy Superintendent of Police who figured in preceding pages, must have been an adventurous person (important police officers had to be like that in those days) and sufficiently mobile in another way: government officials had their job postings transferred regularly and they had to resettle frequently at different places during their service years.

Hyder's mother was a restless soul. She would leave a rented house soon after getting into it, to live somewhere else in the same town. If her daughter or son had a bout of illness in a house, she would blame it on the house being shaded by trees and move somewhere else in the town into a more sunny, warmer house. If that did not work, she would move to another town. Her father, a gentleman to the core, would acquiesce (Vol I, part 9).

Hyder's curiosity, her readiness to go out in the wider world and see things for herself was inherited from her parents as well as from her maternal grandfather, who had moved all over Europe and Asia as procurement officer of the British army during World War I. Her father joined government service as dragoman at the British Resident's office in Baghdad at the age of twenty-four. From then onwards life provided a kaleidoscopic vision of the world. When his service as dragoman came to an end, he was still in his early youth. He was taken into civil service with postings at faraway places like Port Blair in the Andaman Islands. Government service took her parents (and later, her and her sibling) to a few places, but most of the time they moved around on their own.

Momentous change

The year 1947 brought independence and Partition. The family moved to Pakistan, physically unhurt amid tremendous manslaughter. Hyder saw a new nation being formed, history being written, a new national narrative being woven around lives retrieved from blood and fire. For her this was a time of fresh experience, philosophizing on change and continuity and she wrote about the old themes of Time, migration, exile, resettlement, life, death, human relationship and human predicament, on nation, the meaning of being a woman (and being a Muslim woman), politics and culture.

The second volume of *Kār-e Jahān Darāz* covers Hyder's life and times up to the 1970s. In the newly created and still evolving nation state of Pakistan she came to realize that civilizations could not be divided. She moved to Britain with her mother in 1961 and worked there for a few years. In the early sixties she moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) with her mother. Later she came to Delhi and lived her last years in her flat in Noida. Her father had died in Dehradun in 1943, her mother in Bombay in 1967.

In the years leading to the Partition, women described in *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* do not seem to be too keenly aware of the catastrophe that was soon to visit them. They go about the daily business of living and socializing. Hyder reminiscences the pleasant evenings when her Mumani welcomed guests in the luxuriant garden of Alexandra Palace (475-76). Life in Hyder's circle goes on as usual, till things get too bad to be ignored. Hyder's brother had no intention to sell their house Aashiana nor does Hasnain Saheb think of leaving the country (450). Riots spread all around them and she and her mother are asked by their dear ones to leave Dehradun immediately and move to Lucknow. By the time they embark upon the train and are on way to Lucknow rioters are in full frenzy.

The compartment in which they are traveling is attacked by marauders. In it, besides her and her mother were two matronly white women. They plead with her mother to hide under the seat behind their legs, but headstrong as she is, she refuses to do so. The white women shout the mob away. Owing to her fair complexion, Hyder's mother could also have been mistaken for a white Christian (452).

The author, brought up in a liberal, secular environment describes the potentially lethal situation in a playful way. Nowhere in the saga she talks in a "we" versus "they" format; no mob is Hindu, or Sikh. It should be remembered that her class of people was largely spared by trauma of physical violence. Her brother, mother, herself and their friends and relatives were mostly safe from physical attacks although some people in their circle were not that lucky. Their valuables and properties were

invariably looted and misappropriated. Traveling from Lucknow to Delhi was as hazardous. From Delhi they took the flight to Pakistan. Flying to Pakistan was safe, but people traveling by train, foot or bullock cart suffered terrible fates. It is interesting to ponder whether she would be free of rancour if her family or friends were butchered like others on their journeys.

Many upper middle-class Muslims like her, who were not convinced with the rationale for Pakistan (that Muslims are a distinct, separate nation deserving a national homeland, separate from Hindu-majority India), ended up in Pakistan nonetheless, because much of northern India had become too dangerous for Muslims.

Hyder's family and relatives being intellectually oriented, discuss history, the rise and fall of empires, philosophy and various other subjects. They talk about cultures, their friends and relatives in India, Britain and elsewhere. For example:

> *"Kān khol kar sun lij'ye" – Ayyub bhai ne kaha Maghribī culture yehān bāqī rahe ga Mughal tahzīb kī tarah. Imperial tahzībon ke asrāt bahut der-pā hote hain. Roman Law āj tak maujūd hai."* (476)
>
> 'Listen carefully,' said Ayub Bhai.[11] 'The Western culture is going to survive here, like Mughal culture. Imperial cultures endure. Roman Law is still there.'

The great upheaval had turned everything, including people's sense of proportion, upside down. The scale of joy and sorrow, gain and loss are so different in the case of different people that what looks like penury to one is extraordinary wealth to another. A Muslim Memon Sethji from undivided India finds himself virtually "penniless" amid the welter of newly-created Pakistan, in the city of Karachi. One of Hyder's uncles, Laddan Mamoon, finds him, disconsolate, loitering with a *bidi* between his lips, clad in grimy

[11] Colonel Ayub Khan (Ayub Bhai) was the son of Mr. Ibrahim Khan, a wealthy family friend of Hyder's mother who lived on Kanpur Road, Lucknow. They later moved to Karachi and Ayub Khan joined the Air Force (6-7, Akhtar). Figuring out names and relationships can pose challenges in Hyder's biography. Sometimes, namesakes appear on the same page. For instance, on page 450, we meet both Colonel Ayub and Ayub Ahmad Kirmani who was Hyder's sister-in law Asma's elder brother. He left for Pakistan from Barabanki and went on to become Director of Information, Sindh (238, Rizvi). Another edition of *Kār-e Jahān Darāz Hai* available on the Rekhta website, p.474 (published by Fan aur Fannkār, Maharashtra) shows Ayub Khan to be the Field Marshal who went on to become the President of Pakistan. He was from Rehana, North -West Frontier Province and in the army while the aforementioned Ayyub Khan of Lucknow who joined the Air Force was a different person. These references are potentially confusing. In the Educational Publishing House edition, on page 450 a superscript on Ayub Khan is given but the description is missing.

clothes (476).

Sethji grumbles that he could bring in only a "meagre amount of *rokṛa*" to Pakistan. Laddan Mamoon thinks the Sethji could have salvaged only ten or fifteen thousand rupees. However, the Sethji said he could fetch in "only one crore" (476). That makes him mull over how little is too little and how much is too much.

Conclusion

Hyder never pretended to be a plebian, nor was she particularly convinced by Pakistan's national narrative as is evident also from her debut novel *Mere bhī Sanam Khāne* (*My Temples, Too*).

> The local Muslim, according to the Two-Nation Theory, was one with the Muslim of Baluchistan and East Bengal with whom he had nothing in common except religion. It was all very confusing. Nobody had the time for a scientific analysis or a level-headed study of the real cause of this communal trouble (127)[12].

Kār-e Jahān emerges as a profound meditation on identity, belonging, and historical continuity. By intricately blending personal memory with collective history, Hyder crafts a narrative that transcends time and borders, offering a deep exploration of the human impulse to search for roots. Through her portrayal of lineage, stretching back to eighth-century Arabia, Hyder underscores the complexities of identity as both inherited and constructed, shaped by history, culture, and individual experiences.

This work, while rooted in a specific cultural and linguistic tradition, addresses universal questions of selfhood, displacement, and memory. Hyder's ability to intertwine the personal with the historical invites readers to reflect on the fluidity of identity, particularly in an ever-shifting sociopolitical landscape. Despite its relative inaccessibility due to lack of translation, *Kār-e Jahān* stands as a testament to Hyder's literary brilliance and her ability to articulate the nuances of identity formation. This study highlights the significance of this family saga as global literature and underscores the need for its wider recognition and translation.

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[12] Please refer to my paper "Questioning Partition's Rationale: Qurratulain Hyder's *My Temples Too*" in *Indian Literature*, (138-153),2016.https://www.jstor.org/stable/44479013. for a fuller discussion of this theme. I had previously cited the publication date of *My Temples* as 1948 on page 138. This was an inadvertent error; the correct publication date is 1949. I thank readers for their understanding.

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